

## **Examples, Quotations, Reflections:**

### **Sin as Self-Harm, Self-Corruption, and Self-Deception**

### **Evil in Humanity, Human Nature, Human Action**

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: October 18, 2017

## **Introduction**

In the medical substitution atonement model, or in other atonement theories, how do we teach about sin? Penal substitution atonement advocates argue that they take sin seriously, and no one else does, because of their stress on personal responsibility and the threat of divine punishment.

However, I point out that in MSA, sin requires repentance and repair, so it takes sin even more seriously than PSA. In PSA, God can be ‘satisfied’ by pouring wrath out on Jesus, or eternally on people in hell. And in the latter case, people do not actually have to repent or repair the damage sin has caused.

Thus, PSA runs into the problem of the petulant child: the child who sins and accepts the punishment as worthwhile. Would I, as a parent, be “satisfied” by punishing my child if he’s still wearing that smirk on his face? But God is supposedly “satisfied” by infinitely pouring out wrath on a petulant person. The “satisfaction” is founded on God getting to vent, not whether an immature person matures and takes responsibility. Amazingly, this means that repentance is not actually required, in PSA. Is that what it means to take sin seriously?!?

But in MSA, repairing the damage my sin has caused is absolutely my responsibility. This can be seen in the life of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1 – 10, which itself references the law of reparations for theft in Exodus 22. This shows that in Jewish law and in the teaching of Jesus, there is a strong theme of restorative justice. God’s justice is not retributive.

The following Scriptures are passages that I use to teach about sin as self-harm, self-corruption, and self-deception. Some more illustrations and anecdotes are found on this web page:  
<http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.questions.evil.htm>.

## **Scriptures of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addiction (and why)**

Genesis 3:1 – 7; 4:10 – 12 (self-cursing, self-corruption: Adam and Eve corrupt their own human nature; Cain further corrupts himself because the land won’t be fruitful for him, although it will be fruitful for others, so the problem is not with the land per se, but with Cain)

- Exegetical principle: This concern with the further corruption of human nature, through our own sinful choices in resistance to God, should be taken as an overarching concern with human choices and human nature henceforth, through the reading of all Scripture afterwards. The same principle applies when we assert that we are ‘made in the image of God’ from Genesis 1:26 – 28 onwards, especially when it is explicitly repeated (Genesis 5:1 – 3) but even when it is not.

Proverbs and Jeremiah see the heart as a clay tablet, on which we write God’s commands or sinful scripts (Proverbs 3:3; 7:3; 14:33; Jeremiah 17:1 – 10). Jeremiah longed for the day God would write His Law on the tablets of our hearts in the famous passage about the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31 – 34).

Matthew 15:18 – 20; Mark 7:21 – 23 (self-corruption: Jesus says that what proceeds out of the heart corrupt the person; which is very different from saying that the person is already as corrupted and defiled as s/he is ever going to be; our choices matter)

John 4:1 – 30 (self-harm; cycles of sin shown in how the Samaritan woman has had five husbands and incurred the isolation reflected in her visiting the farther well at high noon)

John 8:31 – 37 (self-deception; cycles of sin shown in how the Pharisees say, ‘We have never been enslaved’ – what about their enslavements to the Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans?)

Romans 1:21 – 32 (self-corruption; cycles of sin shown in the alternation between ‘they exchanged’ and ‘God gave them over;’ this section is typically seen in the PSA lens as simply the evidence of guilt of the idol-worshiper; in MSA, the progression of self-harm and self-corruption becomes very evident, and central)

Romans 6:20 – 23 (sin is self-corrupting and self-harming, as shown by Paul’s question, ‘What benefit did you then derive?’ Paul also says that the wages of sin is death. He does not mean that God pays wages of death for our sin. He means that sin pays wages of death when we serve it. For Paul’s extended contrast is between two masters in Romans 6:15 – 23: Christ/righteousness vs. sin/unrighteousness)

Romans 7:14 – 25 (self-corruption; Paul speaks about sin coming to his awareness ‘when the Law came,’ which is almost certainly referring to his youth in Judaism. He did not learn about sin when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road; so this passage is about Saul of Tarsus, not the apostle Paul. Paul’s reflection about how he was further corrupted by his own sin is evident in the contrast he makes between ‘I myself’ vs. ‘sin which indwells me.’)

Ephesians 4:17 – 19 (self-corruption; Paul speaks of a progression of hardening and callousness)

Galatians 6:7 – 8 (you reap what you sow)

### **Scriptures of sin as perspective-altering and self-deceiving (and why)**

Matthew 13:31 – 33; Luke 13:18 – 21 (sin harms our perspective; kingdom appears to us like hospitality we don’t want to offer, like a mustard seed in your own garden which draws birds you don’t want; and hospitality we don’t want to receive, like leavened bread when you were expecting unleavened, because leaven was hidden in it)

Theme of fire in Scripture (in every biblical book, divine fire starts off as God trying to purify us; our resistance makes it feel destroying)

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addiction**

At one time in your life, the most important thing to you was your bottle. If someone took your bottle away from you, and tried to give you a cup, you would fly into a rage. Then, the most important thing to you became your favorite toy. Fly into a rage. Then, it became your cell phone. Then, it became that boy or that girl. When will we learn that our perspective is limited, that by ourselves we don’t just know what is best for us long term, and maybe Jesus does know better than us?

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addiction**

When my kids were really young, we would play wrestle and tickle. On one of those times, I told them that one day, they will be stronger than me, and able to beat me at wrestling. They looked at me, confused, disbelieving. It’s hard to imagine experiencing something you haven’t experienced yet. You have to trust someone who has gone through it. Jesus has gone through purifying his own humanity all the way into resurrection. He is the only one. We have to trust him that he knows what he’s talking about.

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addiction**

Ray Stedman, former pastor of Peninsula Bible Church, once told the story of a man who told a lie. Then he lied again, because he had to maintain the first lie. He kept lying. He counted 42 lies he had told just to maintain the first one. When it all became too much to bear, he confessed.

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addictive**

[Preaching on Ephesians 4:17 – 19] When people don't have a rich inner spiritual life, they usually just want to have a good physical life. 'Well, if the soul isn't important, then I'll just enjoy my body.' We become ruled by our bodies. Part of growing up, I think, is learning how to temper your body. For instance, when I was growing up I was able to eat three Big Macs. I was able to eat a dozen donuts by myself. I loved the smell of gasoline. Those are extremes. I think that's a natural part of growing up, but in other ways, we start to want more and more sensations. When I was a teenager, I was a competitive swimmer, and I thought about taking performance enhancing drugs because I wanted the sensation of having lots of power. I pressured a girlfriend for sex because those were the sensations that I most wanted. I also wanted a lot of money; I really liked ties at that time, because I thought ties were powerful symbols for a man. Maybe your friends say they feel most alive when they're playing video games because it gets your adrenaline going, or high on something, or making a lot of money. That's when they feel most alive. They really start to like indulging themselves. And even though there was always a let down, and those things that promised so much delivered so little, still they jump right back in there. If they're apart from God, they just live for themselves, if all we live for is to gratify some desire of our bodies.

That's why Paul says we become 'calloused.' A callous appears on your finger because you use a pencil and it rubs there. And what happens to a callous? It becomes tough. You can't feel things there. But our soul and our thinking and our feelings can become calloused, too, because of the way we use our bodies. If you take drugs, you start to lose feeling and your body becomes toughened. Then you need more and more drugs to get the same feeling. If you get hooked on pornography, you start to lose feeling. Then you need more and more pornography to get the same feeling. If you want to just shop, you start to lose feeling, and you need more and more things to get the same feeling. That's why Paul throughout 4:24 – 5:7 talks about people wanting sex and greed. Those are the things that affect us most. Here in v.19, he says they 'have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.' When people don't have a rich inner spiritual life, they just want to have a good physical life. But nothing ever satisfies. They just keep going back for hit after hit and it becomes very frustrating for them.

### **Illus of racism, self-harm**

Trevor Noah's *Daily Show*: Racism harms yourself. He didn't take it as far as I wish he had. 'I don't want to go to that swimming pool...' You are depriving yourself of the pool, too. I wish he had taken it a step further. You are depriving yourself of a potential friend or acquaintance. You sow the seed of hatred. [Biota MacDonald] [Mako added: When Hurricane Matthew was a category 1 storm and made landfall on South Carolina, some people might have stayed home even though they were warned to leave. Why? Because Matt Drudge, in his alt-right, conspiracy-oriented Drudge Report said that Hurricane Matthew was exaggerated by the government because it was a liberal conspiracy to play up climate change. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/10/06/matt-drudge-hurricane-conspiracy/91705834/>; <http://www.npr.org/2016/10/07/496996886/matt-drudge-suggests-government-may-be-lying-about-hurricane-matthew>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/liveblogs/2016/10/hurricane-matthew-liveblog/502874/>). The last article I read was 43 Americans died in Hurricane Matthew: <https://weather.com/news/news/hurricane-matthew-southeast-updates>.

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, arrested development, addiction**

Voldemort damaged his own soul when he killed other people, in the Harry Potter series.

### **Illus of sin as self-harm, good and evil**

"Good versus Evil, while brilliantly handled in Tolkien, in the hands of many Tolkien successors, it has become a kind of cartoon. We don't need any more, "Here are the good guys, they're in white; there are the bad guys, they're in black. The wars in my books are morally complex. I've always agreed with William Faulkner. He said that *the human heart in conflict with itself* is the only thing worth writing about. I've always taken that as my guiding principle." (George R.R. Martin, author of *Game of Thrones*, found on Nerd Soup, *Game of Thrones – What Do the White Walkers Want?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qAHu2KifBQ> at the 4:10 minute mark)

### **Illus of self-harm**

When I was young, I thought I could fly. I climbed on the railing of my house's deck. I had a whiffle ball bat in my mouth because I needed my hands to climb. I jumped. The bat got shoved into the back of my throat and lodged

there. He ran into the kitchen with the bat stuck in his mouth. She forbade me to go outside without her, which is also similar to God in the biblical story because God actually got closer to Israel, and then became really close to us in Jesus. I was really lucky to have gotten away with no lasting damage. I literally could have died. My actions hurt my mom emotionally, because they harmed me. [Ian MacDonald]

### **Illus of self-harm**

The kid who goes underneath the sink and gets the bottle of cleaning liquid and drinks it. I typically use that when I talk about the difference between forgiveness and healing. You can forgive a kid for breaking the rule, but forgiving him doesn't heal the kid. The proper response is to go to the hospital and deal with the condition. [Tim Catchim]

### **Illus of self-harm**

The word 'sin' hamartia comes from the world of archery, to miss the mark. Why would someone miss the target? What are the forces at work that would make you not hit the target? External: Winds, etc. Internal: You're not strong enough (Paul talks about this in Romans); your eyesight is bad; your bow is messed up. It plays into Paul's concept of falling short of the glory of God. The arrow falls short and hits only the grass, not the target. Note: 'glory of God' is internal to us, not external to us as a commodity. Glory is not something God hoards for Himself. It is the action of God revealing Himself in and through us. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27). 'We boast in hope of the glory of God...through the Holy Spirit who was given to us' (Romans 5:2 - 5).

Also, 'iniquity' means that something on the inside is bent in the wrong direction. The truck driving down a dirt road. The more it turns in the road, you'll get a well-worn path in the road. The notion of 'iniquity' is that there is either something we inherit through our corrupted human nature, or because of our choices, we have an inclination or even automatic response. [Tim Catchim]

### **Illus of self-harm**

The way we have articulated sin in Nigeria, we look at sin like God is so, so holy, He doesn't want to touch anything that is evil or sinful. We all grew up with that view. 95% of Nigerian 'churchianity' believes that. In our GCI church, God doesn't run away from sin. He actually comes towards it. He addresses the issue. We are a very religious society here. My mom used to cook on the stove. When we took the pot on the stove, there was a beautiful naked flame. As a little boy, I would stare at the flame. My mom warned me that I would burn my hand. I stuck my finger in anyway. It wasn't a good experience. Of course, my mom was disappointed. But she came to soothe me and help me. Sin just harms us. [Chamberline Owen, who also noted, 'When others look at this Trinitarian perspective, they think we're not teaching how seriously the Bible talks about sin and God's holiness.']}

Also, we have the medicine man. If you wanted to know why people are dying, you'd go to the man who could consult the gods. That type of mentality is still in Nigerian churches. They are constantly looking for ways to appease God. Nothing is ever enough. So people give what they don't have.

### **Illus of self-harm, incarnation of Jesus**

Taking your child out of the mud. The parent gets into the mud to pull us out.

#### *Commentary from the Group*

---

*Christine:* In PSA, you're worthless, but look at this amazing God who sacrifices His Son for you, so He deserves your love. So love him. The emphasis is placed on your differences. To a young, impressionable mind, that sounds comforting. When I was a senior in high school, we had a church retreat themed boot camp. You will never know what it feels like to be Jesus on the cross. But we will work you hard and then make you drink vinegar. That's what happens when you emphasize the differences. But in penal substitution, it can sound great. When you package it, in a friendly way, it can feel great. So, I think we can really hammer home the opposite: Emphasize the similarities between you and God: both in redemption in Jesus' story but also in creation. [Jesus is the better version of you, but you were meant to be like him, and you bear his image.]

*Biota:* I did some reading on good parenting. This article was talking about how, when disciplining kids, instead of complimenting kids' actions, compliment them as helpers [emphasizing the relationship with you]. You're like a

pipe through which water flows. You can clog the pipe and obstruct the water. But at the core, you're good, and meant to be good.

*Chamberline:* In our society, kids are flogged. So we present God as if He must punish sin. I try to say God must love. God sings our praises (Zephaniah 3:17). The relationship we have with God is one in which He draws us in to Himself. I try to put God in everyone's face. I put Jesus in everyone's face.

### **Illus of evil, human nature**

'We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself... We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil.'

—Carl Jung, BBC interview, 1959

"Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

— Albert Einstein

"Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody."

— Mark Twain

"there is no shortage of fault to be found amid our stars"

— John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

"On the whole human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time."

— George Orwell, *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays*

"The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

"Scientific views end in awe and mystery, lost at the edge in uncertainty, but they appear to be so deep and so impressive that the theory that it is all arranged as a stage for God to watch man's struggle for good and evil seems inadequate."

— Richard P. Feynman – the critique of the passive god, who winds up being passively evil

This reminds me so much of Gene and Phineas, the two 16 year old boys in John Knowles' literary masterpiece *A Separate Peace*. Gene Forrester is the introverted intellectual, and Phineas was the natural athlete who was Gene's free-spirited best friend during their years at the Devon School in rural New Hampshire. Gene and Phineas take an instant liking to each other. They do everything together. They jump off a high tree into a river. They start a secret society of friends together. They bike together to a New England beach and camp out on the sands overnight. They're the best of friends for an entire summer. But Gene always envies Phineas for his abilities and his fearlessness. And when the school season starts, Gene begins to see Phineas as his chief rival for being top of the class. So on one particular night when they go to jump off the tree together, Gene wraps his arms around the trunk, and bounces on the branch so that Phineas, who is not quite above the water, falls to the hard ground and shatters his leg. What a poignant commentary. I wonder how many of us would be honest enough to say that our drivenness and our insecurities, which are deep inside us, can take us this far. The author then says, 'Because it seemed clear that wars were not made by generations and their special stupidities, but wars were made instead by something ignorant in the human heart.'

— John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, p.193 paperback edition.

"There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast...Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. 'You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go. Why things are what they are?"

— William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*, p.130 – 131

In this story, a group of young British schoolboys survive a shipwreck and get stranded on a jungle island. An older boy named Ralph becomes their leader. They find a conch shell on the beach, and it becomes Ralph's symbol of authority and a prized possession. At first, everything is fine. The boys build a fire as a signal to anyone searching for them. They try to keep the fire going, but some of them want to just hunt on the island, as if they could settle there forever. Another older boy named Jack challenges Ralph. He is the best hunter; so then comes a mutiny: Jack leads some of the boys away to just hunt. Some of the boys follow him. They kill a pig, do a savage dance around it while chanting this weird chant, and put its head on the top of a stick. Flies land on it, and it's called the Lord of the Flies; it symbolizes the beast they're afraid of, which they think they've mastered. Jack wins over almost all the boys and sets up another tribe where he is the chief. Then, as they get caught up in the game and the fears of the beast, they surround and kill one of their own, a boy named Simon. It was an accident; it was nighttime; there was thunder, so they couldn't hear Simon's cries. But the next victim is a chubby boy named Piggy. Piggy confronted the savage hunter boys: 'Which is better -- to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill... Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?' Then another boy named Roger dislodges a huge rock from up a hill, which strikes Piggy and knocks him off a cliff. From that point on, lone Ralph becomes the hunted prey in a life and death struggle. Roger takes a stick and sharpens it at both ends, which means that he wants to put Ralph's head on it. But British sailors from a battle cruiser appear just in time to rescue all the boys from the island, and themselves. But who will rescue the adults, in the adult war they're in?

