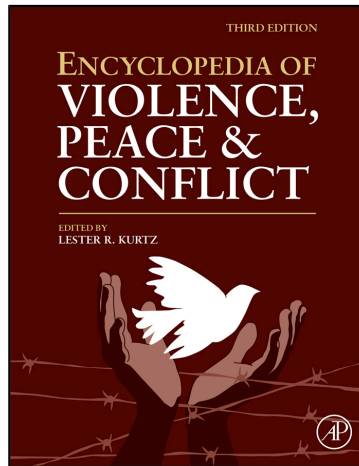


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From Loye, D., 2022. Evil, Concept of. In: Kurtz, L.R. (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict, vol. 4. Elsevier, Academic Press, pp. 82–90.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-820195-4.00092-3>.

ISBN: 9780128201954

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Academic Press

Evil, Concept of

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Today, the question of what is evil has become relevant in new and ever more urgent ways. Climate change, xenophobia, prejudice, pandemics, inequality, threats of nuclear and biological warfare, terrorism, and the rising tide of authoritarianism make the question of what really “is” evil ever more pressing.

If we go back into history and what we know of human evolution, it seems likely that ever since the first humans began to abstract concepts out of, perhaps, the experience of unjustified or unnatural death, the problem of evil has been centrally troublesome. One stream of Christianity has defined evil as what happens when one goes against or falls away from “God,” attributing everything of this sort to “Satan.” A stream of Hinduism defines evil as an illusion, only “Maya.” Philosophers have further tried to define evil in various ways on which they often widely disagree. We will further pursue these traditions in which a far richer heritage of thought exists about what evil is than in science. But, we open here with science because evil is so seldom addressed from the scientific perspective, yet it is this perspective that we must above all now understand if we are to more effectively solve the problems—particularly those of climate change, inequality, and violence in an age of nuclear and biological weaponry proliferation—that give rise to the concept of evil.

Evil: A Scientific View

A working definition from a scientific viewpoint is that evil includes the opposite of what we consider to be “good” in life, or what is “bad.” It also includes what we consider to be “wrong” rather than “right.” But, it involves far more than just the “bad,” the “wrong,” or peace versus war as a matter of scale, persistence, and intensity.

That is, evil is a term used to describe the bad, the wrong, or the violent at their sustained, or persistent, or systems structural “extreme.”

Other than in religious contexts, people seldom use the word “evil” anymore. Yet, the realities that originally gave rise to the concept are still with us. Indeed, in specifics such as our species’ new-found potential via the ultimate violence of nuclear or environmental devastation to make this Earth uninhabitable, what used to be called evil presses upon us even more than ever before.

To understand evil, we need to see it within the perspective of at least three great bodies of knowledge: that of modern science, both social and natural science, and ranging from past into the present, that of religion and theology, and of philosophy. We will consider the scientific perspective first, then the theological, the philosophical, and last focus all three perspectives on the latest views of how violence as an aspect of evil is rooted in the culture prevailing globally for humanity at this point in the evolution of our species.

One advantage of the scientific perspective is that, in comparison to religion and philosophy, it offers a simpler, direct way of grounding ourselves in the “database” of evil. Another advantage is that of its powerful methodology for obtaining the kind of consensus on what something is and is not that is extremely difficult for either religion or philosophy to achieve. Still another advantage is the multidisciplinary problem-solving orientation that further differentiates science historically from religion and philosophy.

What is evil? How, beyond the brief working definition that opens this article, do we define it? As we will see in our consideration of the religious and philosophical background, many answers have been offered. Another advance that science has brought to this area of concern has been its reduction of the global or wholesale use of the word “evil,” thereby forcing us to differentiate between kinds and circumstances and levels of specific ills. In reasonably enlightened settings, this advancement has helped prevent the use of the word evil as no more than a self- or group-defined term for defiling whoever one decides, for whatever reasons, is one’s enemy.

At the same time, however, the need remains for a term for the opposite or lack of good. There are also people and situations where anything short of labeling them evil seems a dangerous diminishment of meaning, as for example in the case of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi impact on Germany and the world.

The basic scientific approach to defining anything is to identify it in what are called empirical or operational terms—that is, in terms of what gives rise to it and how it affects us, what variables or factors and dynamics are involved, or more directly, what it looks like, what seems to cause it, and what can be done about it.

What science has ascertained indicates that what has in the past been classified as evil seems to have at least five sources: cultural, physiological, biological, evolutionary, and existential.

Cultural Sources of Evil

This is the dominant heritage of thought both for science and modern times. Most notably first articulated by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, this is the view that evil is culturally caused or an adverse function of social system arrangements. This belief became a basis both for the American revolution and experiment in democracy, and the first two large cohesive attempts at a social scientific rationale for putting this idea to use in large-scale human problem-solving. First came the economics of Adam Smith's rationale for the development of capitalism. Then came the economics and political science of Marx and Engels' rationale for communism. In other words, before the Enlightenment movement of the 18th century, out of which science arose, the idea prevailed in the West that we are, each of us, innately evil and must be ruled by the supposedly divine ordination of kings. But with the triumph of the Enlightenment, the prevailing idea became that evil resides in the political, economic, or more general cultural system—that we are basically good, made evil by the system, which can be changed.

