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Edited by

Colette Balmain & Nanette Norris

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**Uneasy Humanity:
Perpetual Wrestling with Evils**

At the Interface

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The Evil Hub

'Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness'



**Uneasy Humanity:
Perpetual Wrestling with Evil**

Edited by

Colette Balmain and Nanette Norris

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10 Years of Evil

Colette Balmain

Being human is not easy; being human is a struggle. And in the course of being human we somehow give birth to evil, suffering, pain, hurt, violence, genocide and death. Not only do we give birth to it, but the sheer multitude and variety of ways we give birth to it are bewildering and astounding. By grappling with evil we are grappling with our humanity.¹

In 1999, Rob Fisher founded the not-for-profit organisation *Inter-Disciplinary.net*. Inspired by his experiences as an academic, having worked at Oxford University, Rob's motivation was to open up an intellectual space for the free flow of ideas - in particular between disciplines - that was being stifled as a consequence of the transformation of universities from places of learning into corporations motivated by business aims. Words such as 'business-facing' and 'vocational training' have replaced the philosophical and educational aims that previously informed the Higher Education sector. In opposition to this are the core values of *Inter-Disciplinary.net* which are: "founded on the time-honored motto: knowledge for knowledge's sake, education for education's sake. These are worth pursuing because they are inherently valuable, not they may be 'useful' in some way."²

The first project that came out of *Inter-Disciplinary.net* was 'Evil and Human Wickedness.' The inaugural conference took place at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and was attended by 36 delegates. This year, in the beautiful city of Salzburg, we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the project. We welcomed both old and new scholars from a wide range of disciplines and professions debating the issues of humanity, evil and wickedness; ideas, which as Rob notes, are fundamental not just to interrogating the continuance of evil acts such as terrorism and ethnic cleansing, but also of questioning our fundamental belief in our very humanity. For science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, the atrocities that one human could inflict on another were demonstrated by the Holocaust, and his entire oeuvre was motivated by an attempt to come to terms with such inhumanity, the worst of which was that it appeared in human form:

My grand theme - who is human and who only appears (masquerades) as human? Unless we can individually and collectively be certain of the answer to this question, we face what is, in my view, the most serious problem possible. Without answering it adequately, we cannot even

be certain of our own selves. I cannot even know myself, let alone you. So I keep working on this theme; to me nothing is as important a question. And the answer comes very hard.³

These key questions so eloquently put by Dick also underpin the aims of 'Evil and Human Wickedness.' Rob uses similar words in his words on the main aim of the project: "I was - and remain - convinced that the problems of evil are inseparably and intimately tied to the problems of what it is to be human."⁴ The project had, and still has, three main aims. Firstly, to start a discourse on the nature of evil and human wickedness, questions which are relevant to our very being-in-the world. Secondly in order to do this, it is necessary to open up a dialogue across disciplines and beyond our own areas of interest and/or specialism in order to bring a wider understanding to such crucial issues beyond personal interpretations and pre-existing intellectual investment. Lastly, while we may not come up with answers to questions surrounding the continuing problem of evil and human wickedness in the world, it is necessary to wrestle with the question of evil in its manifold forms, as this is not a mere intellectual exercise but a personal expedition into the very core of humanity that calls upon us personally wrestle with "our own experiences and feelings about events and actions."⁵

My personal experiences having been involved with the project for over 5 years now are a testament to the importance of the work that Rob started and continues, now in a vastly extended form, with a variety of projects and conferences that take place throughout the world on a global basis.⁶ As a film scholar, I was used to conferences where people habitably criticised each other's work in to prove that they indeed were *the experts* in the field. When you start in academia, your experiences at such conferences convince you that you continually need to assert your own opinions at the expense of others, irrespective of the feelings involved within such a process. As such 'Evil and Human Wickedness' was a revelation to me, I had found a place, which allowed the free flow of ideas and questions, which did not rely on one-upmanship. I wasn't going to be criticised if some of my ideas were half-formed, or indeed half-baked, and the other delegates were there to encourage and enable my intellectual and personal growth rather than belittle me or convince me that I had *no right* to be in academia. I have never looked back since, and I feel that I am not just a better lecturer/researcher for my experiences with the project, but that indeed I am a better person and perhaps at the end of the day, that in itself is the most important thing. For that, I cannot thank Rob and everyone who works so hard at Inter-Disciplinary.net enough.

