

On the origin of evil



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Where does evil come from? This is a question that I find most interesting. In our modern day civilization educated by liberal institutions everybody speaks as if they are certain of what evil is. So what is it? At first glance the thing that sticks out to me when I hear this question is: Asking where evil comes from is like asking where hunger comes from. Where does the desire for procreation, for sexual reproduction come from? Is a lion evil? I am sure it could be viewed as such in the eyes of a gazelle. Lions kill other lions indiscriminately. They will kill young and old alike in competition for food, mates, or territory.

Should every creature have the disposition of a humble lamb? Is a human being killing another human being evil? What if it's a matter of self-defense? What if one acquires glory or good fortune for oneself and one's people by killing? King David rose to glory and won the battle for the Israelites by killing Goliath. As stated in 1 Samuel, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands" (ch. 18 v. 7: via Bible gateway. com) Israel's prosperity was only made possible because King David was a masterful warrior king that won many battles. Likewise war and conquest played a vital role in the founding of our country.

And we became an economic superpower because of the good fortunes that came as a consequence of World War II. In this light killing could be viewed as a good thing. Accordingly things are only good or bad depending upon the consequences they produce. For instance stealing and killing is not bad in itself, for if it were there would be no reason to punish someone for doing so. We need not punish people for sticking their hands in airplane propellers. If I

am nice to someone, say for instance a lady that works at my favorite coffee shop, I am being nice because of the consequences it produces.

If I treat her nice and compliment her I will be treated favorably in return. If I tell her that I like the coffee here and that she makes the best cup of coffee I will more than likely, in turn, receive a good cup of coffee. According to Nietzsche it is this line of reasoning that impels the English psychologists to conclude that the value "good" is of utilitarian origin. They claim that "good" was a term originally used to refer to useful unegoistic actions by those that benefited from those actions. Only at a much later time have we forgotten how this approval and designation originated.

Because altruistic actions have always been habitually praised as good we feel them to be good, as if these actions were good "in themselves". As Nietzsche states, "According to this theory, that which has always proved itself useful is good: therefore it may claim to be valuable in the highest degree, as valuable in itself" (On the Genealogy of Morals). Although this etymology of the concept good is an incorrect one; for people did not always view altruistic actions as good. For example the virtues of the Heroic Greek warrior stand in stark contrast to the virtues of the Altruistic Christian.

Likewise the ancient Romans had no concept of evil. They only viewed things as either good or bad, and their concept of good and bad was quite the opposite. As Nietzsche points out, "Strong ages, noble cultures, all consider pity, "neighbor-love," and the lack of self and self-assurance as something contemptible" (Twilight of the Idols). They associated "good" with the beautiful, powerful, healthy, courageous, prideful, and self-assured. They

associated “ bad” with the cowardly, the base, the weak, the lowly, and the ill constituted; they viewed it as a thwarted development.

Indeed, in order to discover the true origins of the term “ good” we must go a bit further than the utilitarian origin of the useful as the good. The concept good did not originate from those in which goodness was shown, but rather it was the “ good” themselves that first established the value good. The term “ good” was originally defined by the noble classes. They used it to designate themselves and their actions. “ Bad” was used to denote the opposite, namely, the lower classes, the plebian, the weak and their actions. For their position of power also included the power over words, the power to decide what was called good or bad.

As Nietzsche states in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, “ Good and Evil”, “ Good and Bad”, “ it was out of this pathos of distance that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values: what had they to do with utility! The viewpoint of utility is as remote and inappropriate as it possibly could be in face of such a burning eruption of the highest rank-ordering, rank defining value judgments: for here feeling has attained the antithesis of that low degree of warmth which any calculating prudence, any calculus of utility, presupposes- and not for once only, not for an exceptional hour, but for good.

The pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a below that is the origin of the antithesis good and bad” (*On the Genealogy of Morals*). If this is the origin of the terms “ good” and “ bad”, then the question arises: From whence then did the concept “ evil”

originate? To answer this question we must once again travel back to Rome. In Rome there existed two classes that were in competition for power: the warrior class and the Judea religious class, the priests.

In this competition the priestly class cannot win by relying on the same tactics as the warriors. Instead they must become clever and inventive. Their only expedient is to demonize the warriors. They devise the concept of evil. The revenge of the priests is an inversion of the value system of the noble class. All the qualities associated with goodness according to nobles, become evil according to the priests. They wage war on the higher type of man effectively excommunicating him. The strong human being becomes the type of reprehensibility. The typical man of nobility becomes the anti-Christ.

In the mouth of the priests even beauty becomes something contemptible. Love of oneself and of life, pride, beauty, lust for power, sexual gratification, everything human and of this world, worldly as they say, becomes evil. The priests redefine "good" to be that which is not evil. Since they lack the strength for the kind of true action and self-affirmation that lead the nobles to claim goodness for themselves, the lowly man first requires an "evil" external world to derive the concept of good as a secondary notion. Since the weak are forced to submit to the strong in this world, they imagine a new world, a "Kingdom of God".

Here the first shall become the last. Here the lowly man will be rewarded for his lowness and the noble man will be punished for his power. In reality the noble class was as unaware of the concept of evil as the animals. Let us consider that evil is an anthropomorphic conception. The acts or deeds that people label as being either good or bad are only a matter of perception, and

things can only be labeled as either good or bad by us according to a certain paradigm: whether or not a thing is good or bad for you or your kids, for us as a people, a community, a state, a nation, or perhaps for us as a species.

But we have no right to say whether or not a thing is good or bad for existence, for the universe, or for god! We posit our condition, that of life and consciousness, as the pinnacle of the universe. As if we are the center of all existence and god's primary concern is ours- how humans treat other humans, or our personal immortality. What vanity! What is life? What is the value of life? As Nietzsche states, "value judgments concerning life, for or against, can in the last resort never be true.

Man has no right to them because he is a party to the dispute, indeed he is its object" (Twilight of the Idols). Couldn't life be a means rather than an end? Couldn't life be a necessary ingredient of existence, and the things we label as evil be prerequisites of life? As Spinoza points out, "Nature's bounds are not set by the bounds of human reason which aim at man's true interest and his preservation, but by infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which man is but a particle" (Spinoza).

I think it is much healthier to view things as being either "good" or "bad", opposed to viewing things as either "good" or "evil". To view things as "evil" only leads one down a road of abstraction, condemnation, and resentment. To help me explain this notion I am going to examine the Ancient Greeks, the most beautiful, most envied, and most accomplished Western civilization, for these Greeks knew exactly what love was. The Greek gods were artistic mirror images of themselves. The gods like the Greeks

themselves, loved beauty, banquets, processions, athletic competition, music, and theater.

They also relished war and embodied what most would consider the bad and questionable aspects of life encompassing all that man considers a shame and a disgrace: theft, adultery, vindictiveness, envy, sexual gratification, and deceit. Thus the Greek gods represented the various qualities and characteristics of man, both good and bad. In this way they were able to divine all as good!! In so doing, they were able to better understand man's true nature and passions thereby pressing them into service.

As Sherman Salisbury notes in the first volume of the three-volume study *The West in the World*, "these gods were so much like humans that worshipping them encouraged people to aspire to the greatest in human accomplishments and to acknowledge the worst in human frailties" (Salisbury). Thus by worshipping the gods the Greeks were actually worshipping themselves. The Greeks had a deep understanding of man. They were able to love and accept man for what he is. Most importantly, they were able to love and glorify this life; they did not turn an evil eye toward it!