That we can change has been supported by recent findings from both the social and biological sciences, including neuroscience. In *Nurturing Our Humanity* (2019), Riane Eisler and Douglas Fry bring together data from numerous studies debunking the popular idea that we are hard-wired for selfishness, war, rape, and greed. Moving past right vs. left, religious vs. secular, Eastern vs. Western, and other familiar social categories that do not include our formative parent-child and gender relations, they examine where societies fall on the partnership-domination scale. On one end is the domination system that ranks man over man, man over woman, race over race, and humans over nature. On the other end is the more peaceful, egalitarian, gender-balanced, and sustainable partnership system. Introducing the biocultural partnership-domination lens to explore how behaviors, values, and socio-economic institutions develop differently in these two environments, they draw on new finding from neuroscience to show how this impacts nothing less than how our brains develop.

By examining cultures from this new perspective (including societies that for millennia oriented toward partnership), Eisler and Fry identify actions supporting the contemporary movement in this more life-sustaining and enhancing direction, showing that a more equitable and sustainable way of life is biologically possible and culturally attainable: we can build societies that support our great human capacities for consciousness, caring, and creativity, rather than, as domination systems do to maintain themselves, our capacities for insensitivity, violence, and destructiveness. They propose that building a partnership-oriented culture requires both short-term and long-term actions, specifically changing four foundational social cornerstones: childhood relations, gender relations (because these are central to what children first experience and observe, and hence to how their brains develop), economics (but again going beyond conventional economic theories such as capitalism and socialism to a caring economics of partnerism), and language and narratives (which channel our thinking, and still in critical ways make domination systems seem normal, and even moral) (Eisler, 1987; 1995; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Indeed, the idea that we can change has informed much of social science directed toward improvement of the human situation. Keying to the pioneering of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber in sociology, John Stuart Mill and Thorstein Veblen in economics, Sigmund Freud and Kurt Lewin in psychology, and many others in all the fields of social science, the various social sciences have focused on racism, sexism, poverty, militarism, crime, and a wide range of other problems—including violence, to which we will return—that in the past were seen as bearing on the question of evil.

As this brief list indicates, the focus has largely been on the specifics that give rise to rather than on the abstraction of evil. A continuing use, however, of the abstracting of evil is the labeling of other people as evil for “social constructionist” purposes. Enemies are labeled evil to help promote wars, people of other faiths or no faith are labeled evil to promote religious conquest, and out-groups of all types, from immigrants to women who deviate from domination norms for “femininity,” are labeled evil to consolidate the power of ruling castes, classes, or elites. The evidence by now available to us through social science indicates that in the overwhelming majority of cases, cultural factors are the primary source of what we could classify as evil. This evidence supports the conclusion guiding progressive modern social policy that the great payoff in reducing the impact of this factor in our lives lies in cultural, social, and educational improvement. Science, however, has identified other factors which interact with, and often derive from, culture to produce the problems of our concern.

Physiological Sources of Evil

To those convinced that cultural factors determine all social and individual pathology, the idea that we might be born evil in the sense of lacking, or be made evil through damage to, the mental equipment for a conscience has been anathema. In criminology, for example, Lombroso, who developed a famous and shoddy system of criminal types, is held up as an example of Dark Ages

psychology. Recent brain research, however, is beginning to reveal what the police, lawyers, and others who deal regularly with criminals have long suspected.

There simply are people, from the so-called best as well as the worst of backgrounds, who either lack or have suffered damage to some facet of the brain structures involved in the existence and functioning of what we call the conscience, or the capacity for differentiating right from wrong.

Many more others, as the work of both anthropologist Ashley Montagu in *Touching* in 1986 and psychiatrist A. N. Shore in 1994 makes evident, are born intact but maimed not only psychologically but physiologically by the lack of love and caring, by brutality and abuse, or other forms of parental mishandling. Shore, for example, documents specific patterns of basic brain damage to children born fully functional that can be linked, on the one hand, to a later incapacity for caring for others and/or tendencies to violence and, on the other, to the child's treatment by parents who either physically batter them or who may pride themselves on "never laying a hand on them," but who were home-grown specialists in psychological damage.

These two kinds of brutalized people used to be among the numbers of those called psychopaths. Now, they are called socio-paths—which can be misleading, as for the reasons given here not all the sources of the kinds of crimes that reach the levels that invite the label of evil are social or cultural.

Here, too, we find a factor that can be diminished with attention to cultural and educational change. A useful analogy would be the case of someone who has suffered a stroke, and thereby damage to the brain, who can only walk or talk with great difficulty, but who can, with a sizeable investment of money and much work, be rehabilitated.