The essays in this volume I feel attest to the importance of the continuing project, and clearly demonstrate that Rob has succeeded in his aim

to open up ideas across disciplines and academia. As Rob succinctly puts it, when asked about the future of the project, “To my mind, nothing has changed in these three original aims. Wrestling with evil remains an urgent and significant task in the 21st century - and I hope and believe the evil project contributes to the grappling with this perennial problem.”⁷

Thanks to Rob Fisher, Stephen Morris, and everyone else who works so hard as part of *Inter-Disciplinary.net*. The last five years have been a blast; I look forward to many more!

Notes

¹ R. Fisher, “Interview”, 2009.

² Inter-Disciplinary.net, “History”, < <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/about-us/history/>>, accessed 12th June 2009

³ P.K. Dick, cited in S. Best and D. Kellner ‘The Apocalyptic Vision of Phillip K. Dick’, 2001, <<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/apocalypticphillipkdick.pdf>>, accessed 15 June 2009.

⁴ Fisher, 2009

⁵ Fisher, 2009

⁶ ‘Evil and Human Wickedness’ is just one of the many projects and learning initiatives that has developed since Rob found Inter-Disciplinary.net. For details of other projects, please visit < <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/>> for details of upcoming conferences and existing projects.

⁷ Fisher, 2009.

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Best, S. and D. Kellner, ‘The Apocalyptic Vision of Philip K. Dick’, <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/apocalypticphillipkdick.pdf>, accessed 15 June 2009.

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Introduction

Nanette Norris

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows...¹

The Shadow first appeared as a vigilante fighter against crime, on the radio programme *Detective Story Hour*.² Originally simply an idea to boost the sale of the magazine from which the stories came, The Shadow as narrator became so popular that pulp fiction writer Walter B. Gibson was hired to develop The Shadow's role for *Detective Story Magazine*. The developing character became imbued with sinister characteristics – he skulked around unsavoury places, clad in black, working mainly after dark; he burglarized in the name of justice; he terrorized criminals into vulnerability, before he or someone else gunned them down. Fashioned on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, his red-lined black cloak was as much his signature as the ambiguity of his vigilante behaviour. His ability to move around unseen was uncanny: it was explained variously as hypnotism and as something learned while travelling in the Far East, "the mysterious power to cloud men's minds, so they could not see him."³ Because he worked to apply vigilante justice, because he rooted out evil, he knew evil. He knew what it looked like, appearing in the minds of others, and he reflected it in himself – he was the personification of evil as we know it, furtive, with power over minds. Evil, for The Shadow and for his audience in the 1930s and 40s, was an element of mind as much as matter. Anti-hero to the core, he assumed the trappings and behaviours of evil in order to entrap and destroy evildoers.

The Shadow is a fictional character that touched a cultural nerve in the inter-war years. He embodied the dual nature of evil, its attractive and abhorrent nature. We are as much attracted to evil as we are repelled by it: in many ways, we define ourselves vis-à-vis our approach to the concept of evil. Ancient Greek philosopher and Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, in his *The Meditations*, wrote that from his mother he learned "abstinence, not only from evil deeds, but also from evil thoughts."⁴ Defining evil, and situating ourselves in relation to it, is the ultimate ethical problem. More than this, we need to consider our reactions in the face of evil: we may feel secure in our sense of right and wrong, we may be firm in our own abstinence from evil thoughts, and yet we will be faced with absorbing knowledge of the most horrendous acts, perpetrated by one man upon another, or by nature upon the innocent. Who and what we are is called into question in our response.