"There is something wrong with human nature, something basically and fundamentally wrong. A recognition of this fact stands as one of the basic assumptions of our Christian faith. The picture of this glaring reality of the gone-wrongness of human nature is set forth on almost every page of the Bible. The Bible pictures it in the pride and disobedience of Adam and Eve, which ends up injecting a discord in the beautiful symphony of life in a garden. It pictures it in a ruthless and merciless pharaoh, caught in the clutches of a hardened heart. It pictures it in the jealousy of a Saul, who ends up hunting David with a bitter and dangerous hate. It pictures it in the glorious career of a David, who constantly spoils that career with [recording interrupted] and making sex the be all and end all of life. It pictures it in a Judas, who was willing to succumb to the temptation of selling his lord for a few pieces of silver. It pictures it in Pilate, who sacrifices truth on the altar of his self-interest and who falls victim to the whims and caprices of a group of people who are crying out, "Crucify him." Yes, it pictures it in a vicious but sincere mob hanging the world's most precious character on a cross between two thieves. The Bible is clear in setting forth the tragic dimensions of the gone-wrongness of human nature.

'Wherever we discover life, somehow we discover this gone-wrongness. Wherever there is a struggle for goodness, we discover, on the other hand, a powerful antagonism, something demonic, something that seems to bring our loveliest qualities to evil and our greatest endeavors to failure. Theologians have referred to this over the years as "sin." That is something that stands at the core of life, this element of sin. And whenever we think about man we must think of this tragic fact – that man is a sinner. Sin is this revolt against God; sin is at bottom separation. It is alienation. It is a creature trying to project himself to the status of the creator. It is the creature's failure to accept his limitations and, thereby, reach out for something higher to integrate his life, and it ends up in tragic separation.

'Man is a sinner before the Almighty God. That is one of the basic facts of the universe and one of the basic facts of life. Now, we've tried to get away from this in the modern world, we hate to hear this word "sin." We try to run from it, and we try to talk about it in other terms. This is one of the weaknesses of religious liberalism, that in throwing out some old traditional conceptions, liberalism fell victim to the danger that forever confronts any new view, and that is that it became sentimental and soft, feeling that man was evolving from a lower state to a higher state and eventually he would move on up the evolutionary ladder and throw off all of the evils and sin of his nature. Then, we came back to see that even after all of that man is still a sinner... at bottom, the conflict is not between the id and the superego but the conflict is between God and man. And the universe stands with that glaring picture of the reality of life—that man is a sinner, man is a sinner in need of God's redemptive power. We can never escape this fact.'

'At bottom, the conflict is not between the id and the super-ego but the conflict is between God and man. And the universe stands with that glaring picture of the reality of life – that man is a sinner; man is a sinner in need of God's redemptive power. We can never escape this fact.'

— Martin Luther King, Jr., *Man's Sin and God's Grace*, 1954 – 1960?, Montgomery, AL?

“Your grandmother taught me to read when I was only four. She also taught me to write, by which I mean not simply organizing a set of sentences into a series of paragraphs, but organizing them as a means of investigation. When I was in trouble at school (which was quite often) she would make me write about it. The writing had to answer a series of questions: Why did I feel the need to talk at the same time as my teacher? Why did I not believe that my teacher was entitled to respect? How would I want someone to behave while I was talking? What would I do the next time I felt the urge to talk to my friends during a lesson? I have given you these same assignments. I gave them to you not because I thought they would curb your behavior - they certainly did not curb mine - but because these were the earliest acts of interrogation, of drawing myself into consciousness. Your grandmother was not teaching me how to behave in class. She was teaching me how to ruthlessly interrogate the subject that elicited the most sympathy and rationalizing - myself. Here was the lesson: I was not an innocent. My impulses were not filled with unfailing virtue. And feeling that I was as human as anyone, this must be true for other humans. If I was not innocent, then they were not innocent. Could this mix of motivation also affect the stories they tell? The cities they built? The country they claimed as given to them by God?”

— Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015), p.29 – 30

### **Illus of evil, human nature**

In 1960, Israeli undercover agents pulled off one of the greatest kidnappings in history. They discovered the South American hideaway of one of the masterminds of the Nazi Holocaust, a man by the name of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann had presided over the slaughter of millions of Jews in the hideous Nazi Final Solution. Furthermore, he had personally executed a number of Jews himself. The undercover agents brought Eichmann to Israel to stand trial. Adolf Eichmann’s deeds were well known to the Jews in Israel in 1960, when his trial took place, and a long line of witnesses were brought in to testify against him. As Eichmann sat in a small bulletproof glass booth, prosecutors called in a small, haggard Jewish man named Yehiel Dinur, who had miraculously escaped death in Auschwitz. Dinur, ready to testify, stared at the former Nazi mass murderer behind the glass, and the courtroom was silent, waiting for what Dinur would say about Eichmann, who was responsible for the deaths of his friends and beloved people. But no one was prepared for what happened next. Yehiel Dinur began to shout and sob, collapsing to the floor. What happened? Was he overcome by hatred? By horrible memories triggered by some evil in Eichmann’s face? No. Dinur later explained in a ‘60 Minutes’ interview that Eichmann was not the demon he expected. Instead, he was an ordinary man just like you and me. And in that moment, Yehiel Dinur came to the realization that sin and evil are the human condition. He said, ‘I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this...exactly like he.’ There is sin in every one of us. Then Dinur concluded with a statement that shocked the world then and it shocks the world today: ‘There is Eichmann in all of us.’

### **Illus of evil, banality, human nature**

Hannah Arendt famously concluded in her study of Adolph Eichmann, one of those responsible for the murder of millions of Jews during the Second World War, that evil is usually banal, not exciting and not exceptional. It comes to pass as naturally as the death of an old man in a tent and the tender touch of a loved one saying farewell. Eichmann was an ordinary man; not particularly smart and not particularly ideological. He wanted to be accepted, he followed the crowd, he hid his conduct behind a screen of clichés and the anonymity of an enormous bureaucracy and, day after day, this ordinary fellow – who landed his first significant job as a vacuum cleaner salesman only through family connections – sent uncounted multitudes to a cruel and terrible death. Humdrum evil, day after day, in the ordinary life of ordinary people. Is this not the story of 21st century America, as it has been of human life everywhere and always? As Arendt summed up her study of Eichmann: “The terrifying thing is the nagging suspicion that these people, these vile people, were in significant ways no different [from] ourselves.” It is very interesting that Arendt’s study has been severely attacked in the years since it has been published by people I think who are absolutely unwilling to assent to that final evaluation.

### **Illus of self-centeredness, sin, confessions**

There was an online confessional called [www.notproud.com](http://www.notproud.com). People posted their confessions of things they are not proud of doing. The website was organized according to the seven deadly sins – a view from medieval Catholicism. The founders have now published a book from the postings. Here are some examples of things people confessed:

- ‘I sometimes belittle other people in order to feel a flashing moment of intellectual superiority. In truth, I’m terrified. Of everything.’ (p. 7) (Pride)
- ‘I just realized the other day that I envied a crippled person because he was getting a lot of attention. How sick is that?’ (p. 48) (Envy)
- ‘Why is it that I can spend more than one hundred hours on a single video game when I can barely even put in five hours on my art? I care more about virtual killing than I do about actual living.’ (p. 95) (Sloth)
- ‘I drank so much on Saturday night that I threw up four times the next a.m. And I was throwing up so hard that I popped some blood vessels in my eye and now half of my left eye is covered with blood. Not too sexy.’ (p. 115) (Gluttony)
- ‘Anytime someone tries to give one of my friends attention, I automatically steal the spotlight away from them. I must be the center of attention. I must have all the love.’ (p. 128) (Greed)
- ‘I filled up my hard drive with porn pictures.’ (p. 193) (Lust)
- ‘Everytime I see that you’re both online, I want to rip her apart. Because I know that you are talking to her. And I know that she is trying to pull you closer, learing you away from me. And I can’t take it anymore. She told me that I would be good for you, but now she is stealing you away. I am trying to be patient, to let things develop between us on their own accord, but all I want to do is grab your hand and tell you that I can’t stand this waiting game. She is getting in the way of everything.’ (Anger, 3/7/06)
- ‘I take sick pleasure in reading other people’s miseries.’ (p. 267)

‘Peering in on the trials and tribulations of others is an intriguing, unsettling, and, at times, very comforting activity. It’s we slow down to look at car wrecks and why reality television has tantalized the world’s cultural palette. You may find yourself in this collection, either through your own words, or through the feeling that someone somewhere has traveled down the very same path. These confessions shine a spotlight into the many dim corners of our collective psyches.’

— Scott Huot & GW Brazier, founders of notproud.com

### **Illus of evil, education**

‘As an alternative to tradition, the United States has proposed reason. Educate citizens and inform them, and they can be counted on to behave sensibly – this is the Jeffersonian-Enlightenment faith on which the United States was founded. It has not been fulfilled. Until recently the world’s leader in education, the United States leads likewise in crime, delinquency, and divorce.’ (Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions*, Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1958, p.163)

### **Illus of evil, education**

‘The core of the belief in progress is that human values and goals converge in parallel with our increasing knowledge. The twentieth century shows the contrary. Human beings use the power of scientific knowledge to assert and defend the values and goals they already have. New technologies can be used to alleviate suffering and enhance freedom. They can, and will, also be used to wage war and strengthen tyranny. Science made possible the technologies that powered the industrial revolution. In the twentieth century, these technologies were used to implement state terror and genocide on an unprecedented scale. Ethics and politics do not advance in line with the growth of knowledge — not even in the long run.’ (John Gray, essay ‘Joseph Conrad, Our Contemporary’ in *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions*, 2004)

### **Illus of evil, generosity**

The following quote is important because it is a serious attempt to study the motivations behind human philanthropy, compassion. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow studied people’s claim that they care for others because they feel fulfilled by doing so:

The more serious weakness of the reciprocity model of caring and fulfillment is that caring becomes only one – and perhaps not even a very important – source of fulfillment...

Quite a bit of evidence in fact supports this criticism...

In order of importance, the sources of fulfillment that best predict differences in individuals' levels of happiness (taking into account differences in their happiness as children) are: fulfillment from family, fulfillment from leisure activities, fulfillment from religion, fulfillment from being good to themselves, fulfillment from doing things for others, and fulfillment from work. Caring behavior does not rank high on the list. Even when this kind of analysis is restricted to people who are heavily involved in charitable and other volunteer activities, caring behavior still ranks near the bottom as a predictor of overall happiness.

These results run contrary to what one would expect from advertisements and news stories... that emphasize the importance of fulfillment and other good feelings associated with caring. Admittedly, the questions at hand are a little crude. So, just to see if this was the problem, I obtained another set of data with better questions and explored the whole issue somewhat more thoroughly. This set of data was also drawn from a nationally representative sample of the American public. It included extensive measures of self-perceptions among more than 1,400 respondents. Among these measures was the sophisticated Rosenberg self-esteem scale – an index widely used to assess variations in levels of individual self-worth. Other items in the study made it possible to see whether generosity, helping behavior, and other characteristics contributed positively to people's levels of self-worth

I performed three tests with the data. The first examined the relationships between overall self-esteem and a dozen pairs of personal attributes, such as talented/untalented and friendly/unfriendly. Among these attributes was generous/selfish. If caring is a significant source of personal fulfillment, this attribute should be one of the strongest predictors of self-esteem – but it was not. Indeed, it was one of the weakest. Of the twelve pairs, it ranked tenth in importance.

The second test examined the relationships between self-esteem and a set of eleven items that the respondent rated in terms of their importance to his or her basic sense of worth as a person. One of these items was 'your efforts to help others.' Other items on the list focused on moral standards, 'efforts to fulfill your potential as a person,' family, friends, social status, and work. I thought helping behavior might be one of the most important indicators of self-esteem because one person in two rated it as very important to self-worth, but I was wrong. It ranked fifth of the eleven items – below moral standards, 'efforts to fulfill your potential as a person,' family, and friends.

The final test examined the relationship between self-esteem and another set of eleven items that asked people to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each. The items covered the same range of activities and interests as in the previous test. I thought the level of satisfaction people expressed with their helping activities might be a good predictor of their overall self-esteem. Again, I was wrong – very wrong. Satisfaction from helping others ranked at the bottom of the list, below satisfaction from hobbies, finances, and work, and far below the items at the top of the list: satisfaction from fulfilling one's potential as a person, moral standards, social status or prestige, and family.

On the whole, these results fairly strongly confirm the criticism I mentioned earlier: that we may not find appeals to good feelings from caring very compelling because we are already fulfilled. Many of us say our helping behavior is an important source of fulfillment and self-worth. But set against the other things in our lives that give these feelings, helping behavior seems relatively insignificant. (Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Princeton University Press: NJ, 1991), p.97 – 99)

### **Illus of evil, self-deception**

Review of Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson's book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts*

Why do people refuse to admit mistakes – so deeply that they transform their own brains? They're not kidding themselves: they really believe what they have to believe to justify their original thought. There are some pretty scary examples in this book. Psychologists who refuse to admit they'd bought into the false memory theories, causing enormous pain. Politicians. Authors. Doctors. Therapists. Alien abduction victims. Most terrifying: The justice system operates this way. Once someone is accused of a crime - even under the most bizarre circumstances - the police believe he's guilty of something. Even when the DNA shows someone is innocent, or new evidence reveals the true perpetrator, they hesitate to let the accused person go free. This book provides an enjoyable, accurate guide through contemporary social psychology. So many 'obvious' myths are debunked as we learn the way memory really works and why revenge doesn't end long-term conflict. Readers should pay special attention to the authors' discussion of the role of science in psychology, as compared to psychiatry, which is a branch of medicine. I must admit I was shocked to realize how few psychiatrists understand the concept of control groups and disconfirmation. Psychoanalysis in particular is not scientific. The authors stop short of comparing it to astrology or

new age. This book should be required reading for everyone, especially anyone who's in a position to make policy or influence the lives of others. But after reading *Mistakes were Made*, I suspect it won't do any good. Once we hold a position, say the authors, it's almost impossible to make a change.

### **Illus of evil, self-deception**

Reviews of Cordelia Fine's book *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*

From Publishers Weekly

Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action, according to Fine, a research associate at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. Fine documents a wealth of surprising information about the brain in this readable account that adopts a good-humored tone about the brain's failings without underestimating the damage they do. The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!). The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality. Despite the firm hold these distortions have on our brains, Fine is not a pessimist. The path to overcoming stereotypes and other distortions of the brain, she says, may be gained through self-awareness and knowledge provided by experimental psychology, a field that explores and exposes unconscious mental influences. (July)

From Scientific American

Many psychological studies show that on average, each of us believes we are above average compared with others—more ethical and capable, better drivers, better judges of character, and more attractive. Our weaknesses are, of course, irrelevant. Such self distortion protects our egos from harm, even when nothing could be further from the truth. Our brains are the trusted advisers we should never trust. This 'distorting prism' of selfknowledge is what Cordelia Fine, a psychologist at the Australian National University, calls our 'vain brain.' Fine documents the lengths to which a human brain will go to bias perceptions in the perceiver's favor. When explaining to ourselves and others why something has gone well or badly, we attribute success to our own qualities, while shedding responsibility for failure. Our brains bias memory and reason, selectively editing truth to inflictless pain on our fragile selves. They also shield the ego from truth with 'retroactive pessimism,' insisting the odds were stacked inevitably toward doom. Alternatively, the brain of 'selfhandicappers' concocts nonthreatening excuses for failure. Furthermore, our brains warp perceptions to match emotions. In the extreme, patients with Cotard delusion actually believe they are dead. So 'pigheaded' is the brain about protecting its perspective that it defends cherished positions regardless of data. The 'secretive' brain unconsciously directs our lives via silent neural equipment that creates the illusion of willfulness. 'Never forget,' Fine says, 'that your unconscious is smarter than you, faster than you, and more powerful than you. It may even control you. You will never know all of its secrets.' So what to do? Begin with self-awareness, Fine says, then manage the distortions as best one can. We owe it to ourselves 'to lessen the harmful effects of the brain's various shams,' she adds, while admitting that applying this lesson to others is easier than to oneself. Ironically, one category of persons shows that it is possible to view life through a clearer lens. 'Their self-perceptions are more balanced, they assign responsibility for success and failure more even-handedly, and their predictions for the future are more realistic. These people are living testimony to the dangers of self-knowledge,' Fine asserts. 'They are the clinically depressed.' Case in point.