In the case of those who lack or have suffered damage to our primarily frontal brain equipment for a conscience, however, it is evident that for the protection of others they must be rigorously controlled, while an effort is made to retrain them. To prevent misinterpretation of this information by those seeking to discount cultural factors—who, for example, think that public funding should overwhelmingly go to prisons rather than to schools—it is important to stress two aspects of this information. The first is that those with physiological deficits that may lead to the levels of pathology that could be called evil represent only a small fraction in comparison with those with cultural deficits. Second, a preponderance of findings indicate that even in these cases pathology emerges out of an interaction of both cultural and physiological factors. So we see how psychological, and even biological, factors are impacted by culture—and, to use the partnership-domination social scale, by the extent to which a culture orients to either end of this scale (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Biological and Evolutionary Sources of Evil

For several decades, a debate has raged within the fields of biology, sociology, anthropology, and psychology over claims of those establishing the new field of sociobiology that fundamentally bear on the question of the origin of evil. In general, it is the contention of biologists such as E. O. Wilson, Robert Trivers, and Richard Dawkins that the evolution of our species out of earlier organisms, for example, reptiles and earlier mammals, reveals how human behavior is basically driven by selfishness rather than altruism, indeed even by "selfish genes." Others not as widely respected add to this the idea that we are basically driven by "killer instincts" also implanted within us by our evolutionary origins, thus in effect making evil rather than good a primary motivation as well as a primary direction for our species.

More recently, the battleground has shifted to the field of primatology. A recent book, for example, *Demonic Males*, finds that contrary to the impression that only at the human level do we find organized warfare this has now been found among roving bands of male chimpanzees. To counter the position of the sociobiologists, anthropologists such as Ashley Montagu, biologists such as Richard Lewontin, and psychologists such as Leon Kamin make three primary points. One is that to extrapolate from the prehuman to the human level is a far more complicated process than the sociobiologists assert, that at the prehuman level one actually finds a preponderance of what might be called prosocial rather than antisocial behavior, and that at the human level again culture rather than biology becomes the overwhelming factor determining behavior.

In primatology, the debate tends to center around the differences between two kinds of chimpanzees, the common chimp and a more evolved bonobo or "pygmy" chimpanzee. In contrast to the greater potential for violence and other forms of antisocial behavior among the common chimps, the bonobo is not only much more peaceful but in many other regards seems to be far closer to what we mean when we speak of humanity as a prosocial characteristic of humans. The message of books such as *Good Natured* (1996) by primatologist Frans de Waal as well as *Sacred pleasure* (1995) by cultural evolutionary theorist Riane Eisler is that at the prehuman level in evolution there exists a wide range of behavioral potentials, from which at the human level "culture" selects which behaviors to favor and which to discourage.

Again, recent studies are relevant here. For example, primatologists Frans de Waal, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, and others who have worked closely with bonobos have found that bonobos are in significant respects smarter than chimpanzees, as in their superior capacity to learn. James Rilling and colleagues found that brain areas involved in perceiving another's distress, such as the amygdala and anterior insula, are larger in bonobos than in chimpanzees. Eisler and Fry suggest that this greater mental capacity and empathy of bonobos may be related to the less stressful, less aggressive, more partnership-oriented nature of bonobo groups, where sharing and caring rather than controlling and hurting are socially supported. They also suggest that since bonobos resemble humans more than chimpanzees, this should be considered in evaluating popular ideas about early human social organization, shifting them from an emphasis on violence, warfare, and male dominance to highlighting our species' capacities for empathy, caring, and cooperation (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Existential Sources of Evil

Beyond consideration of cultural, physiological, biological, and evolutionary sources of evil lies the existential fact of the kind of disasters of life that religions and philosophers have wrestled with for thousands of years, but which science has mainly avoided other than to consider, via the field of psychotherapy, what may be done to help comfort the victims.

This is the realm of horror that opens before us with the death of a beloved child, with all that otherwise could have been its life before it or the case of the great achiever and the great achievement that might have enormously benefited humanity cutoff midstream or when barely underway or the triumph of the most despicable and least worthy of humans and the defeat and subjugation of the good.

Some would say that because this factor is structurally inbuilt into existence, that it simply happens, it cannot be called evil, it is just what it is. Such a belief, however, has not been acceptable to many of those motivated to better the human condition as scientists, as religious leaders or theologians, or as philosophers.

Evil: A Religious View

Though science has begun to demystify or cut the age-old problem of evil down to size, there remains much about evil that science cannot adequately express or probe. It cannot, for example, capture the eerie sense of evil that a great writer such as Joseph Conrad can in *Heart of Darkness* (1947). Nor can it—or for that matter anything else—do justice to the monumental horror of how Germany, as one of the most advanced nations of the world, could shift so quickly from having the most outstanding scientists and symphony orchestras of its time to the torturing and gassing of millions, the fiendish death camp experiments of Josef Mengele, and the manufacturing of lampshades out of human skin.

It was the routine prevalence of such brutality in earlier times that over thousands of years drove religious visionaries and theologians to try to account for what to them was the incontrovertible fact of evil in our world. As indicated earlier, one route taken by ancient Hindu thought was to deny the existence of evil, to assert that it was only an illusion born of the limits of human mind. This was in keeping with a general tendency among Eastern religions to accept evil as a fact of life to be lived with or otherwise accommodated. In the Hindu system of deities one had Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva and his consort goddess Kali as destroyers. To further work evil into the natural cycle of life, one had a system of reincarnation interlocked with Karma that offered compensations for evil. Bad things that happen in a life are not only lessons for us to learn from, but can also be offset with better things or compensation in one's later lives on Earth through reincarnation. Buddhism accepted suffering as our central challenge to overcome through the "eightfold path" designed to overcome selfish craving. Confucianism identified social ills and abuse of power as evils to likewise transcend by overcoming egoism—as well as the "parochialism, ethnocentrism, and chauvinistic nationalism" (Smith, p. 117) ironically characteristic of modern China. With Islam evil has chiefly been seen as disobeying the edicts of Allah. This unfortunately has been widely used for the deified justification of violence that historically has been the black mark against almost all religions.