According to the story, in a survey taken several years ago, all incoming freshman at MIT were asked if they expected to graduate in the top half of their class. Ninety-seven percent responded that they did.

And another piece of research in 1989 compared mathematical competence in students in eight different countries. Korean students ranked the highest in mathematical skills, while those in the United States had the lowest rating. Yet the American students had the highest overall opinion of their ability, while the Koreans who had the best results had the lowest opinion of how they had done.

### **Illus of evil, apathy, negligence, omission, cold hearts**

How can I be proud of my China if we are a nation of 1.4bn cold hearts?

The death of the two-year-old run over as passersby ignored her is symptomatic of a deepening moral crisis

Lijia Zhang  
Saturday 22 October 2011 17.07 EDT  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/22/china-nation-cold-hearts>

Yueyue's mother



Yueyue's mother after she was called to where her daughter was found. Photograph: China Foto Press / Barcroft Medi

Shame on us Chinese! Last Thursday a two-year-old girl was run over twice, about 100 metres from her home in a hardware market district of Foshan, a prosperous city in southern China. As she lay on the ground, writhing in pain, before being hit by the second vehicle, 18 people, on their bicycles, in cars or on foot, passed by but chose to ignore her. Among them a young woman with her own child.

Finally, a 58-year-old female rubbish collector came to the girl's rescue, but it was too late. By the time she was brought to the hospital, the girl Yueyue, (whose name translates as Little Joy), was brain dead. She was declared dead early on Friday morning. She was a good girl, full of life, her mother said a few days ago in an interview. She said she had just brought Yueyue back from her kindergarten. She popped out to collect the dry clothes and returned to find Yueyue gone – probably trying to look for her elder brother.

It might have been a different story if one of the 18 people had lent Yueyue a hand. None even bothered to call for emergency services. Later, when interviewed by a journalist, one of the passersby, a middle-aged man riding a scooter, said with an uncomfortable smile on his face: 'That wasn't my child. Why should I bother?'

Before giving himself up to the police, the driver of the second vehicle, a van, told the media why he had run away. 'If she is dead, I may pay only about 20,000 yuan (£2,000). But if she is injured, it may cost me hundreds of thousands of yuan.' What's wrong with these people? How could they be so cold-hearted? The horrific scene was caught by a surveillance camera and has been watched by millions of viewers since it was posted on Youku, China's equivalent of YouTube.

This is only the latest incident where tragedy has struck as a result of the callous inactivity of onlookers. Last month an 88-year-old man fell over face down at the entrance of a vegetable market near his home. For almost 90 minutes, he was ignored by people in the busy market. After his daughter found him and called an ambulance, the old man died 'because of a respiratory tract clogged by a nosebleed'. If anyone had turned him over, he might have survived.

Both cases, the death of Yueyue in particular, have provoked much public outrage and a nationwide discussion about morality in today's China. From Shanghai, someone with the cybername 60sunsetred wrote: 'The Chinese people have arrived at their most morality-free moment!' There was plenty of condemnation of the cold-heartedness of the passersby. But, astonishingly, a large percentage of posters said they understood why the onlookers did not

lend a helping hand. Some admitted they would do the same – for fear of getting into trouble and fear of facing another ‘Nanjing judge’.

Let me explain the story of the muddle-headed Nanjing judge. In 2006, in the capital of Jiangsu province, a young man named Peng Yu helped an old woman who had fallen on the street and took her to a hospital and waited to see if the old woman was all right. Later, however, the woman and her family accused Peng of causing her fall. A judge decided in favour of the woman, based on the assumption that ‘Peng must be at fault. Otherwise why would he want to help?’, saying that Peng acted against ‘common sense’. The outcry from the public in support of Peng forced the court to adjust its verdict and resulted in Peng paying 10% of the costs instead of the total. Since that incident Peng has become a national cautionary tale: the Good Samaritan being framed by the beneficiary of their compassion.

It’s true that in China you can get into trouble when you try to help. Weeks ago I spotted an accident on the fourth ring road in Beijing as I returned home one night. A man was hit by a ‘black car’, an ‘illegal taxi’, and his face was all bloody. Watched over by a crowd, the injured man behaved aggressively towards the driver. I got off my scooter. As I tried to pull the two men apart, I was struck myself. When I asked if anyone had reported this to the police, the driver said no. I couldn’t believe that people just stared as if enjoying a free show, without doing anything. I called the helpline and the policemen turned up soon after.

The fundamental problem, in my view, lies in one word that describes a state of mind: shaoguanxianshi, meaning don’t get involved if it’s not your business. In our culture, there’s a lack of willingness to show compassion to strangers. We are brought up to show kindness to people in our network of guanxi, family and friends and business associates, but not particularly to strangers, especially if such kindness may potentially damage your interest.

Fei Xiaotong, China’s first sociologist, described Chinese people’s moral and ethical characteristics in his book, From the Soil, in the middle of the last century. He pointed out that selfishness is the most serious shortcoming of the Chinese. ‘When we think of selfishness, we think of the proverb ‘Each person should sweep the snow from his own doorsteps and should not fret about the frost on his neighbour’s roof,’’ wrote Fei. He offered the example of how the Chinese of that period threw rubbish out of their windows without the slightest public concern. Things are much the same today.

Under Mao, citizens were forced to behave themselves in both public and private spheres. Every March, people were obliged to go into the street to do good deeds: cleaning buses, fixing bicycles and offering haircuts. Now relaxed social control and commercialisation over the past three decades have led people to behave more selfishly again.

People are enjoying, and sometimes abusing, the vast personal freedoms that didn’t exist before. To start with, it is now safe to be ‘naughty’. Back in the early 1980s, when I worked at a rocket factory in Nanjing, one of my colleagues, a married man, was caught having an affair with an unmarried woman. He was given a three-year sentence in a labour camp and the girl was disgraced. In today’s society, having extramarital affairs or keeping an ernai – second wife or concubine – is as common as ‘cow hair’, as the Chinese would say. For a novel I am writing on prostitution, I have interviewed many prostitutes and ernai. Many see their profession as a way to gather wealth quickly, feeling few moral qualms.

China’s moral crisis doesn’t just manifest itself in personal life but also in business practice and many other areas. The high-profile ‘poisoned milk powder’ case and the scandal of using ‘gutter oil’ as cooking oil have shocked and disgusted people around the world. Last year an article, ‘Why have Chinese lost their sense of morality?’, in which the author tried to find an explanation, was widely read. He reasoned that China has introduced the concept of a market economy from the west but failed to import the corresponding ethics, while the traditional moral principles of China no longer fit the market economy model.

There’s a lot of sense in that. I believe that the lack of a value system is also deepening the moral crisis. Before Mao, the indifference towards others once so accurately described by Fei existed but was mitigated by a traditional moral and religious system. That system was then almost destroyed by the communists, especially during the 10 mad years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Nowadays communism, the ideology that dominated Chinese people’s lives like a religion, has also more or less collapsed. As a result, there’s a spiritual vacuum that cannot be filled by the mere opportunity of money-making.

To drag China out of its moral crisis will be a long battle. The pressing question is how to make people act in cases of emergency and the solution is law. After the ‘Nanjing case’, there have been discussions about introducing a law that imposes a ‘duty of rescue’ as exists in many European countries. I am all for it, because that’s probably the only way to propel action for a people who do not see a moral obligation in rescuing others.

The Yueyue incident revealed an ugly side of China. I hope the entire nation will take the opportunity to take a hard look at ourselves and ask ourselves what’s wrong with society. There’s at least hope in the action of the rubbish collector who rushed to Yueyue’s side without hesitation.

China’s economy is galloping like a horse without a rein and its position in the world is rising. We Chinese have every reason to feel proud about what we’ve achieved. Now we demand respect. But how can we possibly win respect and play the role of a world leader if this is a nation with 1.4 billion cold hearts?

### **Illus of evil, apathy, negligence, omission, cold hearts**

Black Friday: Target Shoppers Step Over Walter Vance As He Collapses, Dies

The Huffington Post Tara Kelly

First Posted: 11/27/11 08:15 PM ET Updated: 11/28/11 03:36 PM ET

A Black Friday shopper who collapsed while shopping at a Target store in West Virginia went almost unnoticed as customers continued to hunt for bargain deals. Walter Vance, the 61-year-old pharmacist, who reportedly suffered from a prior heart condition, later died in hospital, reports MSNBC. Witnesses say some shoppers ignored and even walked over the man’s body as they continued to shop, reports the New York Daily News. Friends and co-workers saddened to learn of his death, expressed outrage over the way he was treated by shoppers. ‘Where is the good Samaritan side of people?’ Vance’s co-worker Sue Compton told WSAZ-TV. ‘How could you not notice someone was in trouble? I just don’t understand if people didn’t help what their reason was, other than greed because of a sale.’ Gawker points out there is no legal obligation to come to someone’s rescue, only a moral one. While some news organizations say that no one helped the collapsed man, his wife refuted this report. Lynne Vance said six nurses shopping in the store came to her husband’s rescue and performed CPR until paramedics arrived, notes the Sunday Gazette Mail. This wasn’t the only incident to taint America’s biggest shopping day. While one customer sprayed fellow shoppers with pepper spray so she could snag a video game, another scenario involved an exhausted Target worker accidentally driving her car into a canal after working the Black Friday midnight shift.

### **Illus of self-deception**

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8269462.stm>

Turning a blind eye to obesity

By Clare Murphy

BBC News health reporter

### *Obese person*

Apparently we do not know what’s normal anymore. A survey suggests the vast majority of those who are obese do not realise they are so. How is this possible amid what some see as saturation coverage of the nation’s burgeoning bellies? The poll, carried out by YouGov for Slimming World, found just over a quarter of 2,000 people questioned had measurements which would place them squarely in the obese camp. But only 7% of those asked classified themselves as so. Over half of those deemed morbidly obese believed they ate a healthy diet, while more than a third of the overweight said they had never tried to shed the pounds. The findings appear to be fresh evidence of a phenomenon that health professionals have long suspected: as those around us get fatter, our perceptions of our own size change accordingly. Meanwhile pictures of children too fat to toddle or the adults so large they need to be hoisted from his house have transformed obesity into a freak show rather than a shared problem.

### *You’re bigger than me*

Many have found solace in the suggestion that Marilyn Monroe was apparently a size 16: sadly dress sizes have changed dramatically down the decades as our bodies have grown, and those who can squeeze into a size 8 today would not have been able to do so in 1940. These figures do suggest that the discrepancy has widened with

worryingly few people recognising their weight is potentially harmful to them. While our life expectancies have increased at the same time as our weight, the consensus now is that cases of diseases such as diabetes and even cancer could be reduced if everybody strove to be within the ‘normal’ Body Mass Index (BMI) range. But our perceptions of normal have changed. ‘In my view there is a very clear tendency for individuals with obesity to feel that they do not stand out from the crowd,’ says Jonathan Pinkney, a consultant in endocrinology and diabetes from the Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO). ‘This is because the median BMI has increased so much. For example, if some 4% of women now have a BMI of more than 40, then arguably you need this sort of BMI to begin to look obviously obese when you walk down the street. That may be one reason why self-reported obesity underestimates its true prevalence.’ The focus on the extreme in television documentaries about the very large but also in the pictures that are chosen to illustrate articles about obesity have also been held up as another potential culprit. ‘If you see people with BMI of over 50, say, and you have a BMI of 40 then you may well think you aren’t too bad,’ says Dr Krystyna Matyka of the University of Warwick Medical School.

#### *Not my baby*

Studies have also started to document a particular problem among parents in identifying weight issues among their children: Australian research recently found half of parents thought their child of average weight when in fact they were overweight. But professionals also note the picture is a complicated one. While large may be becoming the norm, the fat - and particularly children - are often seen as a legitimate target for abuse. ‘All the discussion around overweight children is so negative that it is not surprising parents find it difficult to acknowledge there is a problem. It’s a defence mechanism,’ says Dr Susan Jebb of the Human Nutrition Research Laboratory of the Medical Research Council. ‘We need to get to a point where we can talk about this in a measured way. Everybody knows obesity is a problem for the nation, but they don’t accept it’s a problem for them - as this latest survey shows. We need to give people the confidence to recognise that it is problem, and that it’s one they can do something about.’

#### **Illus of evil, hell, perception, self-deception**

This is from *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle*. There are dwarfs in a stable, but it’s not ordinary one. Inside it, there’s a field of grass and beautiful forest... it feels like it’s outside with sunshine and everything but the dwarfs think it’s dark and dirty when the humans can clearly see that it’s not.

‘Aslan,’ said Lucy through her tears, ‘could you – will you – do something for these poor Dwarfs?’

‘Dearest,’ said Aslan, ‘I will show you both what I can, and what I cannot do.’ He came close to the Dwarfs and gave a low growl: low, but it set all the air shaking. But the Dwarfs said to one another, ‘Hear that? That’s the gang at the other end of the Stable. Trying to frighten us. They do it with a machine of some kind. Don’t take any notice. They won’t take us in again!’

Aslan raised his head and shook his mane. Instantly, a glorious feast appeared on the Dwarfs’ knees: pies and tongues and pigeons and trifles and ices, and each Dwarf had a goblet of good wine in his right hand. But it wasn’t much use. They began eating and drinking greedily enough, but it was clear that they couldn’t taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a Stable. One said he was trying to eat hay and another said he had got a bit of an old turnip and a third said he’d found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said ‘Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey’s been at! Never thought we’d come to this.’

#### **Illus of evil, theology**

The following Wikipedia article is important because it demonstrates that religions are not all the same, especially when it comes to defining good and evil. The karmic traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism) and Eastern thought in general believes that good and evil are aspects of the same reality. The difference between good and evil is one that we perceive in our heads – it’s our opinion. If this is so, it leads to an ‘accept the world as it is’ posture. This is why there have been no social justice movements in Asia that come from Hinduism, that I know of. There are two that can be remotely connected to Buddhism (the fifth century king Ashoka, although his reforms did not constitute a broad social movement, and the Burmese Buddhist monks resisting the military rule of Burma). Otherwise, the only social justice movements in Asia have been either Christian or Marxist.

Make a donation to Wikipedia and give the gift of knowledge!

article discussion edit this page history

# Problem of evil in Hinduism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Hindu answers to the problem of evil are different from most answers offered in Western philosophy, partly because the problem of evil within Hindu thought is differently structured than Western traditions, mainly Abrahamic traditions.

In the Hindu tradition the problem of evil is phrased as the Problem of Injustice. This problem can be considered in the following manner:

**God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Just. Yet injustice is observed to persist in the world. How is this possible?**

In the Advaita school of Vedanta, this problem is dealt with in detail by Sankara in his commentary on the Brahma Sutras, 2.1.34-36:

*Brahma Sutra 2.1.34: "No partiality and cruelty (can be charged against God) because of (His) taking other factors into consideration."*

Sankara's commentary explains that God cannot be charged with partiality or cruelty (i.e. injustice) on account of his taking the factors of virtuous and vicious actions (*Karma*) performed by an individual in previous lives. If an individual experiences pleasure or pain in this life, it is due to virtuous or vicious action (*Karma*) done by that individual in a past life.

*Brahma Sutra 2.1.35: "If it be argued that it is not possible (to take Karma into consideration in the beginning), since the fruits of work remain still undifferentiated, then we say, no, since the transmigratory state has no beginning."*

The opponent now argues that there could have been no "previous birth" at the very beginning of creation, before which *Karma* could not have existed. Sankara replies that it is not so, for the number of creation cycles is beginningless, vide the next verse:

*Brahma Sutra 2.1.36: "Moreover, this is logical, and (so) it is met with (in the scriptures)."*

Sankara provides references from the Vedas concerning the beginninglessness of Creation: "The Ordainer created the sun and moon like those of previous cycles" (Rig Veda 10.190.3). This shows the existence of earlier cycles of creation, and hence the number of creation cycles is beginningless.

Thus Sankara's resolution to the Problem of Injustice is that the existence of injustice in the world is only apparent, for one merely reaps the results of one's moral actions sown in a past life, which is compatible with the Justness of an Omniscient and Omnipotent God.

On the higher level of Existence, however, there is no evil or good, since these are dependent mainly on temporal circumstances. Hence a *jnani*, one who has realized his true nature, is beyond such dualistic notions.

**Sources** [edit]

- Swami Gambhirananda. *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*. Published by the Ramakrishna Math. ISBN 81-7505-105-1
- Mohanty, J.N. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. ISBN 0-8476-8933-6

**See also** [edit]

- Karma in Hinduism

**External links** [edit]

- "The Problem of Evil" — Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood

## Illus of evil, human nature

Hannibal Lecter, *Silence of the Lambs*. In response to the question, 'What happened to you?' Hannibal Lecter says, 'Nothing has happened to me, officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behavioralism, officer Starling. You've got everybody in dignity pants. Nothing is ever anybody's fault. Look at me, officer Starling. Can you stand to say, 'I'm evil?'

## Illus of evil, self-deception, irrationalism in social justice

As a social philosophy, liberalism is dead; and it cannot survive even as a private morality unless it is integrated into a new moral and philosophical synthesis beyond liberalism. (Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (Vintage Books/Random House: NY, 1969), p.209-210)

Another tendency in recent social criticism is existentialist irrationalism [despair of ever making sense of an incoherent world; Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus each chose his own alternative to reason—the leap of faith, radical freedom, and heroic revolt, respectively] – the one philosophy that seems to have made some impression on the New Left. Even more than the others, the popularity of this point of view betrays the association between social criticism in the United States and the intellectuals' 'alienation' [from any meaningful political party or movement]. Even more than the others, the irrationalist critiques of modern society, ranging from New Hegelian versions of Marx to various existential social philosophies, are 'undogmatic, highly personal and idiosyncratic' and therefore inadequate 'to sustain effective social criticism or to bring about any radical social change.' (Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (Vintage Books/Random House: NY, 1969), p.46, quoting T. B. Bottomore, *Critics of Society: Radical Thought in North America* (Pantheon Books: NY, 1968), p.99, 130)

'But the new rebel is a skeptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never really be a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies trust in a moral framework of some kind; and the modern skeptic doubts not only the thing he denounces, [but the words by which he denounces it].' That was written by G.K. Chesterton in his book, *Orthodoxy*, in 1909. He then lists some examples that were pertinent back then, but I'll give you some examples pertinent now. *We denounce marriage as a lie, and then we denounce Tiger Woods for treating it as a lie. In a social justice meeting, we denounce Nike for treating Third World people as if they were animals, and then in a science class, we prove that they are animals. In an international studies class, we denounce war as a waste of life, and then in philosophy class, we denounce life as a waste of time. We denounce a white policeman for beating a black man, but we denounce any moral framework by which white bankers are really responsible for black foreclosures.* Let me resume with Chesterton: 'In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite skeptic, is always engaged in undermining [himself]. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.' [my modification to G.K. Chesterton quote from *Orthodoxy* about the split between heart and mind caused by sin]

#### **Illus of sin, evil, idolatry, desire**

Woody Allen ran off with his wife's adopted daughter. Even the liberal New York Times reporter asked him, 'Come on – this is a little far. Even if she's not your biological daughter, she's still your wife's adopted daughter, and your daughter.' His response was, 'The heart wants what it wants.'

#### **Illus of sin, evil, idolatry, identity, desire, spiritual formation, Revelation 21**

'The gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And we will worship something – have no doubt of that either. We may think that our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of the heart – but that will out. That which dominates our imagination and our thoughts will determine our life and character. Therefore it behooves us to be careful what we are worshipping, for what we are worshiping we are becoming.' Ralph Waldo Emerson

#### **Illus of self-centeredness, sin, lying, idolatry**

In Thursday's piece, Del Cecato contends that the 'bad behavior' of the Balloon Dad, also known as Richard Heene, 'has parallels to the reckless rants from the GOP's two most powerful voices.' Heene had told authorities that his son was trapped in a homemade flying-saucer-like balloon that floated in the air for hours over the Colorado plains — a saga that captivated Americans who watched the flight in real time on television, only to find out later that the boy was alive and well at the family home. Authorities now allege that the whole episode was hatched by Heene and his wife to get publicity for a reality TV show. 'When a troubled soul with nothing to offer craves the national spotlight, he builds a balloon and tells an outrageous story,' Del Cecato wrote. 'When a political party with no good ideas thirsts for power, it outsources its message to those who manufacture fear and incite anger.'

#### **Illus of knowledge, ethics, epistemology, self-centeredness**

'And his knowledge remained woefully incomplete, Harry! That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.' (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p.709 – 710) Dumbledore, explaining to Harry why Voldemort chooses not to know certain things.

#### **Illus of good and evil, morality**

'There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.' Professor Quirrell, speaking about what Lord Voldemort taught him. (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p.291)

### **Illus of evil, depersonalization**

In the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJvXrTq6qRU&feature=relmfu>, there is a commentary on the story. Specifically, the wraiths are a twisted moral vacuum. The Ring appeals to something inside us that wants power.

5:50 – 8:07 or 10:05

### **Illus of hypocrisy**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/10/newt-gingrichs-ex-wife-go\\_n\\_676834.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/10/newt-gingrichs-ex-wife-go_n_676834.html)

<http://www.esquire.com/print-this/newt-gingrich-0910?page=all>

Newt Gingrich's Ex-Wife Goes Public: Messy Relationship Life, Meltdowns, And 2012  
The Huffington Post | Elyse Siegel First Posted: 08-10-10

A new Esquire profile of Newt Gingrich offers a rare glimpse into the personal life and political ambitions of the former House Speaker as he vies to make a comeback after resigning in disgrace over a decade ago. Gingrich himself was interviewed for the feature story; however, some of the juiciest insight into the life of the prominent conservative voice comes from his ex-wife, Marianne Gingrich, whom he divorced in 2000. ‘He asked me to marry him way too early,’ she revealed. ‘And he wasn’t divorced yet [from his first wife Jackie Battley]. I should have known there was a problem.’ Marianne Gingrich suggested that the former House Speaker found himself in the same relationship pattern eighteen years later when he sought to marry his current wife, then-congressional aide Callista Bisek.

‘I know,’ she explained. ‘I asked him. He’d already asked her to marry him before he asked me for a divorce. Before he even asked.’ The profile paints a silhouette highlighting the intersection of Gingrich’s personal life and political career: ‘There’s somebody else, isn’t there?’ She kind of guessed it, of course. Women usually do. But did she know the woman was in her apartment, eating off her plates, sleeping in her bed?

She called a minister they both trusted. He came over to the house the next day and worked with them the whole weekend, but Gingrich just kept saying she was a Jaguar and all he wanted was a Chevrolet. ‘I can’t handle a Jaguar right now.’ He said that many times. ‘All I want is a Chevrolet.’ He asked her to just tolerate the affair, an offer she refused. He’d just returned from Erie, Pennsylvania, where he’d given a speech full of high sentiments about compassion and family values. The next night, they sat talking out on their back patio in Georgia. She said, ‘How do you give that speech and do what you’re doing?’ ‘It doesn’t matter what I do,’ he answered. ‘People need to hear what I have to say. There’s no one else who can say what I can say. It doesn’t matter what I live.’

As for 2012, Marianne Gingrich shared her take on speculation swirling over the possibility of Newt Gingrich making a run for the White House in the next election cycle. The bottom line, she said, is that ‘there’s no way’ he’ll be president. ‘He could have been president,’ she explained. ‘But when you try and change your history too much, and try and recolor it because you don’t like the way it was or you want it to be different to prove something new . . . you lose touch with who you really are. You lose your way.’

Marianne Gingrich suggested that her ex-husband ‘believes that what he says in public and how he lives don’t have to be connected’ and added, ‘If you believe that, then yeah, you can run for president. ... He always told me that he’s always going to pull the rabbit out of the hat.’ Gingrich’s second wife zeroed-in on what she suggested might be her ex-husband’s Achilles’ heel: ‘He was impressed easily by position, status, money,’ she says. ‘He grew up poor and always wanted to be somebody, to make a difference, to prove himself, you know.’

### **Illus of sin, evil, corruption, downward spiral**

During the summer of 2005, many dreams came true for my wife Ming and me. We saw our household’s influence in our neighborhood expand. After five years of living in our neighborhood, which is a lower-income, higher crime area, we saw God open up so many opportunities we couldn’t even take them all: We started a monthly neighborhood meeting, a monthly crime watch meeting, a weekly women’s bible study, a weekly youth bible study, a weekly family games night, a weekly family movie night, a weekly African dance and drums class. We helped a non-profit organization get a \$15,000 grant to get musical equipment and a brand new video projector to in the community center across the street. My wife got a \$20,000 grant to build a community garden, which helped us pay

young people in our neighborhood to work on the garden. As a result, we got closer to many people. But we had one incident that was a real bummer. One day, two of the young men, brothers, who were interns working on the community garden, came into our house, ostensibly to use the bathroom. When they left, one of them had taken a \$90 check written out to us. We discovered that the check was missing after they left. Now it's not a lot of money, but it felt significant because we had trusted them, because they were working for us and giving them an opportunity, and most importantly because they were young men and still had hope. If they started down a path of bad choices, who knows where that would end? And would they be open to hearing from God? Unfortunately, or fortunately for them, one of them signed his name on the check, complete with his phone number and address. After we asked the bank for a copy of the stolen check, we compared signatures to another signature he had signed. Were they alike? Yes; they were exactly alike. So we knew it was at least one of them. My wife and I prayed about how to respond to these two young men. We decided that we would not call the police or the bank. But we would not hire them again to work in the garden until they paid us back. And then I confronted both of them. I said, 'Hey, I want you to know that I'm really rooting for you and I'm on your side. I think you have a lot of potential in life. And I even want to keep working with you. But there's this problem.' I showed them the check, and the other signature, and I asked them to fess up and either give us the money or work it off. Both of them denied it. Then, they accused each other. Then, they said that they would tell their dad and accuse each other in front of him. So I said, 'You see, this is what sin does – you stole from us, then you lied, and now, you're accusing each other. Then it's going to affect your dad and your family. That's the kind of life that I don't want you to live. Over time, it becomes harder and harder to live a clean life because you get sucked into these habits and patterns, so much that you no longer want to change, you no longer want to live a clean life. You're still young; you've still got a good chance; so you'd better give your lives to Jesus and let him transform you!!'

### **Illus of human nature**

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a Colossus; and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about  
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.  
Men at some time are masters of their fates:  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings. (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 1.2.135)

### **Illus of human nature**

Again, the human condition is the error and all the efforts of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Candomble, Anago et al, seem weak in curbing the perverse selfish ungodly actions of man. And let us not limit our analysis to religion because in all systems the ruling race-class seek to protect their interest and are always reluctant/unwilling to surrender that which grants them advantage over others. (Hailie Selassie)

### **Illus of evil, systemic corruption, social justice, confession, need for atonement**

From the movie Sicko by Michael Moore  
22:00 man who used to disqualify people from medical coverage, and then quit the industry, said that that didn't 'atone' for his participation in the system, but he's glad to be out of it  
29:00 Linda Pino, confessing that she denied coverage to a man for surgery that caused his death

### **Illus of evil, chaos, morality, justice**

*The Allure of The Dark Knight: Speaking a Troubled Truth to an Anxious Audience*  
by Marc T. Newman, Ph.D.  
<http://www.movie ministry.com/articles.php>

The Dark Knight has brought in more money at the box office in its first eight days of release than its predecessor, Batman Begins, did it its entire domestic run. Some point to actor Heath Ledger's untimely death as a factor, others to his Oscar-nomination-worthy performance as The Joker. Both certainly play a role. Either might get fans into seats at least once, but neither can explain the multiple viewings that blockbuster films of this caliber must attract to

post the kind of numbers that *The Dark Knight* boasts: top opening night of all time, top weekend of all time, top weekly box office of all time – which it accomplished in six, not seven, days, and fastest film to \$300 million, cutting the time to the record from sixteen days to only ten.

So what drives audiences to repeat viewings of a film that is, by any standard, a dark film set in a dystopian world with, at best, an ambiguous ending? I would like to argue that *The Dark Knight* is resonating with film audiences because it has tapped into a collective moral angst about the condition of our culture, and the schizophrenic attitudes many have about what it takes to set things right. In line with our culture of narcissism, regardless of what the mirror shows, we enjoy looking at ourselves. *The Dark Knight* reflects our culture's troubling truths: our downward slide into nihilism, the impossibility of continuing to draw from a moral well without replenishing it, and the difficulty of wanting heroes while inhabiting a post-heroic age. The world of *The Dark Knight* looks both grim and familiar – it is our own, writ large.

#### *Sliding Toward Nihilism*

Gotham City has never been the poster child for the model American metropolis. There are good reasons why Batman operates there instead of, say, Des Moines. But even in its underworld there was always an odd sense of orderliness. The job of the crooks was to commit crime. The police had a duty to catch them. There was planning and execution. Even among thieves there was occasionally muted cooperation and a warped code of 'honor.' This was a world, for better or worse, that operated under rules.

*The Dark Knight* introduces The Joker as the harbinger of a new immoral order. He describes himself to District Attorney Harvey Dent as a kind of force of nature: 'Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I am a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. I just do things.' But moments later, he reveals his true identity, 'Introduce a little anarchy, upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I am an agent of chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fear.'

The crimes committed in *The Dark Knight* -- murder, kidnapping, bank robbery, and terrorism -- are not otherworldly; they are the evening news. *The Dark Knight* merely consolidates them in a single city; creating a recognizable microcosm of crime. But unlike crimes of the past, where someone might do something evil to obtain something good -- for example, rob someone to get money -- The Joker simply revels in lawlessness. He is an icon for the random attacks against innocents by strangers and the senseless drive-by shootings that have recently plagued our nation. We live in a world that no longer makes sense. We see in *The Dark Knight* a fictional expression of our own world gone mad.

Under interrogation, The Joker rejects the idea that his is some alien ideology. Providing his analysis of the bastions of rules and laws -- the police department -- The Joker explains, 'You see, their morals, their code, it's a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign of trouble. They're only as good as the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When the chips are down, these civilized people, they'll eat each other. See, I'm not a monster...I'm just ahead of the curve.'

The important question to ask is whether The Joker is right.

#### *An Inconvenient Morality*

*The Dark Knight* does not provide any easy answers. The optimistic viewer will find plenty of examples of people trying to do the right thing, engaging in self-sacrifice, and taking time to examine themselves before acting. But the film balances these with otherwise upright citizens who will try to engage in blackmail if they think they can get away with it, who will shoot an innocent man on orders of The Joker in response to the fear of what The Joker might do if they don't, who will violate the law and terrorize a person in police custody to get the information they need to prevent another crime, who will democratically vote to slaughter a boatload of prisoners, who will deliver an innocent man to death to save a relative, who will violate the rights of millions of people in order to capture a dangerous man, and who will openly lie to the citizens to maintain their faith in the system.

Is this imagery unfair?

We live in an era in which, for the majority among us, truth and morality do not matter. In 2002, researcher George Barna revealed some startling statistics about public morality. What Barna discovered in his study was that only 4% of all teenagers believe in moral absolutes. And only 9% of Christian teens believe in moral absolutes. Startlingly,

only 32% of Christian adults believe in moral absolutes. Study after study shows us to be a nation of liars and opportunists. When people say that there are no moral absolutes, they reveal something about their character. Rules apply when convenient, and can be discarded when the cost of following them appears to exceed the temporal benefits of adhering.

Of course, living in a chaotic world of moral anarchy presents many dangers. The quickest way to expose the false nature of nihilists is make them victims of crime. Lie to them, steal from them, and like everyone else they will cry, ‘Foul!’ But in a culture taught that morality is subjective and relative, and that truth is nothing more than a social construct, how often can we go to our collective historical moral well and expect to find anything there to draw from? How can a culture that abandons morality replenish that well? And once we draw too deeply, exhausting the reserves created by our forebears, who will be there to champion our cause?