Of Eastern beliefs regarding evil, possibly the one of most enduring interest here is the Hindu belief that the evolution of humanity involves cycles of great long spans of time called the Yugas. According to this belief, a peaceful golden age of goodness called the Krita Yuga was followed by two Yugas of lesser peace and goodness, and finally with the Kali Yuga—a time of evil and much violence in which humanity has been stuck now for thousands of years. Indian holy men and holy women today aver the Kali Yuga is ending, that we are again entering the Krita Yuga. One, Dadaji, predicted the shift would come in 1989, when in later fact the Cold War between the Soviet East and the West came to an end. In contrast to the more passive attitude of the Eastern religions toward evil has been the more active stance of Western religion (as well as Islam, which in part derives from both Judaism and Christianity). Here, evil has been seen as something to be much more actively questioned, and if possible eradicated. Ironically, one of the most influential strains in this regard comes from a technically Eastern religion, the Zoroastrianism of ancient Persia, as well as the later ancient Middle Eastern sect known as Manicheism. For the Zoroastrian, evil was caused by the fiendish spirit Angra Mainyu, with whom the supreme being, Ahura Mazda, is engaged in a vast, cosmic struggle. This became the basis for the later Christian belief in Satan or the Devil as the evil within and all around us to, by struggle, be overcome.

Thus, out of earlier beliefs, for Western religions that posited the existence of an overriding supreme being, arose the problem that theology has wrestled with ever since. Whether it was fact, illusion, or a Devil, how could one reconcile the devastation of evil with a belief in the goodness of an all-powerful and all-wise God? One solution for the problem was proposed by the ancient Hebrews in the *Book of Job*. After suffering practically every bad thing one can think of, Job asks God why this is being done to him. God's answer out of a whirlwind became another tenet of belief for religion over hundreds of years thereafter: that these things happen and one can only submit, for God's purposes are above and beyond human understanding.

Among those sharply questioning this view have been feminist theologians from Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the end of 19th century to Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elizabeth Dodson Gray in our time. In their view, a primary source of the ills of the world, therefore evil, has been the psychological and social consequences of the positing of an exclusively male ruler God at the heart of the violence of a globally male-ruled system of "patriarchy."

At the end of the 4th century, out of a profligate youth that left him riddled with the guilt that led to his famous Confessions, there emerged a very different theory, the theodicy of St. Augustine. (Theodicy is the term for religious beliefs regarding suffering and evil.) God's creation, according to Augustine, was all good; therefore, evil had not been created by God. It was the "absence" of good,

as darkness is the absence of light. But how then did evil enter the world? Goodness could be diminished by the weakness and the corruption that entered into God's creation through the existence of free will in the human allowing the human to defy the will of God. Augustine further asserted that what at first may appear to be evil can in the long run turn out to be good within the context of eternity.

Today we think that because such thoughts were first expressed around 1600 years ago, they have little to do with our lives today. But Augustine's solutions were not only to rule the minds of many theologians, Protestant as well as Catholic, but also millions of Christians over hundreds of years thereafter. Certain aspects of his thinking persist even today and not only in fundamentalist faiths but also in surprising and seemingly wholly different contexts. Via the writings of Carl Jung and Aldous Huxley, for example, the belief that what may appear to be evil may in the long run turn out to be good has reentered and spread within what is known today as New Age spirituality. But, it is Augustine's powerful formulation of the doctrine of "original sin" and theological reaction to it that seems to be mirrored in the more surprising, and seemingly far removed, area of scientific debate today.

The problem of evil began with Adam in the Garden of Eden, Augustine stated. Having been given free will by God as an experiment, Adam then foolishly chose to listen to Eve, who in turn was advised by the serpent of evil. Though strictly forbidden by God to do so, Adam ate the apple, thus going against the will of God. Thereafter, this original sin has corrupted all of us, his descendants, for Adam's guilt and its penalty pass on to us. All of us are born in sin; because of Adam's original sin, we are naturally driven to pursue evil, and only through the Church can we find redemption. Though this belief was used by the Church of the Middle Ages to hold much of Western humanity in subjugation, even with the Protestant Reformation what is basically a belief that humans are driven to err through innate evil was picked up and again advanced by Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In Augustine's time another cleric, Pelagius, disputed this charge. Many other theologians and progressive faiths have since emphasized free will and vigorously denied the doctrines of innate evil and original sin. Indeed, embodied in the thinking of both the philosophers and religious thinkers of the 17th and 18th century such as William Penn and Roger Williams, the counter-position not only helped shape the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution establishing the United States. A belief in our inherent goodness, rather than innate evil, has also similarly animated the emergence of democracies elsewhere throughout the world. Yet even in science today, the ancient dispute persists.