#### *Seeking Heroes in a Post-Heroic Culture*

Batman, as currently conceived, is the only help in the time of post-moral need. Bruce Wayne admits to his butler, Alfred, and his former girlfriend, Rachel Dawes, that Batman is an unusual sort of hero. Wayne recognizes that a vigilante hero might be the only thing standing between Gotham and bedlam for now, but that kind of order cannot be maintained. Trying to do right, while engaging in illegal activities, is a tightrope act. Gotham City needs a moral leader who can do the right thing while living his life out in the open (what used to be called ‘character’) -- a man like Harvey Dent.

The connection between these two strangely complimentary heroes reveals the ultimate agenda of The Joker. Motivated by chaos and anarchy, The Joker sets his sights on destroying all bastions of morality, public or private. As he continues to ratchet up the price that needs to be paid for following the rules, Dent begins to crack. Ultimately, as all followers of the comic book story (or viewers of the pre-Christopher Nolan films) know, Dent is overwhelmed, and is transformed into the villain Two Face.

Batman is not a public figure, but his rule-based morality is a constant challenge to The Joker’s ascendant immorality. The Joker wants to break Batman, even at the cost of his own life. In response to the Joker, Batman says that he only has one rule (it is implied that he tries very hard not to kill people), and The Joker replies that this is the one that Batman will have to violate in order to save one of his friends. When Batman acts virtuously in the face of immense temptation to do otherwise, The Joker accuses him of a ‘misplaced sense of self-righteousness.’ In the end, Batman is forced to take upon himself the sins of another, and perform the services of a scapegoat, an outcast, in order to save the city that rejects him.

Thomas de Zengotita, in his book *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It*, argues that we are in the age of the twilight of the heroes. In a relativistic world, heroes begin to look arrogant. As de Zengotita notes, ‘Who do they think they are?’ If everyone is ‘special’ in his or her own way, why should anyone be ‘more special’ than anyone else? Why should any other person’s morality trump my morality? What makes the great thinkers’ thoughts so ‘great’ anyway? One way to assure their death is, at every turn, to try to chop them down to size. To de Zengotita, this represents an attractive outcome. He believes that local heroes will come to replace great heroes. What he fails to understand, and what philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* understood completely, is that it is the culture’s stories of great heroes that inspire the actions of others. Take that inspiration away and the world is likely to look very different in a few short years.

In an early scene, a copycat Batman questions the right of the genuine article to fight crime while denying others the right to do the same. Batman has been successful in cleaning up the streets of Gotham. But when The Joker demands that the Batman be unmasked or else many people will die, in a heartbeat the citizens who have thrived under the Batman’s protection are screaming for his arrest. Heroes traditionally embody a sense of ideals that people, even if they cannot emulate them perfectly, still value. But in a relativistic world we find ourselves paradoxically wanting a hero, while simultaneously rejecting the morality that makes heroes possible.

#### *Inexplicable Shock*

In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis described our current predicament well: ‘And all the time – such is the great tragi-comedy of our situation – we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible...In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.’

The Dark Knight does our culture a great favor. It uses a popular media format, fictional film, to magnify our culture and reveal its unsettling end. The Joker is a type of Nietzschean Superman – a person whose word is law, and the undoing of all other laws. To those who would reject the notion of The Joker as the natural end state of moral relativism, what objection could be raised? Without any transcendent morality to which a culture can call upon to judge actions, we would be bereft of any means of calling those who would do evil into account. We would lack the vocabulary to even call their deeds evil.

But like Scrooge, visiting his own grave with the ghost of Christmas future, our culture's end is not yet etched in stone. The Dark Knight provides for us a cautionary tale, but not one entirely without hope. It is possible for our culture to tumble into anarchy and chaos. We can even choose to act surprised when it does. But no amount of exclamation will save us. The message of The Dark Knight is that each of us needs to respond to the challenge to be the kind of person who is committed to discovering the right thing, and then doing it – not furtively in the darkness – but fully in the light of day.

Marc T. Newman, PhD., is the president of MovieMinistry.com, an organization that provides sermon and teaching illustrations, Bible studies and discussion cards, drawn from popular film, and helps the Church use movies to reach out to others and connect with people. Requests for media interviews, or reprints of this article, can be made to marc@movieministry.com

### **Illus of evil, externalizing evil**

*The Real Meaning of Evil*

Lance Morrow, TIME magazine, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2003

The word evil — brandished so often by George W. Bush and just as regularly scorned by those who oppose him — could use some serious parsing.

It is possible that neither side in the debate about evil quite knows what it is talking about. Philosophically and theologically, both are fighting the last war. They are talking about a world that no longer exists, or rather, they fail to see what evil lies in the world that now exists.

President Bush uses the word in an in-your-face, born-again manner that takes its resonance from a long Judeo-Christian tradition that sees radical evil embodied in heroically diabolical figures. This personalized evil is the kind that is insinuated by the sauntering Tempter in the first scene of the Book of Job, when God and Satan speculate like racing touts about whether Job can go a mile and a quarter on a muddy track. In Bush's usage, evil has the perverse prestige of Milton's defiant Lucifer. Evil emanates, implicitly, from a devilish intelligence with horns and a tail, an absolutely malevolent personality, God's rival in the cosmos, condemned to lose the fight (eventually) but powerful in the world.

Bush's critics, hearing the word, go ironic. They put evil in quotes and think of Dana Carvey's Church Lady: 'Well, isn't that special, Saddam? Who's your little friend? Could it be Satan!!!????' They mock Bush for what they see as a primitive, frightening and atavistic use of a medieval term that should probably be banished from civilized discourse in a multicultural world.

Evil, these critics say, is in any case such an elusive term that it can only cause mischief in human affairs and has a way of evaporating — or turning into something else as time passes. Toward the end of World War I, when labor unions threatened strikes in England, Minister of Munitions Winston Churchill sternly blamed 'evil and subterranean influences,' meaning, he said, 'pacifism, defeatism and Bolshevism.' Of course, the real evils of World War I, which slaughtered an entire generation of Europe's young men, were obdurate military stupidity, the effectiveness of newly industrialized war and a monstrous official indifference to the value of human life. (A neglected dimension of evil, by the way, is stupidity.)

But even if it's elusive and even if the term is used brainlessly, evil is still there — a mystery, a black hole into which reason and sunshine vanish but nonetheless ... there. Talk to the children with chopped-off hands in Sierra Leone. It is as fatuous to deny the existence of evil as it is to toss the word around irresponsibly. The children of the Enlightenment sometimes have an inadequate understanding of the possibilities of the Endarkenment. The question is how evil exists, how it works.

Go back 40 years to the controversy that surrounded Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, a study of the Adolf Eichmann trial, in which she coined the famous phrase 'the banality of evil.' Arendt did not seem satisfied with the term and afterward wrote in a letter to a friend (the great scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem), 'It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth

nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface.' This was what W.H. Auden meant: 'Evil is unspectacular and always human,/And shares our bed and eats at our own table.' The normality of evil.

The truth about evil that needs attention now is its shallow, deadly, fungus quality. Nice people — especially in a tiny, multicultural world in which different civilizations inhabit different centuries — are often moved to evil deeds, like blowing up the Other. Don't bother demonizing people as being inherently evil (as Satan is evil). That's not how it works. Opportunistic evil passes like an electric current through the world and through people, or wanders like an infection that takes up residence in individuals or cultures from time to time.

Distance once helped dampen the effects of human wickedness, and weapons once had limited range. But evil has burst into a new dimension. The globalization, democratization and miniaturization of the instruments of destruction (nuclear weapons or their diabolical chemical-biological stepbrothers) mean a quantum leap in the delivery systems of evil. This levels the playing field — and the level field has fungus on it. Every tinhorn with a chemistry set becomes a potential world-historical force with more discretionary destructive power at hand than the great old monsters, from Caligula to Stalin, ever had. In the new dimension, micro-evil (the dark impulse to rape or murder, say) and macro-evil (the urge to genocide) achieve an ominous reunion in any bid for the apocalyptic gesture. That's the real evil that is going around.

### Illus of evil, externalizing evil

*Zimbardo Unbound*

From Stanford Alumni Magazine, May – June 2007

<http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/mayjun/features/zimbardo.html>

Long after his notorious prison experiment and soon after the Abu Ghraib scandal, the famous psychologist lobbies for a greater understanding of how evil systems subvert good people.

INTERVIEW BY Marina Krakovsky

PHOTOGRAPHY BY Glenn Matsumura



No matter what Philip Zimbardo does—publish research on shyness, time perspective or madness; teach wildly popular undergraduate courses; co-author the bestselling textbook *Psychology and Life*; star in the PBS series *Discovering Psychology*; or serve as president of the American Psychological Association—everybody remembers him for the famous (and infamous) 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment. The mock prison he'd set up in the basement of Jordan Hall quickly turned ordinary college students into abusive guards and degraded prisoners, some of whom broke down under the pretend prison's all-too-real strain. When, decades later, Zimbardo first glimpsed televised images of the inmate abuse at Abu Ghraib, he was shocked by similarities to what he'd seen in his own study.

Before long, Zimbardo, 74, was not only giving media interviews, but serving as an expert witness in defense of Ivan 'Chip' Frederick, a staff sergeant who was the highest-ranking officer court-martialed for the crimes at the Iraqi prison. This role gave Zimbardo access to documents detailing horrendous conditions at the prison—and the evidence he needed to dispute official claims that the sadistic treatment of Iraqi detainees was an isolated incident and the work of a few rogue soldiers.

In a new book, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (Random House), Zimbardo makes the case that ‘bad apples’ aren’t to blame for evils at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere: he argues that extreme situations and the systems that create them—‘bad barrels’—lead ordinary people to behave in horrid ways.

On March 7, roughly coinciding with his golden teaching anniversary and the publication of the book, the psychology professor gave a farewell Stanford lecture. In the packed auditorium, the veteran showman’s presentation combined psychological research with real-world politics, leavened a heavy message with personal history and popular culture, and elicited both despair and optimism about human nature. The centerpiece: a series of snapshots from Abu Ghraib.

It’s easy to loathe the soldiers gloating over their atrocities—Zimbardo calls the photos ‘trophy shots,’ likening them to fishermen’s poses with their big catch. But when Zimbardo describes the hellish, decrepit prison—in which the guards lived in conditions little better than those for the inmates—the soldiers’ actions gain new context. Under frequent attack by mortar fire, enveloped in desert heat and urine stench, the guards worked 12-hour shifts for weeks without respite, with insistent but vague orders to ‘soften up’ for interrogation their prisoners of war.

*You felt sympathetic toward Chip Frederick after getting to know him, but do you feel as much for the other abusers?*

I haven’t studied any of the others in sufficient detail, but they were all pawns of chess masters who orchestrated their game remotely and with no understanding or concern for the humanity of these soldiers or the dignity of their prisoners.

The supposed worst of the other MPs was corporal Charles Graner. In the middle of the abuses he got accolades from his lieutenant colonel for the work he was doing in preparing the detainees for interrogation. I am sympathetic that he then was sent away for 10 years after doing this acclaimed duty.

*You write in your book, ‘There are no special inner attributes of either pathology or goodness residing within the human psyche or the human genome.’ Isn’t this an empirical question—something for behavioral geneticists to answer?*

Behavioral genetics cannot deal with highly complex behaviors, and certainly not generic ones like good and evil. There is no data of genes that predispose toward good or evil, and any such data would be so weak as to apply [only] to a minority of cases. If your mother and father were both schizophrenic, the probability you will be is only 50 percent.

*You contend that abuses, those at Abu Ghraib and those in your prison study, started with good people—people who had passed psychological evaluations. But can we know that they were good? Maybe the psychological tests aren’t getting at something important.*

They’re not. All that personality tests can do is predict how you’ll behave in situations that you’re familiar with. They can’t predict how you’d act in a totally new situation. But the tests do tell us that at the time these people completed them, they fit in the normal range of all people taking the tests. So when we put these good guards in a bad place, the place changed their personality in ways they couldn’t imagine.

*You make the classic distinction in social psychology between the person and the situation, but you also bring the system into it. What made you think about that third piece?*

I was unaware even with the Stanford prison study about the power of the system because I was the system. It wasn’t until I was preparing for Chip Frederick’s trial by reading these investigative reports that I said, ‘Oh, my God, what’s really important isn’t how terrible the situation was in Tier 1A, but how is it possible that any military system allowed this terrible environment to exist?’ So I began to say the most important thing is the cruel and inhuman system, because the system is where the power is.

I should have thought of it earlier: my major was sociology and anthropology before I turned to psychology.

*Some people say situations are easier to change than people. If you accept the ‘broken-windows theory,’ which your own early research supports, then fixing urban decay seems doable: you repair broken windows, you paint over graffiti—and street crime sharply declines. Prompt, detailed ounces of prevention provide big cures. But when you start talking about a system that creates bad situations, you’ve got a huge problem. Because aren’t systems really difficult to change?*

Systems are really difficult to change, but you can’t even conceptualize what a change would look like until you realize the system is where the power is—and you begin to investigate where there’s leverage.

One glowing example is with South African apartheid. This was going on for 100 years, and how did Nelson Mandela and his colleagues change that from the prison? It took them 25 years, yet they did it. It started by changing the guards’ perception of them, sending out messages to the community about acting with dignity, and then getting other countries involved, with American colleges saying, ‘We’re not going to invest in South Africa.’

The same thing with the war on terrorism: the only really effective thing they’ve done is freeze the assets of groups that support terrorism.

*You suggest looking at the highest levels of power, the ‘barrel makers’ who create systems and situations. But aren’t those people subject to system forces, too?*

Yes, the person at the highest level is in the context of getting elected. Today you have lobbyists from Israel saying, ‘Why is [Nancy] Pelosi talking about ending the war? We’re going to be more vulnerable.’ And they’re threatening to cut off financial support. At that point the politician has to say, ‘I have to get money from somewhere else, and if I don’t get enough I can’t get re-elected, in which case I can’t work on other issues.’

The ultimate power is the power to frame the issues, to say, ‘This is a war against terrorism.’ Is there anybody who’s against national security? But then you fall into Erich Fromm’s Escape From Freedom analysis, which is that the only way authorities can reasonably talk about guaranteeing your security is if you surrender your freedoms. But when you give up your freedom, that’s always real, whereas security is an illusion.

*In the book you repeatedly say that you’re not practicing ‘excusiology’ for the abusers, that understanding the why of what was done does not excuse what was done. Can you have it both ways—blaming the situation and the system while still holding individuals accountable? Is the solution simply a lighter penalty because of mitigating circumstances?*

Legally, individuals are always accountable for their actions and found guilty if they break laws, civil or military. And situational forces should be invoked to mitigate the extent of the sentence of guilt. Currently there’s insufficient appreciation or discounting of how powerful they can be, and the extent to which they can play a major role in causing the illegal, immoral behavior.

We have to more fully appreciate the extent to which human behavior can come under the control of a host of situational forces in certain behavioral settings. As those forces become more extreme and intense, a greater percentage of ordinary, even good, people will be swayed, seduced, initiated into doing things that are unimaginable to them when they are outside the constraints of that situation. Not everyone is susceptible to those forces, only the majority of people, but that is a big number.

*How does heroism, which you’ve begun studying, fit into this situationist’s model? How do you account for that one person out of 100 who does the right thing?*

At this point we don’t know. But situations can be subtle. A professor gave a talk here a few years ago. He’s going on and on, and finally somebody asks a question that he can’t answer, and he says, ‘I’m really feeling sick and I’ll get to that in a minute.’ I think, is he saying he’s sick of this kind of question? Suddenly he’s speaking much slower. . . . I move closer and closer until I’m right in front of him . . . and I notice his pants are now wet, so I say something like, ‘Maybe you should end.’ And at that point he falls on me, and had I not been there, he’d have smashed into that chair. We called the paramedics, and it turned out he had the flu. So in a way it’s a heroic act because if I do nothing, nobody knows but me, but on the other hand, suppose I made a mistake?

*You're weighing the costs of taking action . . .*

Essentially, it's shame and guilt: you have to live with the guilt of not doing what you should have done vs. the shame of doing the wrong thing. All my life I've done things to make people laugh at me, and playing the fool means when the time comes I don't care if people laugh. Also, there's the situational thing: it's only because I was sitting in the front row that I knew what was happening and stepped in.

*So we don't really know that everybody is in the same situation just because they're in the same room.*

Exactly. It's the same with the prison study: some guards were on a shift where they didn't see most of the bad stuff, because they were out getting the breakfast or lunch for the prisoners, and most of the bad stuff occurred on the night shift.

*Why, throughout the book, do you use the word 'evil,' which is such a loaded word? Why not just talk about aggression, since that's a straightforward psychological term?*

I've done lots of work on aggression, but aggression for psychologists has always been one-on-one. Once you have torture, where it's a systematic program to instill fear in a community, to use specialized tactics to get information to break people's will, that's not aggression. That's not even violence.

For me, evil is the highest level of inhumanity. It could be one-on-one, like the torturer and his victim, but more often than not at that level it's the individual as an agent of a system.

One of the things I try to get across is, it's really noble ideologies that allow the worst possible destructions, because you could always say, 'I did it for God.' Throughout the world, evil occurs almost always in the name of religion or of national security. In the beginning of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler says, 'In dealing with the Jewish question, I'm doing the Lord's work.' No evildoer ever believes he or she is doing evil.

*That gets to Hannah Arendt's idea of 'the banality of evil,' but you take it in a new direction.*

Before Eichmann went to Auschwitz, he's normal. The psychiatrist evaluating him says, 'He's more normal than I am.' So with the banality of evil, Hannah Arendt is saying that the evildoer looks just like us. But what she should have added is, that it's only when the evildoer is in a special situation that he's transformed. It's only when he has the ideology, when his mission is to efficiently destroy as many of these people as possible . . . Eichmann's job was to get 100 people to kill 2 million, and he did that really well.

So there are people like Eichmann who are situationally evil. Just like there are people who are only shy on blind dates—and when you ask them, 'Are you shy?' they'll say no.

The same is true of heroism—there are people whose whole lives are organized around service to others. Those are the rare exceptions among heroes in the same way the chronically evil people are rare. They stand out in our minds because they're rare. So here are the chronically evil and the chronically heroic, situationally evil and situationally heroic—the everyday heroes, who in a particular situation, with no prior history of doing it, move from passivity to action.

The following interview questions and answers did not appear in the print edition of STANFORD.

*You outlined some strategies for resisting situational forces, and I'd like to hear you connect them to Abu Ghraib. What could Chip Frederick have done that he hadn't already done?*

That's a really good question. At this point, I'm not sure what he could have done. He complained to senior officers that there were no rules of engagement, a lot of improper policies, patients with mental illness mixed in with other prisoners, and so on; and they just told him, it's wartime and you have to deal with it. To be frank, Army reservists are the lowest form of life in the military, and he's an Army reservist in a dungeon, in a horrible prison, in a horrible war, and he's in a position of little power to change anything.

Usually you have to go to the next higher level. After the My Lai massacre, Ron Ridenhour [a young enlisted man who heard about the incident] insists on an investigation; he goes to the military officers, and they disregard him. So he goes to the next level: he writes his congressman, and nothing happens. It was only after he got [investigative journalist] Seymour Hersh involved, who was outside the system, that anything happened. While Ridenhour was in Vietnam, he couldn't do anything. So the bottom line is sometimes when you're trapped in a situation and you have little personal power it's very difficult to change it.

*This term ‘the Lucifer Effect’—did you coin it so people would stop calling it the Zimbardo Effect?*

The Zimbardo Effect was a journalist’s shorthand for explaining abuses in some prison, to say that it’s not that the guards are rednecks. But the Lucifer Effect is a much broader concept.

When I was a kid, my mother always made me take my brothers and sisters to church, Sunday school, Tuesday catechism. (My parents never went to church. It wasn’t until later that I realized that the only reason they did this was we lived in this tiny apartment where there was no privacy, and it was the only time my parents could have sex.) As a kid I wondered, ‘How could God’s favorite angel become the Devil?’

When God created Adam as his perfect creature, he said all the angels have to honor Adam. And Lucifer refused to do that, and God took that as an act of disobedience, and also a sin of envy and jealousy, and sent Michael the archangel to punish him, and a bunch of other angels sided with Lucifer. Paradoxically God created Hell as a place to put them. I thought that was a bad deal—why was there no consultation? And over time I came to believe that Lucifer was actually right—because why should angels bow down to Adam, a mortal, if he can be so easily corrupted?

MARINA KRAKOVSKY, ‘92, is a writer in San Mateo.

### **Illus of evil, free will, determinism**

*Rescuing Evil: Pondering the consciences of Hitler, Hamlet, and England’s Psycho-Cabbie Killer*

Ron Rosenbaum

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/09/rescuing-evil>

(page not found at this url)

At the close of the final 2010 Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellowship seminar series in Cambridge this June, after writer Rob Stein’s informative discussion of ‘Conscience,’ as everyone began packing up, one of the moderators, Sir Brian Heap, turned to me and asked (presumably because I’d once written a book entitled Explaining Hitler): ‘Did Hitler have a conscience, Ron?’ Having spent a decade examining that very issue, which was at the heart of my book, I was able to reply, crisply and cogently: ‘Um, well, I’m not sure . . . I mean, it all depends.’ Yes, it all depends. It all depends on how you define conscience, and how you define conscience depends on how you define evil, the cancer for which conscience is the soul’s MRI.

Evil has gotten a bad name lately. It always was a name for some sort of badness, yes; but lately the word sounds antiquated, the product of a less-sophisticated age. Evil belongs to an old, superstitious world of black and white, and we all know now that everything is gray, right? It belongs to a world of blame in which the Enlightenment tells us that ‘to understand all is to forgive all’—no blame, just explanation. There are some who argue it’s an unnecessary word: Having no ontological reality, no necessary use, it’s merely a semantic trap, a dead end.

After a century that saw the slaughter of more than a hundred million souls, we seem to be insisting on one more casualty: the word evil. Perhaps because by eliminating its accusatory presence and substituting genetic, organic, or psychogenic determinism, we escape the accusatory finger it points at the nature of human nature. Things go wrong with our genes, or our amygdalas, or our parenting, but these are aberrations, glitches. The thing itself, the human soul, is basically good; the hundred million dead, the product of unfortunate but explicable defects, not the nature of the beast.

But there are losses to the glossing-over process that has made the concept of conscious evil so unfashionable. If we could rescue free-will evil from the various determinisms that have been substituted for it, we could also set free will—the freely made choice to do good or evil—free again. Doing so would reestablish the possibilities of freely chosen courage and nobility, of altruism and self-sacrifice, rather than reducing them to some evolutionary biology survival stratagem. We diminish and marginalize the idea of evil because we don't want to face the accusatory consequences that the free choice of evil—a choice contrary to conscience—entails.

Serial killers and mass murderers are frequently spoken of, in the mumbo jumbo of popularizing science, as people ‘without conscience.’ But if they lack conscience, they lack transgressiveness; they cannot consciously violate an entity they lack. Consider Derrick Bird, a cabdriver in England’s West Cumbria, who, on a June morning in 2010, with no evident warning signs, turned into a spree killer who murdered twelve people and then shot himself. The murders took place at a time when I was in Cambridge for the Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellowship and so was able to observe the cultural schism over the notion of evil and free will as it played out in the intensive coverage (virtually absent in the United States) of the murders and their aftermath.

Bird—or ‘psycho-cabbie’ as the tabloid News of the World’s front-page headline dubbed him—became an emblematic case study of how science and religion have shaped the split in society and culture over the nature of evil. Just take that headline moniker, psycho-cabbie. On the one hand, it melodramatizes the killings. On the other hand, it serves to defuse their malevolence: The murders were performed by a ‘psycho,’ not a ‘normal’ person, and psychologists tell us that psychos suffer from a disease, not from evil. They have poor ‘impulse control,’ and so it’s not something we have to fear from normal people like ourselves.

On yet another hand, on its inside pages the News of the World featured an exclusive photo of psycho-cabbie’s dreary kitchen, a shot taken from outside his kitchen window that spotlighted a bottle of HP sauce on his sad, loner’s kitchen table. The headline on that read ‘the devil’s kitchen.’

Tabloids believe in evil. And yet, if someone is possessed by evil spirits, does that mean he’s a victim, too? Was the headline saying that the devil was cooking up evil in that kitchen, using his special brew of satanic HP sauce on the previously nondevilish psycho-cabbie?

It’s complicated. But at least evil is still a problem to the moralists of the tabloid press. To the bien-pensant columnists of the serious press, it’s virtually a vulgarism. On the day after the psycho-cabbie’s killing spree, The Independent ran a story on the killings by an ‘investigative psychologist’ with the headline, ‘A simmering anger fuelled by low self-esteem and paranoia.’

Ah, that old (and shopworn) villain, low self-esteem. The allegedly more sophisticated media, with their investigative psychologists of various stripes, think we’re on the way to giving evil a local habitation and a name in the brain. Neuroscience will clear up the problem of evil that has troubled philosophers and theologians since before St. Augustine: Pinpoint the site of evil on this or that temporal lobe or cortical matrix and predict and perhaps interdict evil behavior.

Geneticists have recently proclaimed, with all the confidence of Columbus discovering the Indies, that they have located evil in the ‘evil twin’ copy of the ‘warrior gene.’ Brain-scan analysts say it’s located in ‘an imbalance between the orbital cortex and the amygdala,’ as neuroscientist James Fallon recently informed listeners to National Public Radio. The morning before psycho-cabbie started on his murderous rounds, the ever-dependable Independent credulously informed us, at breakfast, of a different finding, in a story headlined ‘How a deprived childhood leaves its mark on the brain.’

Written by ‘Social Affairs Correspondent’ Sarah Cassidy, the story promoted the brain scan-based theory being peddled by a charity called The Kids Company, which, we were told, spent £1.6 million on a study to establish that ‘over-exposure to fright hormones damages children’s brain development and leaves them prone to violent outbursts and unable to calm themselves’ when they grow up and perform evil acts.

The story was accompanied by two scary-looking brain-scan slices, in each of which a sinister-looking, crescent-shaped swath was helpfully highlighted by The Independent in blood red to demonstrate the effects of ‘cortical

atrophy,’ seen in the difference between a ‘healthy three-year-old’ and one who ‘suffered severe sensory deprivation with minimal exposure to language, touch, and social interaction.’ It turns out that Rousseau’s child of nature, the epitome of unsocialized innocence, untainted by ‘social interaction,’ is likely to harbor evil—or ‘cortical shrinkage’—rather than natural nobility within.

The red areas bore an unmistakable, if perhaps inadvertent, resemblance to Satan’s horns, growing inside the brain, but the story was another instance of the organizing of evil, the implicit determinism: Anyone with cortical shrinkage showing up on the brain scan, like anyone with the wrong orbital-to-amygda ratio, was destined to commit evil acts—and to be absolved of them by science because they were only the product of neuronal defects.

The Kids Company study also showed ‘enlarged ventricles in the center of the brain.’ Now we’re talking. Hasn’t evil as an ‘absence of being’ been a theme of post-Thomistic discussions of the subject? Hole in the brain = absence of being, no? Curiously, on the page opposite the damaged-brain scans was a story about human remains found in the river Aire in West Yorkshire that turned out not to belong to two murdered prostitutes; evidently there had been speculation that a serial killer—a cortical-atrophied, poorly ratioed orbital / amygdala type—was at work emulating the famous ‘Yorkshire Ripper.’ The juxtaposition of stories suggested an account of evil: Cerebral atrophy means murdered prostitutes. A description of evil that, in effect, exculpated the evildoer by blaming his crimes on a bad brain scan.

Indeed, brain scans are the new phrenology of forensics, with the key bumps actually inside the head, on the soft parts of the brain, rather than outside, on the knobby protrusions of the skull. To my great satisfaction, the story in *The Independent* ended by quoting one of my favorite skeptics of pseudoscience, Raymond Tallis, a doctor and philosopher more well known in the U.K. than here, who suggested we not get too excited: ‘I do not think brain scans will add anything to what we already know,’ he said. ‘The trouble is that that leads to a general sort of claim that ‘My brain made me do it.’ This neuromitigation of blame has to be treated with suspicion.’

Neuromitigation! Exactly the word we need to describe this organizing of evil. But evil is a problem not just for science. To promoters of a new religiosity—such as Terry Eagleton, who writes so well for someone whose thinking is so muddled, strangled in his own sophistry like Laocoön by the snakes—evil really isn’t a problem, barely exists at all. Of course, Eagleton’s sophistic denial of evil’s relevance, in a book called *Evil*, demonstrates even more strongly what a problem it is. As Alan Wolfe noted in the *New Republic*, Eagleton thinks evil is ‘boring, supremely pointless, lifeless, philistine, kitsch-ridden, and superficial. Indeed, lacking any substance, it ‘is not something we should lose too much sleep over. People can be wicked, cruel, and indifferent. But the concept of evil, with which theologians and philosophers have wrestled for centuries, can be safely tucked away. When it comes to evil, we must be social and economic realists. ‘Most violence and injustice are the result of material forces, not of the vicious dispositions of individuals.’ The neo-Marxist Christian view of evil.

There have been few takers lately for Jung’s view that evil has an ontological reality—that it has real being, something to watch out for. Although I have met two very different people whose sanity and stability I respect who have said they have encountered the presence of palpably ontological evil. One was a New York City cop, from the Dominican Republic originally, who, because of his background, was assigned to investigate allegations of Santeria killings and a subterranean ring of exorcists who were actually extortionists.

In effect, he was often called upon in his job to try to distinguish who was truly possessed by evil spirits and who was being conned into believing it or was suffering delusions of possession. I watched him perform an exorcism in his off-duty role as spiritual counselor in an old, candlelit Lower East Side church. It was chilling. And somehow convincing.

He told me something much like what I also heard from Fraser Watts, a thoughtful, mild-mannered Anglican priest in Cambridge, also a trained psychologist, who described his experience of ‘deliverances,’ as the Anglicans call exorcisms of those possessed by evil spirits. He conceded that most of the cases he saw were likely psychogenic, but he believed that in a few instances he felt he had been in the presence of genuine evil spirits.

Of course, even evil spirits are a problem for evil, since belief in them displaces responsibility from the individual possessed to the possessor. Still, it’s more than intriguing that similar language would be used by a hard-bitten New York cop and a soft-spoken Anglican priest in Cambridge.

Evil remains a problem, not just for its victims, though they should not be forgotten in all this theorizing, but for those who try to conceptualize it. This first came to trouble me during an exchange with the late historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, who has grown in estimation as one of the most scrupulous and discerning historians of his time.

At the end of the Second World War, as a member of MI-6, Britain's secret intelligence service, he was tasked with going into Hitler's bunker to reconstruct the details of Hitler's death, in part to halt rumors of the Nazi leader's escape and survival. In the process, Trevor-Roper learned an immense amount of previously unavailable information. This included the discovery of Hitler's 'final testament,' in which, shortly before he killed himself, he commanded the German people never to cease and desist from their war to exterminate the 'eternal poisoners of humanity, the Jews'—a job he'd left unfinished.

From the evidence he gathered, Trevor-Roper produced perhaps the first, certainly one of the finest, early biographies of Hitler. He agreed to be interviewed by me in the Oxford-Cambridge Club, to which I had brought a tape recorder, which I nested in the shelter of what looked like a five-century-old chess set and at which he looked disapprovingly.

'A solecism,' he said tartly, indicating the recorder. I decided to brazen it out, and I'm glad I did because I might not have retained the stark reply he gave to my question, 'Did Hitler know he was doing wrong when he was committing his crimes?'

'Absolutely not,' he shot back without hesitation. 'He was convinced of his own rectitude.' Yes, rectitude. All that Trevor-Roper discovered confirmed him in his belief that Hitler was a true believer—a man who did not consider himself evil but a heroic doctor, a veritable Pasteur, a great benefactor to humanity purifying the human race of infection.

This is an old—but still unresolved—philosophical question: Can someone be evil if he thinks he's doing good, no matter how deranged his thought process? It has troubled everyone from Plato to Augustine and their heirs, but it remains a genuine problem—because most people we think of as doing great evil think of themselves as doing the right thing. Indeed, who does evil while thinking he actually is doing evil? Only a few characters in literature—Shakespeare's Richard III, notably—and those cartoon villains twirling mustaches.

This is a hard notion to assimilate. In fact, the following week at Oxford, I placed it before Alan Bullock, Trevor-Roper's rival as an early historian of Hitler and the author of *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. He exclaimed, with North Country bluntness: 'If we can't call Hitler evil, then who can we?' One way to sort all this out is to note that it is possible for evil to inhere in ideas as well as in men. There are evil ideas that men can become true believers in—thinking they are doing good in carrying them out. It is the intellectual version of possession by evil spirits.