It has been diluted and made a matter more of an honest difference of opinion than a matter of life or death according to which position one might take, as against the earlier. But behind the sociobiologists' doctrine of an embedded selfishness and the belief of others in our natural propensity for violence lurks the old doctrine of innate evil. And in the countering positions of the scientific advocates of culture as a primary source of what may be considered evil can be seen as an updating of Pelagius.

Evil: A Philosophical View

By far the greatest attention to the problem of evil has come from philosophers ranging from the ancient Greeks, through the years leading to and through the Enlightenment, and thereafter swelling and then dwindling into modern times.

Though not the first to deal with the problem, the Greek philosopher Epicurus most neatly set forth a central dilemma that both theologians and philosophers were to wrestle with afterward. If there is an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good God, how can his existence be reconciled with the fact of evil? If he is all-powerful, then he could prevent evil, but as he does not, he cannot be all-good. Likewise, if he is all-good, he would be forced to try to prevent evil, but as he cannot prevent it, he therefore cannot be all-powerful.

Another long-term influential idea was offered by Socrates. He felt that virtue lies in knowledge and that people will be virtuous if they know what virtue is; therefore, the cause of vice—or evil—is ignorance. Historically, this has been a powerful underlying rationale for the activist rise and spread of universal education. Socrates' pupil Plato believed that evil does not in itself exist, but is an imperfect reflection of the real, which is good—an idea that much later George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne and founder of modern idealist philosophy, was to further develop. "The very blemishes and defects of nature are not without their use," Berkeley maintained. "They make an agreeable variety and augment the beauty of the rest of creation, as shadows in a picture serve to set off the brighter parts" (Castell, p. 139).

Many other positions were taken by the Greeks, but perhaps of most interest to the modern problem-solving mind are the generally neglected views of Aristotle. In contrast to the abstractions of Plato and other Greeks—notably the Cynics, the Cyrenaics, the Megarians, and the Platonists—Aristotle was the world's first, most wide-ranging, empiricist. "Let us look carefully at what exists before we speculate" was his basic position. What he saw in looking at the problem of evil seems at first ridiculously simplistic. There are virtues and there are vices, and there are the two kinds of people, the good and the bad, he observed. But to Aristotle what made the difference was not so much the fact of evil, but what one did about it. What made the difference was a matter of character. The virtuous were distinguished by using the virtues of courage, temperance, and what he called "greatness of soul" to apply the power of "perception, intellect, and desire" to action to better our world. The others merely wallowed in "spite, shamelessness, and envy and such actions as adultery, theft, and murder," all of which are "evil in themselves" (Aristotle, p. 310).

The "just man is formed by doing just acts, the temperate man by doing temperate acts: without doing them, no one would even be likely to become good," he wrote (Aristotle, p. 307). Then in a slap at his teacher, a host of philosophers to follow him, and indeed most of us, Aristotle noted that "the great majority do not act on this principle. Instead, they take refuge in argument, thinking that they are being philosophers and will become morally good in that way. They are like invalids who listen attentively

to their doctor, but carry out none of his instructions. These will never be made fit by that sort of regime; nor will people become healthy in soul by philosophizing like that." (Aristotle, p. 307).

Some 2000 years later, in the early stages of the development of the thinking that flowered during the Enlightenment, applying geometry to a demonstration of ethics, the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza tried to advance our understanding of ethics by deriving principles from geometry. This led to his assertion that everything in the universe is morally neutral prior to the assignment to it by the human being of the labels of good or evil, or right or wrong. He also presents the question of evil as a rather trivial concern within the perspective of eternity, finding evil to be only "in reality a lesser good" (Spinoza, p. 231).

Another mathematician and philosopher Leibniz further advanced this view, asserting that evil was a necessary ingredient in this "best of all possible universes." This was to enrage the most accomplished polemical philosopher of his age, the great Voltaire. Not only did he immortalize Leibniz as the foolish Dr Pangloss of his novella *Candide*, but he proceeded to impale Spinoza as well as Leibniz in a poem detailing what he found to be the inescapable "nontriviality" of evil rampant in this world, in which "every member groans, all born for torment and for mutual death." "And o'er this ghastly chaos you would say the ills of each make up the good of the all!" Voltaire thundered. "What blessedness! And as, with quaking voice, mortal and pitiful ye cry, 'All's well,' the universe belies you, and your heart refutes a hundred times your mind's conceit." (Durant, p. 226)

The obdurate British philosopher Thomas Hobbes picked up this theme to maintain that not only is the world filled with evil but human nature is basically evil. Apart from the veneer that civilization might give us, human life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," involving a "war of all against all" (Castell, p. 396). As was before and since then has been a firm conviction for most conservatives, for Hobbes the only solution to the implacable problem of evil embedded within all of us is massive control through the power of a strong monarch or state. Among many other British philosophers who disagreed were David Hume and Adam Smith. Both felt that we are morally linked to one another by sympathy, which raises us out of the Hobbesian brutishness. As for evil, Hume felt this, along with the question of the existence of God, was a matter beyond the reach of human reason. Smith, however, felt that evil could be diminished. We could move away from the brutishness of the feudal monarchy, as well as the brutishness of the privileged as well as unprivileged classes of his time, toward the greater freedom and equality offered by the early stages of capitalism.

For Rousseau, as noted earlier, the source of evil was the lack of freedom and the prevalence of inequality imbedded in society rather than anything inherent in the human being. "Man is born free, and is everywhere in chains," he wrote (Castell, p. 407). But behind this figure celebrated in most textbooks as the champion of the idea of the innate goodness of "man" lay the much more complicated reality of a man who was himself, by any reasonable definition, not a good person. Not only did he abandon his many illegitimate children to die in orphanages, but his sexism became legendary.

Taking up the challenge for feminist philosophy in his time, Mary Wollstonecraft detailed how Rousseau's book *Emile* "degrades one-half the human species." Evil to her was the enforcement of ignorance and sexual slavery upon the female by the male of the species. Man, she railed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, "from the remotest antiquity, [has] found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to show that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure" (Schneir, p. 9). The situation of woman, she charged, was to "grovel contentedly, scarcely raised by her employments above the animal kingdom" (Schneir, p. 11).

Another important figure was the man considered one of the greatest philosophers of all time, Immanuel Kant. He felt that the origin of evil was a matter beyond human comprehension. But emblematic of the contradictions in philosophy that accelerated the rise of science as a way of resolving this confusion were Kant's further thoughts about evil. In relation to ethics, Kant is most famous for his Categorical Imperative, a modern updating of the ancient Golden Rule to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This Categorical Imperative, Kant states, is the universal grounding law for all human beings—from which one would infer that Kant believed that we humans, being governed by this law, are inherently good. But elsewhere in his work, he states that we are not only evil, but in fact "radically" evil by nature! Moreover, this radical evil within us "is a natural propensity, 'inextirpable' by human powers" (Kant, p. 32). Yet within five pages of this assertion, he is telling us that our original direction involves "a predisposition to good," and that "despite a corrupted heart" we "yet possess a good will," therefore "there remains hope of a return to the good from which [we have] strayed" (Kant, pp. 38, 39).

Kant, with all his contradictions, was the watershed philosopher between earlier and modern times. Of the many strains of philosophy thereafter touching at times on the problem of evil, much of it emerged in reaction to the long-time attempt by Christianity, and what at the time was a present-day attempt by Marx and Engels and other "utopians," to eradicate the ills once classified as evil through the activist power of social movements.

On the other hand, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer took a very jaundiced view both of humanity and of any prospect for improvement through social movements or any other means.

To Nietzsche—paving the way for the Nazis—a source of what he would classify as evil was what he called the "slave morality" of Christianity as opposed to the "master morality" of the "free spirit" and the Superman. "The hardier human traits, such as egotism, cruelty, arrogance, retaliation, and approbation, are given ascendancy over the softer virtues, such as sympathy, charity, forgiveness, loyalty, and humility, and are pronounced necessary constituents in the moral code of a natural aristocracy," one admiring commentator writes of Nietzsche's views (Nietzsche, p. 376). As for Schopenhauer, life was evil because we are driven to never be satisfied because pain is our basic reality with pleasure only temporary, because the more advanced and sensitive we are the more we suffer, because if we find satisfaction it is only to thereafter become bored, and because life is war—everything trying to eat or outdo each other in a situation where "man is a wolf to man" (Durant, p. 325).

Out of this mid-nineteenth-century time, via the gloomy Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, also arose the existential philosophy that was to carry the problem of evil on into more recent times. To Kierkegaard, "the human race is sick, and, speaking spiritually, sick unto death" (Loewith, p. 112). Our "peculiar immorality" is "an extravagant disregard for the individual" (Loewith, p. 110). In a view shared with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, one of the worst things about modern life for Kierkegaard were the social movements, such as Marxism or any other, that in attempting large-scale improvement in the human situation reduced the individual to being meaningless unless one could be labeled an advocate of some larger cause.

For one of the best-known existentialists for the 20th century, Jean Paul Satre, this became the view of "man" as isolated in a lonely world, with our only basic reference point or source of standards being ourselves, as individuals. Rather than being in any way fixed "essences," good or evil were again, as for Spinoza, only labels we assign to what happens according to our own perceptions out of our own isolated "existences." Satre, however, whose thought, along with that of his lifetime companion Simone de Bouvier, was shaped by resistance to the evil embodied in the Nazi occupation of France during World War II, shared with Aristotle and Marx and Engels the conviction of the necessity for moral action. "I ask myself, 'Will socialization, as such, ever come about?' I know nothing about it," he wrote. "All I know is that I'm going to do everything in my power to bring it about. Beyond that, I can't count on anything... The doctrine I am presenting is the very opposite of quietism, since it declares, 'There is no reality except in action.'" Moreover, it goes further, since it adds, "Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life" (Satre, pp. 31, 32).

Gradually thereafter in France existentialism gave way to related philosophies, still embedded in the English and art departments of many universities worldwide, variously known as deconstructionism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other terms. Though originally representing an advance in destroying many old paradigms binding modern thought and visual expression, over time these "schools" of thought have driven philosophy into what their critics feel is a cul-de-sac of irrelevance. Within the context of the problem of evil, central to this failure seems to be the way the deconstructionists, etc., pushed to the extreme the idea we have been following that good or evil are only labels we assign to things for which there are no universals, no basis for consensus, no basis for the arousal and binding of ourselves together into a community of feeling or solidarity, or for concerted action. In stark contrast stands the view of American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey, which over 70 years ago now expressed what has long been the rationale for both activist education and activist social science.