In any case, back to psycho-cabbie, who raises a whole host of new questions about evil and its depiction in our culture. Beginning at 5:30 on that morning in June, the man whose name was not psycho-cabbie but the oddly cheerful name of Derrick Bird, began a killing spree that racked up twelve murders, not including his own suicide, in what was almost invariably referred to as the 'sleepy seaside town of Whitehaven.'

Was he feeling 'simmering anger fuelled by low self-esteem' that morning? Other psychiatrists and savants lined up to weigh in. In a full-page diagnosis in a later edition of *The Independent* entitled 'There is no one either good or bad, but circumstances make them so,' Julian Baggiani jibed 'self-esteem,' 'paranoia,' and other such old-fashioned jargon for 'situationism,' which he announced was 'the dominant school of thought in psychology and philosophy now.'

Ah, situationism, which, we were told, 'claims that the best predictor of how people behave is the circumstances they find themselves in, not their predispositions.' In other words, 'everyone was doing it, you can't blame me.' As the leading theorist of situationism, Philip Zimbardo, has put it, 'We have underestimated the power of social situations because we overestimate the power of individual dispositions.'

It's sad that conventional wisdom has thrown in its lot with 'situationism.' One dramatic refutation of it can be found in Christopher Browning's study *Ordinary Men*, which examined the choices made by the members of one of Hitler's killing squads in the period before mass murder had been industrialized in death camps such as Auschwitz.

Browning studied letters and diaries from members of a reserve police battalion which slaughtered whole towns full of Jews and buried them in mass graves.

Browning learned that participation in the slaughter was not mandatory; troops had the choice to opt out, and some did. Despite the fearfulness of making such a choice, they refused, of their own free will, to participate in the evil. Which removed the 'situationist' exculpation from those who did.

But there's no indication, contra Julian Baggiani, that situationism has the slightest relevance to psycho-cabbie's choices. He made them himself. Derrick Bird left the Devil's Kitchen at approximately 5:30 a.m. Shortly thereafter he arrived at the much larger, more luxe home of his twin brother David and shotgunned him to death.

Here we enter into one perplexing question raised by psycho-cabbie's spree—the degrees of evil. 'The primal eldest curse' is on the murder of a brother, Hamlet tells us. And a twin? It more than recapitulates the First Murder. And indeed there were other Biblical elements to the psycho-cabbie's first murder. There was a struggle over a birthright and who was favored by the father's blessing. Apparently the younger but better-off of the twins (David) had received a £25,000 chunk of the father's estate—and then, when the father died, he didn't feed it back into the evidently depleted estate to be shared with his brother.

psycho-cabbie seemed to be wrought up over this, and over the way his solicitor had been handling it, and over the concomitant problem of Derrick's keeping £60,000 pounds of his cabbie earnings under the floorboards of the Devil's Living Room. He believed his brother and solicitor were 'stitching him up' for the Inland Revenue so the brother wouldn't have to come up with the £25,000 pounds.

So one could see Derrick 'simmering with rage and paranoia' and perhaps even the dread low self-esteem, too. But we are all simmering to some extent. And yet: Murdering his twin in cold blood and then driving over to his solicitor's house and shotgunning him in bed, too? Are these bad choices psychogenically determined, organically inevitable? Crimes just waiting to happen if we'd had a proper brain scan to warn us? Or are they evil? Can we utterly eliminate the fact that he had a choice, that he made a choice, and that it was an evil choice? Or do we just look at his brain scan posthumously for the real trigger? And what do we make of the nine further killings that morning, and of the dozen or so attempts that left several critically wounded?

From the murdered solicitor's office Derrick drove to his customary post in the cabbies' rank in Whitehaven, where he shot to death one of his fellow cabbies. There was talk that he did it because of a rumor that this poor fellow had gone out with Derrick's ex-wife. In each of those cases one could say there was a rationale, a reason—not a good one, not an excuse, not an exculpation, but a reason, however inadequate. Does the existence of a reason, however selfish and prideful, make these killings less or more evil?

Less, one could say, because they weren't killing for killing's sake. They were killing for ancient human grudges against twins and lawyers, perhaps. More, one could also say, because they were killings for selfish, greedy, felonious reasons. Felonious in the sense that they were about money and rivalry and ego and emotional wounds of being second twin in a father's love.

In capital-punishment law in most American states, premeditated murder in the first degree is not enough to put one in jeopardy of the death penalty. It must be murder in the service of, or accompanied by, another felony—kidnapping, robbing a liquor store, and or the like—to put it over the top, because the murder is then done for some kind of gain beyond mere murder.

I wonder if here the law has it backward, that killing for the sake of killing is worse than killing with some further motive. At this point, after murdering three he knew, psycho-cabbie started killing complete strangers, killing for the sake of killing. He set out in his cab and started shooting just about everyone who crossed his path, shotgunning motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians point-blank in the face and head.

In other words, virtually every time he saw anyone—a person with whom he did not have any kind of psychogenic, emotional, legal relationship—he chose evil, more and further evil, until he totaled a dozen dead victims and then shot himself. He was in a world of utter freedom offered by the fact that he could not become any more morally or legally culpable than he already was. He was free to be as evil as he wanted to be. He could have shot himself after the first three, but he chose to blast open the faces of a dozen or so more, nine of them fatally.

The reason I focus on the factor of choice in thinking about evil, rather than its ontological status, is that giving evil ontological status—positing that it is something external that may enter into or possess a previously nonevil being—makes that being less culpable.

Perhaps it could be argued that some people are culpable in ‘leaving the door open’ for evil. Tempting evil. But what I want to emphasize is not that I know what evil is, but that abandoning the concept of evil, refusing even to see it as a problem that cannot be reduced to organic dysfunction, is to abandon free will. Because if we are not free to choose evil, we are not free to refuse it.

Ron Rosenbaum, the author of *Explaining Hitler* and *The Shakespeare Wars*, is a cultural columnist for Slate.

Comments:

9.19.2010 | 7:46pm

Tom Clark says:

Rosenbaum insists on evil as something beyond causation, beyond material and psychological explanation, because he insists on free will. Were we to abandon free will and accept explanations that don’t invoke undetermined human choices, he imagines that evil-doers would be exculpated.

Not quite. Evil acts – ones that wreak the worst imaginable unjustified harm and suffering on innocents – are fully explicable in terms of the material and psychological causes that shaped evil-doers. How else are we to account for them?

But this doesn’t leave the evil-doer exculpated in the sense of being set free to do further harm. He, no one else, was the most proximate cause of the causal chain leading to evil, and must be constrained, his acts condemned \*as evil\*. Such constraint and condemnation reinforces norms prohibiting such acts.

But to really get control of evil, to minimize it, we must abandon Rosenbaum’s idea that it springs uncaused and freely willed from sheer human malevolence and understand its \*actual\* causes, what he so mistakenly derides as exculpatory excuses. Only then can we go about fostering the sorts of formative social conditions that will make the likes of Hitler and the ‘psycho-cabbie’ even greater exceptions to the humanistic ethical norm to which a healthy culture aspires. To refuse evil, we must be caused to refuse it.

<http://www.naturalism.org>

9.20.2010 | 6:56am

Ars Artium says:

‘... fully explicable in term of the material and psychological causes that shaped evil doers ...’ - This sentence expresses the writer’s confidence that, once optimal social conditions are achieved, human evil will disappear. The ‘constraint and condemnation’ of any remaining evildoers will ‘reinforce norms prohibiting such acts.’ His (youthful?) faith in this possibility is understandable and admirable. Certainly the proclamation of moral norms and accompanying censure of offenses against these norms has been part of the mission of Christianity since its inception.

A reader must wonder exactly what procedures Tom Clark has in mind. His confidence must include his knowledge that all experiments to achieve this desirable state have, at least thus far, ended in disaster. Still he hopes that there is a better way.

‘... we must be caused ...’ - what a chilling phrase. Who are the human angels who will do this ‘causing.’ And by what means do they intend to bring about their good end? Tom Clark desires the best good of all and wants to provide ‘formative social conditions’ to bring about this best good. His sincere words do convince a reader that he

believes this can happen; that he intends no harm or violence to other acting selves. But has he studied the history of the ‘reformers’ who have gone before him?

The term ‘formation’ is a very important one in Catholic teaching, although the emphasis is on the inner person, not external circumstances. Certainly harmonious living is good. Certainly material well-being is good; good health is conducive to human flourishing. But there is something even more precious, so precious in fact that I do believe its absence would render life no longer worth living (except perhaps temporarily for those who are in charge of the ‘causing’ whether by physical force or psycho-pharmacological means).

It is in the striving that one becomes a self. No one can accomplish this for another person without destroying him. The struggle to triumph over human weakness, first and foremost in the innermost self, in spite of conditions, no matter how dreadful they may be, forms an ‘acting person’ - one who has come to say: ‘Who am I with my sins, my absurdities, my tired failures that I could respect myself?’; one who realizes, at the same time, that this terrible knowledge is the beginning of wisdom and, by the grace of God, some possibility of goodness.

9.20.2010 | 11:03am

sally r says:

I believe that there is an ontological evil entity in this moral world. I don’t believe its existence exculpates those who cooperate with it. By our free choices we decide to either reject such cooperation or we embrace it.

I think the idea of ‘being possessed’ can be confusing. The ‘imperfectly possessed’ are similar to those portrayed in movies like ‘The Exorcist’ - someone who is overpowered by evil spirits, and with very little likelihood of culpability (ie - someone who dabbles in occult practices and thus opens the door to such spirits.) In that way we can say that the person isn’t culpable for their actions in this severe and disproportionate state (seemingly disproportionate, since it seems odd that one should face such a terrible state for such a seemingly harmless act, perhaps performed in ignorance of the consequences).

There are other kinds of ‘being possessed’ by evil, though. One creates a vicious character by our repeated free choices, just as one creates a virtuous character by repeated free choices. They may be small decisions, but they are cumulative. I believe that we are acting in conformity to various spiritual promptings in making these small choices: that benign spirits are trying to influence to the good, and evil spirits are trying to influence to evil, but that the choice is ours. The more habituated we become to following the promptings of good spirits, the more virtuous we become, and so likewise we become vicious by habituating ourselves to the opposite.

I knew an exorcist who told me that he only deals with the ‘imperfectly possessed’ - those who are struggling against an evil entity that has invaded them against their will. But that there are also the ‘perfectly possessed’ and they are by far the more frightening. These latter are those who are not struggling against evil entities, but who rather welcome them into their heart and are happy to cooperate with them. With these perfectly possessed, the evil spirits don’t do any odd manifestations - they just happily co-exist with someone and keep a very low profile. The person doesn’t look like a monster, they just quietly sow discord and misery as they go about their normal life.

As to the cabbie, there’s no way to judge his soul, but it sounds to me like his behavior could evince a long-nurtured resentment and greed that quietly built up to a point where everyone became an object of hatred and a proper recipient of abuse. If he had come to this state through his daily choices to agree with the evil spirits influencing him, while ignoring those that tried to bring him toward God, then he could be both willingly possessed by the promptings of evil and also culpable for the character he chose to adopt for himself. And therefore culpable for the killings by his acts not just on the day of the killings, but by his choices for years preceding that terrible day.

9.20.2010 | 11:13am

Zachary Bos says:

In our always ad hoc systems of how we assign rewards and penalties to our fellow man, ‘good’ and ‘evil’ emerge as major headings under which we file, respectively, the behaviors and beliefs we value and those that don’t serve our interests. Since any system of ethics, and any system of law, is an invention of our own design, to suit our interests, we are free to make whatever distinctions we like about what situations mitigate one’s actions, and which do not. If those systems are not internally consistent, then we are each free according to our conscience to rebel against them, or to seek to persuade our neighbors to adopt new rules. Some people go so far as to use force to

replace the old system with a new. We can see all of this in history. What we can't see in history is any mark of that substance called 'evil' that can explain evil behavior in the absence of otherwise compelling material or psychological explanations. We might make an analogy to the old theory of phlogiston. What could be more logical, than to deduce to the existence of some invisible fluid, whose greater presence is marked by greater heat? It was reasonable on the surface. But no -- when we discovered that heat is the action of collections of atoms, we could cut the superfluous factor out of thermodynamics. In the same way, we speak of 'evil' as if it flows, and collects, in the human soul. But as we peer more closely at the human brain, it begins to be clear that mental behavior is the action of collections of neurons, each of which is shaped by developmental conditions and by a history of stimulation. The substance evil, whose ontological nonexistence Rosenbaum falls short of acknowledging, is no longer needed to account for evil behavior.

When Rosenbaum skirts the question of evil's ontological status, he lends implicit support to the position that culpability is a higher-order manifestation of our individual self-interest, compounded across a society, and codified through law. In other, more naturalistic words, 'good' and 'evil' don't exist other than as labels human beings give to certain patterns of behavior that are respectively socially constructive and socially destructive. This reality actually increases our freedom to assign culpability, rather than limiting it.

The causes of actions which we call evil are explicable; explaining them in material and psychological terms is not an exculpation. That seems to be the entirety of Clark's position as posted above. Why is Clark guilty of a ('youthful?') naivete, in observing that there is no mystery afoot? It may well be true that 'once optimal social conditions are achieved, human evil will disappear.' However, Clark has not advanced this position, and not made any effort to define what optimal conditions look like, and how shall determine those, and how they shall be implemented. We need not, therefore, treat him like an Utopian who has made a serious omission in his accounting for human nature.

<http://people.bu.edu/zakbos>

9.20.2010 | 12:26pm

Ars Artium says:

Zachary Bos states his conclusion that the categories of "good" and "bad" emerge as major headings under which we file, respectively, the behaviors and beliefs we value and those that don't serve our interests.' as factual. He writes that 'as we peer more closely [into] the human brain' we find neurological activity which he believes accounts for a material and psychological explanation of all human behavior - not for some aspects of it but for all of it. 'The substance evil [or one has to assume goodness] is no longer needed to account for [all] evil behavior.' The writer is obviously not alone in this conclusion; in fact, he is in excellent intellectual company.

If a thinker accepts the proposition that scientific observation is perfect and not always subject to correction by new evidence; if a thinker is able, after a lifetime of study and experience as a living human being in relationship with others, to accept that there is no such thing as an 'acting person,' he or she will be in agreement with the philosophy of life of Zachary Bos.

If, on the other hand, a thinker has experienced within himself or herself a dynamic process, a struggle or battle with conflicting tendencies that are at least partly the effects of 'developmental conditions and ... a history of stimulation', a arduous struggle within which he 'decides' to override these outside influences in favor of a 'conversion' with all of the agony that is involved in undergoing such a change, that thinker will not accept the exclusive material explanation of human nature.

My first post went much farther afield than was necessary in responding to the post by Tom Clark. My use of the adjective 'youthful' was a response to the tone of assurance that the writer knows [or that anyone knows] what 'optimal social conditions' could be for all people. One had to assume that he intended reference to the good things we can acquire - that everyone would have everything he or she desires in the material sense.

It seemed important to me to suggest that there is more, much more, to human life than 'optimal social conditions' and that there truly is an element of mystery in it. I think that the post by 'sally r' adds to the discussion. And, just one more thought: If scientists can find a way to manipulate human brains to produce their [and I repeat 'their']

model of ‘good’ persons, and if they are able to persuade or force others to submit to their machinations, their triumph will be evidence that ‘evil’ really does exist as a ‘substance’.

9.20.2010 | 2:05pm

Fred Pauser says:

It seems that Rosenbaum would like to turn our knowledge of human nature back a few centuries. The word, ‘evil’ translates in modern terms to ‘destructive or harmful to others.’

We are social creatures, our lives are interconnected. We possess a will imbued in us by nature. Our will is created by evolution and natural law. As such, no one’s will can operate outside of the laws of nature, cause-and-effect. Nature has built into us as part of our make-up, desire to gain satisfaction and avoid pain -- and it is that by which we make our decisions. When healthy we make decisions aimed at helping both society and ourselves, as it difficult to thrive individually in an unhealthy society.

Individuals who initiate harmful or destructive acts against others, are in some sense sick. The better our understanding of \*why\* an individual engages in antisocial or destructive activity, the greater our tendency to forgive. But forgiveness does NOT mean condoning harmful acts. Such individuals must be corrected if possible, or incarcerated so as protect others. Efforts to rehabilitate are more conducive to a healthy society than mere punishment.

9.23.2010 | 11:55am

Qoheleth says:

‘Indeed, who does evil while thinking he actually is doing evil? Only a few characters in literature—Shakespeare’s Richard III, notably—and those cartoon villains twirling mustaches.’