"The problem of evil ceases to be a theological and metaphysical one, and is perceived to be the practical problem of reducing, alleviating, as far as may be removing, the evils of life," Dewey wrote in 1920. "Philosophy is no longer under obligation to find ingenious methods of proving that evils are only apparent, not real, or to elaborate schemes for explaining them away or, worse yet, for justifying them. It assumes another obligation: That of contributing in however humble a way to methods that will assist us in discovering the causes of humanity's ills" (Dewey, pp. 141, 142).

This leads to an important development: In contrast to the earlier emphasis on "deconstruction," throughout the fields of art, literature, and philosophy as well as the social sciences the move is now toward "reconstruction." This is illustrated by the work of Riane Eisler, who while not using the terms good or evil, has proposed that injustice and pain are in large part produced by social institutions—from families to economics and politics—orienting to the domination side of the domination—partnership scale, and who describes the "reconstruction" needed for a world that is more caring and peaceful (Eisler, 1987, 1995; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Violence as Evil and What to Do About It

A recurring theme over thousands of years of religion and hundreds of years of philosophy is the identification of violence as evil. While evil is a word one seldom finds used in science, it is also significant that by a variety of criteria, over a number of fields, scientific studies find violence associated with much of what in religion and philosophy has been labeled evil—that is, that violence breeds more violence and is generally destructive to the stability and well-being of persons, families, and neighborhoods, as well as nations.

The Hindu *Bhagavad Gita* identifies self-restraint, harmlessness, absence of wrath, peacefulness, and forgiveness as among the "divine properties" that are "deemed to be for liberation." By contrast, it identifies wrath, harshness, and "unwisdom" as properties of the "demonical for bondage" (Bible of the World, p. 99).

"Him I call indeed a Brahmana who without hurting any creatures, whether feeble or strong, does not kill nor cause slaughter. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is tolerant with the intolerant, and mild with the violent," counsels the *Dhammapada* of Buddhism (Bible of the World, p. 303).

"So far as arms are concerned, they are implements of ill-omen," offers Taoism. "Where armies have been quartered brambles and thorns grow" (Bible of the World, p. 484). "Now beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace," proclaims Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Jews and Christians, foreshadowing Jesus' "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." (Dartmouth Bible, pp. 679, 883).

As for the philosophers, with the exception of firebrands like Nietzsche, who looms now as a truly aberrant being not only in his legitimation of the philosophy of the Nazis but also for his literal worship of violence, most of the rest were mild men to whom it was obvious that violence threatened everything they valued. Moreover, in keeping with Aristotle's dictum of praxis, or moral action, some tried to do something about it.

Repelled by the violence of his age, Kant made the case for organizing what eventually became the League of Nations and then the United Nations. Repelled by the violence of his age and mindful of the global interest in sports, William James detailed a plan

for a game that might provide a “moral equivalent” for war. Repelled by the violence of their ages, over 100 years feminist philosophers such as Margaret Fuller, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Simone de Bouvier steadily laid the intellectual groundwork for a notably peace-oriented global women’s movement. Currently, philosopher Ervin Laszlo has launched a Club of Budapest to be an equivalent for the industrial Club of Rome in focusing the creativity of artists, musicians, writers, and religious leaders as well as scientists on the reduction of global violence and the stabilization of peace. A powerful countering factor bearing on the question of violence and what to do about it, however, has been the influence of certain aspects of the philosophies of two twentieth-century figures known chiefly as psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. These views are of interest here for two reasons. One is that, although purportedly scientific, neither of their views in this instance is scientific, both being matters of unsubstantiated personal philosophy. The other reason is that, generally unperceived, both views have widely and persistently served to perpetuate the idea of evil being innate in humans, which again and again has discouraged people from trying to do something about violence, as it seems inevitable, as well as being used to justify authoritarian control.

For Freud, the evil in us is innate aggression—that we are cosmically driven by the death instinct he called Thanatos, as well as by the primal depravity of the id within our unconscious, to aggress against others, and to kill if need be. For Jung, evil was the dark mystery residing in what he called the Shadow, an archetypically embedded and, therefore, innate and eternally threatening source of the potential for violence and all other depravities.

Within the context of both the religion and the philosophy, we have examined here it can be seen how again we are looking at what are in essence modern updatings of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin—and indeed Jung recognized this connection in one of his papers.

Countering the persistence of this idea of innate evil are not only the views and studies identified earlier but much new work. In closing, we will examine examples bearing on the question of violence as evil from theology, cultural evolution studies and theory, and again the interface between brain and culture.