And every teenage Catholic boy who has been taught that masturbation is wrong, but does it anyway because it feels good. And St. Paul: ‘For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do.’ And... but why belabor the obvious? The human heart can find innumerable reasons to do the wrong thing without convincing its owner that it’s actually the right thing. If you’re not familiar with the phenomenon, either you’re a born saint or you’ve been neglecting your examination of conscience lately.

### **Illus of sin, selfishness, self-reliance, transformation**

And all the while, it grew colder. One night during evening roll call a platoon somewhere far down the Lagerstrasse began a rhythmic stamping. The sound grew as others picked it up. The guards did not stop us and at last the entire street was marching in place, driving circulation back into numb feet and legs. From now on this was the sound of roll call, the stamping of thousands of feet on the long dark street.

And as the cold increased, so did the special temptation of concentration-camp life: the temptation to think only of oneself. It took a thousand cunning forms. I quickly discovered that when I maneuvered our way toward the middle of the roll-call formation we had a little protection from the wind.

I knew this was self-centered: when Betsie and I stood in the center, someone else had to stand on the edge. How easy it was to give it other names! I was acting only for Betsie’s sake. We were in an important ministry and must keep well. It was colder in Poland than in Holland; these Polish women probably were not feeling the chill the way we were.

Selfishness had a life of its own. As I watched Mien’s bag of yeast-compound disappear I began taking it from beneath the straw only after lights-out when others would not see and ask for some. Wasn’t Betsie’s health more important? (You see, God, she can do so much for them! Remember that house, after the war!

And even if it wasn’t right--it wasn’t so very wrong, was it? Not wrong like sadism and murder and the other monstrous evils we saw in Ravensbruck every day. Oh, this was the great ploy of Satan in that kingdom of his: to display such blatant evil that one could almost believe one’s secret sins didn’t matter.

The cancer spread. The second week in December, every occupant of Barracks 28 was issued an extra blanket. The next day a large group of evacuees arrived from Czechoslovakia. One of them assigned to our platform had no blanket at all and Betsie insisted that we give her one of ours. So that evening I ‘lent’ her a blanket. But I didn’t ‘give’ it to her. In my heart I held onto the right to that blanket.

Was it coincidence that joy and power imperceptibly drained from my ministry? My prayers took on a mechanical ring. Even Bible reading was dull and lifeless. Betsie tried to take over for me, but her cough made reading aloud impossible.

And so I struggled on with worship and teaching that had ceased to be real. Until one drizzly raw afternoon when just enough light came through the window to read by, I came to Paul's account of his 'thorn in the flesh.' Three times, he said, he had begged God to take away his weakness, whatever it was. And each time God had said, Rely on Me. At last Paul concluded--the words seemed to leap from the page--that his very weakness was something to give thanks for. Because now Paul knew that none of the wonders and miracles which followed his ministry could be due to his own virtues. It was all Christ's strength, never Paul's.

And there it was.

The truth blazed like sunlight in the shadows of Barracks 28. The real sin I had been committing was not that of inching toward the center of a platoon because I was cold. The real sin lay in thinking that my power to help and transform came from me. Of course it was not *my* wholeness, but Christ's that made the difference.

Corrie Ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place*

### **Illus of good and evil, choices, story**

John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden* is based on the Cain and Abel story from Genesis. The book is a compelling work about lives lived in different states of exile, tormented by memories of the distant past. So passionate is Steinbeck about his theme that three quarters of the way through his book, he emerges from behind his veil as narrator to make sure his readers don't miss the point. He says: 'A child may ask, "What is the world's story about?" And a grown man or woman may wonder, "What way will the world go? How does it end, and while we're at it, what's the story about?" I believe there is one story in the world, and only one, that has frightened and inspired us...humans are caught in the net of good and evil...I think this is the only story we have and that it occurs on all levels of feeling and intelligence. Virtue and vice were warp and woof of our first consciousness, and they will be the fabric of our last...There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: was it good or was it evil? Have I done well--or ill?' (John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (New York: Penguin), p.411)

### **Illus of evil, choices, struggle, good**

'That human beings have a certain propensity to evil, which Christians call Original Sin, is obvious to all, and explains much of the misery of the world. But that we also have a propensity to good is pretty clear too. It is the existence of these competing instincts--or whatever they are--struggling for paramountcy in the same individual at any one time, which makes men and women so endlessly fascinating, so elusive of final judgments, so worthy of study. We are not so virtuous as the angels, or so beautiful or powerful, but we are much more interesting.' (Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p.1 – 2)

### **Illus of evil, human nature**

Kelly Clarkson's song *Dark Side*:

There's a place that I know  
It's not pretty there and few have ever gone  
If I show it to you now  
Will it make you run away

Or will you stay  
Even if it hurts  
Even if I try to push you out  
Will you return?  
And remind me who I really am  
Please remind me who I really am

Everybody's got a dark side

Do you love me?  
Can you love mine?  
Nobody's a picture perfect  
But we're worth it  
You know that we're worth it  
Will you love me?  
Even with my dark side?

Like a diamond  
From black dust  
It's hard to know  
It can become  
If you give up  
So don't give up on me  
Please remind me who I really am

Everybody's got a dark side  
Do you love me?  
Can you love mine?  
Nobody's a picture perfect  
But we're worth it  
You know that we're worth it  
Will you love me?  
Even with my dark side?

Don't run away  
Don't run away  
Just tell me that you will stay  
Promise me you will stay  
Don't run away  
Don't run away  
Just promise me you will stay  
Promise me you will stay

Will you love me? Ohh  
Everybody's got a dark side  
Do you love me?  
Can you love mine?  
Nobody's a picture perfect  
But we're worth it  
You know that we're worth it  
Will you love me?  
Even with my dark side?

**Illus of evil, human nature, self-centeredness, relativism**  
Kelly Clarkson's song *Catch My Breath*:

I don't wanna be left behind  
Distance was a friend of mine  
Catching breath in a web of lies  
I've spent most of my life  
Riding waves, playing acrobat  
Shadowboxing the other half  
Learning how to react  
I've spent most of my time

Catching my breath, letting it go,  
Turning my cheek for the sake of the show  
Now that you know, this is my life,  
*I won't be told what's supposed to be right*  
Catch my breath, no one can hold me back,  
I ain't got time for that  
Catch my breath, won't let them get me down,  
It's all so simple now

Addicted to the love I found  
Heavy heart, now a weightless cloud  
Making time for the ones that count  
I'll spend the rest of my time  
Laughing hard with the windows down  
Leaving footprints all over town  
Keeping faith, karma comes around  
I will spend the rest of my life

Catching my breath, letting it go,  
Turning my cheek for the sake of the show  
Now that you know, this is my life,  
*I won't be told what's supposed to be right*  
Catch my breath, no one can hold me back,  
I ain't got time for that  
Catch my breath, won't let them get me down,  
It's all so simple now

**Illus of evil, self-centeredness, human nature, relativism**  
Beyonce's song *If I Were a Boy*

[Verse]  
If I were a boy  
Even just for a day  
I'd roll outta bed in the morning  
And throw on what I wanted then go  
Drink beer with the guys  
And chase after girls  
I'd kick it with who I wanted  
And I'd never get confronted for it.  
Cause they'd stick up for me.

[Chorus]  
If I were a boy  
I think I could understand  
How it feels to love a girl  
I swear I'd be a better man.  
I'd listen to her  
Cause I know how it hurts  
When you lose the one you wanted  
Cause he's taken you for granted  
And everything you had got destroyed

[Verse]  
If I were a boy

I would turn off my phone  
Tell everyone it's broken  
So they'd think that I was sleepin' alone  
*I'd put myself first*  
*And make the rules as I go*  
*Cause I know that she'd be faithful*  
*Waitin' for me to come home (to come home)*

[Chorus]

If I were a boy  
I think I could understand  
How it feels to love a girl  
I swear I'd be a better man.  
I'd listen to her  
Cause I know how it hurts  
When you lose the one you wanted (wanted)  
Cause he's taken you for granted (granted)  
And everything you had got destroyed

[Bridge]

It's a little too late for you to come back  
Say it's just a mistake  
Think I'd forgive you like that  
If you thought I would wait for you  
You thought wrong

[Chorus 2]

But you're just a boy  
You don't understand  
Yeah you don't understand  
How it feels to love a girl someday  
You wish you were a better man  
You don't listen to her  
You don't care how it hurts  
Until you lose the one you wanted  
Cause you've taken her for granted  
And everything you have got destroyed  
But you're just a boy

### Illus of evil, rape, sexism

Abuse of Power

Lauren Wolfe, April 14, 2014

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/14/abuse\\_of\\_power\\_sexual\\_violence\\_schools\\_congo](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/14/abuse_of_power_sexual_violence_schools_congo)

BUNIA, Democratic Republic of the Congo — A dust-diffused brightness illuminated female speakers dressed in patterns of orange and green, yellow and blue as they addressed a group of journalists and activists about the many challenges facing women in their country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These challenges include low literacy, a lack of representation in politics, and disenfranchisement from access to other sources of power, including money. Then, almost as an aside, a woman named Jacqueline Borve from a group called Programme Amkeni Wamama made a remark that stood out among the litany: The most prevalent form of violence against young women she sees in her home town of Walikale, in Congo's North Kivu province, is sexual harassment and assault in schools.

She was not referring to the treatment of girls by male students, however. She was talking about abuse mainly perpetrated by teachers.

"They use their power as teachers to impose on girls what they want through sex," she said. And there is no recourse for girls who are subjected to a teacher's violence. "The system does not allow girls to raise any complaints."

Other human rights activists I met in eastern Congo told me that this kind of abuse against girls in schools is shockingly common. A survey by the Brazil-based nonprofit organization Promundo found that 16 percent of girls in North Kivu said they had been forced to have sex with their teachers. And according to a 2010 UNICEF report, 46 percent of Congolese schoolgirls in one national study confirmed that they had been victims of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence committed by their teachers or other school personnel.

"There's something exceptionally perverse here," said Pablo Castillo-Diaz, a protection specialist on U.N. Women's peace and security team. "School is supposed to be a safe haven. Teachers are seen as protectors, so it's even more harmful when these people become perpetrators."

This problem is hardly unique to Congo. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, "it is not uncommon to find teachers promising higher grades or reduced school fees or supplies in exchange for sex with girls," UNICEF has reported.

Because salaries are so low, forced sex is sometimes viewed as a kind of compensation, and teachers will blackmail or force girls with threats of bad grades.

Because salaries are so low, forced sex is sometimes viewed as a kind of compensation, and teachers will blackmail or force girls with threats of bad grades. In Mozambique, a study by the Ministry of Education found that 70 percent of female respondents reported knowing that some teachers use sexual intercourse as a necessary condition to advance students to the next grade. Teachers in Mali are known to use "La menace du bic rouge" -- "the threat of the red pen" -- or bad marks if girls do not accept sexual advances, UNICEF says. Similarly, girls in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua endure sexual coercion by teachers, "sometimes with threats that their grades will suffer if they do not cooperate," according to the United Nations Secretary-General's 2005 "Study on Violence Against Children."

Sometimes, grades do not factor into the situation; girls are degraded simply for being girls. In Kampala, Uganda, a female student told the international development organization Action Aid that a male teacher made girls "wash his feet, take water to the bathroom for him, but sometimes he would be naked and ask you to help him as a man."

Meanwhile, UNESCO says that several studies in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan have also found evidence of inappropriate sexualized behavior by teachers toward girls. In Nepal alone, UNICEF found that 18 percent of the perpetrators of "severe sexual abuse" of girls in schools were teachers. The International Rescue Committee's Healing Classrooms Initiative found that sexual abuse of girls in refugee schools with male teachers is a significant problem in West Africa and beyond. And while rape by teachers in the United States may not be a rampant concern, sexual harassment and manipulation of female students certainly appears to be common enough that the U.S. Department of Education's website has plenty to say about it.

"The issue affects all young people in all countries," said Dina Deligiorgis, a knowledge management specialist at U.N. Women. "It is broad and defined differently by different parties in different contexts, so can include a range of behaviors, including but not limited to sexual violence (including harassment), bullying, and corporal punishment, among others."

The immediate effects of teachers' sexual predation are terrible. Certainly, there is trauma, both physical and mental. But there are other impacts too: 16 percent of children in Togo, for instance, named a teacher as responsible for the pregnancy of a classmate, according to a Plan International report.

Despite the stories and statistics, the rape and assault of girls by teachers remains underreported and understudied, according to multiple experts I spoke to at the U.N. and NGOs that work on this issue. Children are reluctant to report abuse by authority figures because they fear they are to blame or that they will suffer repercussions; they worry about bringing shame to their families.

These reasons are among the same ones that have helped sexualized violence to go unchecked across many parts of the world in schools and beyond.

Sometimes, adults other than teachers are also complicit, pointing to the deeper roots of sexualized violence.

I have been told stories of doctors saying after one medical exam that a girl's hymen was ripped by a teacher, but not in another exam when payoffs were involved.

I have been told stories of doctors saying after one medical exam that a girl's hymen was ripped by a teacher, but not in another exam when payoffs were involved. I've heard about parents forcing their traumatized girls to return to classrooms after being raped by their teachers. "This is a patriarchal affair," said Everjoice Win, a Zimbabwean who studied violence against girls in schools when she was head of women's rights for Action Aid. "Patriarchs from the family and the local chiefs meet the patriarchy of the local education system."

This is all tied up, too, with the deep-seated problem of men believing that they have the right to women's bodies, whatever their age. Win said girls in her culture are usually viewed as "small women," an idea backed up by UNICEF: In West and Central Africa, "[t]he girl child becomes a woman as soon as she starts menstruating." Teachers often make claims meant to "legitimize" their actions -- namely, that they want to marry the girls they rape. "Remember," Win said, "we are living in a society that values and cherishes marriages of girls and reproduction above many things."

Sometimes, teachers actually marry students. More often, however, their claims of "legitimacy" -- occasionally coupled with money paid to the families of victimized students -- are enough to quiet whatever critics might exist. Then, according to Win, these teachers "hastily seek transfer to another school -- far away."

Dina Deligiorgis said UNESCO is concerned enough about the issue of sexualized violence in schools that it is launching an inter-agency initiative on school-related, gender-based violence in Paris on April 14. The initiative will consider more than rape by teachers: There is gender-based violence on the way to school; at night when students without electricity are forced to sit under public streetlamps to do homework; and violence -- verbal and physical -- committed by other students. These problems prevent many girls from getting an education, joining numerous other obstacles that stand in their way. (For instance, when a family can only afford to send one child in much of the world, many send a boy.)

Indeed, sexualized violence is part of a spectrum of violence and humiliation that girls face as they are growing up. It is "a structural barrier in societies in which men and boys try to keep girls in their places," as Win put it. And that can create long-term, intransigent gender disparities.

"Obviously, these acts have a multiplier effect," said Cristina Finch, head of Amnesty International USA's women's human rights program. "If little girls are unable to access education, it affects their economic abilities, it affects their health, and it affects political participation because they don't have an education. Violence against women and girls is a cross-cutting issue that affects their ability to access the full range of human rights."

According to experts, the solution to violence against girls in schools is multifold. It involves adopting various forms of protection at international, national, local, and school-district levels. Laws need to explicitly prohibit violence; accountability must follow when illegal acts are committed. Communities must be educated in the rights of girls, and there needs to be "international cooperation, coordination and sharing of knowledge of good practices, programs and evidence-based research to end violence against children," according to the U.N.

And this must all be integrated in a much larger discussion about gender inequality writ large.

"Whether you're sitting in the Swat Valley or in South Africa, where violence against women is endemic, why would you expect that the violence in your informal settlement or slum would not be reflected in the school that is sitting in the same slum?" asked Win.

In other words, the challenge of solving violence committed against what is arguably the world's most vulnerable population, in what are supposed to be nurturing environments, is as big as the world itself. But so too are the benefits of taking it on.

JENNIFER BRUCE/AFP/Getty Images

**Illus of relativism, good and evil**

Cinderella:

Mother cannot guide you.  
Now you're on your own.  
Only me beside you.  
Still, you're not alone.  
No one is alone. Truly.  
No one is alone.  
Sometimes people leave you.  
Halfway through the wood.  
Others may deceive you.  
You decide what's good.  
You decide alone.  
But no one is alone.

'No One Is Alone,' *Into The Woods*