Being mainly irreligious themselves, having outgrown such prejudices they might feel, social scientists looking for the causes of the ills of this world—or the source of evil in the earlier terminology—tend to overlook one very large fact. This is that religion is still exceptionally meaningful to the overwhelming majority of the people on this planet. Moreover, these religions are—for better or for worse—primarily motivational. Both how we are driven to violence and to nonviolence has been examined in a monumental recent study of the problem of evil from the theological viewpoint in a trilogy of books by Walter Wink. “Evil is not our essence,” theologian Wink concludes in *Engaging the Powers* (p. 72). Rather, the problem is the “myth of redemptive violence” which has become the linchpin for the “Domination System,” the term he borrowed from the work of cultural historian and systems scientist Riane Eisler (Eisler, 1987, 1995; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

“Paradoxically, those in the grip of the cultural trance woven over us by the Domination System are usually unaware of the full depth of their soul-sickness,” Wink writes. “It is only after we experience liberation from primary socialization to the world-system that we realize how terribly we have violated our authentic personhood—and how violated we have been”.

As indicated earlier, another monumental recent work searching for the cause of violence are the cumulating books and papers of systems scientist and cultural evolutionary theorist Riane Eisler. Driven herself to the question of the origin and nature of evil by the fact of being Jewish and a refugee from the devastation of the Nazis in Europe, Eisler’s work culminates the feminist critique we have briefly touched on here, but goes further to a systems analysis of cultural evolution and the introduction of two new social categories. The problem is not violence or evil inherent in the “male” per se, Eisler stresses—a misconception which has driven women as well as men to reject the feminist critique. Rather, as she outlines in *The Chalice and the Blade, Sacred Pleasure, Nurturing Our Humanity*, and other works, the problem is violence as a foundational aspect, along with male domination, and authoritarianism, of the “dominator” or “domination” system or paradigm of social organization that has prevailed over the past 5000 years of human cultural evolution. This Eisler contrasts with the “partnership” system of social organization, based on nonviolence, gender as well as more general equality, and more democratic governance, originally advanced by Jesus among others and furthered by the Enlightenment and many modern social movements—and prevalent for millennia in prehistoric societies (Eisler, 1987, 1995; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

In its probe of violence against women, against children, against men, against races and creeds and nations, Eisler’s indictment ranges, era by era, over hundreds of years of our history. Yet out of it all arises the hopefulness of her observation that “this kind of system is not the only possibility for our species. Indeed, despite all the insensitivity and pain considered normal in much of recorded history... women and men have still somehow managed to relate to one another in sensitive and pleasurable ways. Even in the midst of hate, cruelty, and violence, we have again and again managed to instead give and receive love and to find joy not only in sexual passion but in the simplest of human gestures, in the touch of someone’s hand, a kiss, a friendly smile” (Eisler, 1995, p. 242).

And what might account for this difference between whether we are to sadistically bully, brutalize, exploit, and kill, or to love one another? A particularly dramatic recent finding of brain researchers reaffirms the findings of many other brain researchers, child development specialists, and psychologists over at least the past 50 years. In 1994, psychologists Adrian Raine, Patricia Brennan, and Sarnoff Mednick reported the result of a study of 4269 men born in Denmark in the years 1959–61. They had looked for connections between birth complications, rejection by their mothers, and later violent crime. What they found was no significant correlation between either birth complications and later violent crime or between rejection by their mothers and later violent crime. But the picture greatly changed when they looked at the 3.9% of their sample who had suffered “both” birth complications and later rejection by their mothers. For they found that this 3.9% had committed 22% of all the later violent crimes.

What does this tell us? If we carefully consider this finding, it seems to be a scientific mini-metaphor for the relation of culture to biology, or of nurture to nature, that runs throughout this question we have repeatedly encountered of the origin of evil, and of whether we are innately evil, innately violent, or inherently otherwise. For here, pinned down by the most exacting of scientific approaches, the message would seem to be relatively clear.

It is then understood that what determines our violence is not in our genes, or otherwise in us at birth, or even—as some contend—the trauma we may suffer in being born. It mainly depends on what happens to us afterward.

It seems to heavily depend on whether we are born into a family in which the parents have been maimed by cultural systems orienting to domination, violence, and gender and other forms of inequality, or into a family in which the parents have themselves been nurtured by cultural systems orienting more to the encouragement of equality, love, and caring (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

In this connection, and returning to focus on “reconstruction,” Eisler has proposed four partnership cornerstones for a less violent more equitable and caring partnership oriented world: Childhood, Gender, Economics, and Narratives/Language (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Another relevant work that provides grounded hope for a less violent, more equitable future is *The Measuring of Evolution*. This is a volume that was written in a cycle of books such as *Darwin's Lost Theory* (Loye, 2010) and *Darwin's Second Revolution* (Loye, 2018) celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin. These books are based on new discoveries of Darwin's long-ignored emphasis on love and moral sensitivity rather than “survival of the fittest,” half a century of measurement research and two decades of advanced evolution research. *The Measuring of Evolution* reports the development of the new Global Sounding measure of general and moral evolution to more precisely differentiate right from wrong, and good from evil, in terms of human and planetary evolution.

To close, and going full circle to the pressing matters that we began with: Is it evil to promote fossil fuels at a time of rising carbon and oceanic pollution leading to the melting of ice caps and endangering of future generations? Is it evil to ignore rising income inequality and the fact that even in a rich nation like the United States one-quarter of children live in poverty? Is it evil to provide false information to people, especially at a time of the Covid-19 pandemic? These are questions more people are asking today.

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