All of the essays in this volume are responses to the knowledge of evil and say as much about the human condition as they do about the evil under investigation. First, we ask the question, what is evil? Fitzsimmons and

Lanphar ask that question of adolescents, fully expecting them to be sponges for the current attitude emerging from popular culture. Not so! In fact, the young people, far from being ‘infected’ by uninformed and faddish views, were quite critical of themes in popular culture in general, and the concept of evil in particular. They had “a world view that not only explained evil, but provided them with a linguistic platform” with which to define themselves in relation to the views of evil with which the world at large approached them.

It would be interesting to know more about the ethical and religious backgrounds of these students. Panaioti’s investigation, “Wrong View, Wrong Action in Buddhist Thought,” suggests that the platform from which we approach the ethical issue of evil is of prime importance. The “framework of Buddhist moral psychology” which this essay discusses presents the concept of a “pre-reflective wrong view” – we might, in fact, begin our deliberations from a mistaken starting point.

In “*Acedia’s Avatars in the Medieval World*,” Machado proposes to firm up the starting point by establishing a line of approach through the seven deadly sins. She reminds us of Thomas Aquinas’ pivotal contribution to the definition of *acedia*. For Aquinas, there is a universal moral disorder, disconnected from bodily symptoms. By the 15th century, the spiritual had become equated with the medical interpretation of melancholic humour, well on the way to its more laic definition as sloth.

Peter Admirand, in “Destructive, Concrete Evil as Absence: A Reevaluation of the Theory of *Privatio Boni* in the Context of Mass Atrocity,” discusses the tradition of *privatio boni* and the claim that evil is the absence of good. The deed may be horrifically evil, but the person is good (and redeemable in this world) because God created us. The evil deed may corrupt character, and may lead to other evil suffering or consequences, but it is just that – a deed with consequences.

Here, then, is the heart of the question with which we are faced. Is evil a deed, or is it intrinsic to the nature of a person? Is it an act committed or a force to be reckoned with on a constant basis? The way in which we answer this question seems to determine our behaviour when judging and dealing with evil.

In “Questioning the ‘Witch’ label: Women as Evil in Ancient Rome,” Linda H. McGuire looks at the way in which medieval society labelled the person rather than the deed. Moreover, she contends that the gender-bias which is evident in the labelling of women as witches in medieval times did not exist in ancient Rome. Her study concludes that evil did not have a female face in ancient Rome.

Stephen Morris pinpoints 6th century Byzantine Christian attitudes toward women, in “The Female Voice of Vice in The Ladder of Divine Ascent.” Spiritual powers, for both good and ill, are overwhelmingly seen as feminine powers. Female spiritual entities interact with humans in practical

terms, spurring the monks on to heroic accomplishments of virtue and despicable enactments of vice. The Ladder was intended for a male monastic audience: Morris wonders, not so tongue-in-cheek, whether it is a reflection of some daily reality encountered by the monks. Given this world view as the basis for their interactions with the outside world, one could expect the monks to be on the defensive when dealing with women.

The way in which we dance between contending belief systems is a mark of our own age, as Scott M. Powers discusses, in “The Question of Evil and the ‘Cross Pressures’ of the Secular Age: Zola and Huysmans on the Lourdes Phenomenon.” Because of the existence of a multiplicity of religious and non-religious positions, all positions are compromised by an attraction to ‘the other side’ as a compelling alternative.

Certainly, in our own age, the once-secure religious response to evil has become fragile, compromised by the compelling alternative of the secular view. Darren Oldridge discusses a most interesting example of the effect of modernity on religious faith. In “Snowflakes and Tigers: R. S. Thomas and the Problem of Evil,” Oldridge introduces us to the Welsh poet-priest whose faith was more shaken than firm. Thomas questioned religious meaning in a world suffused with undeserved pain; he questioned the waste and rapaciousness of the animal world; he was bewildered in the face of an absent and apparently uncaring God.

The act of scholarship is likewise a questioning of the compelling alternatives of thought. The choice of subject exposes the scholar, and the questions become cries, in a world of pain, waste, and inhumanity. Such is the case in Gary Evans’ “Fritz Lang’s *M*: The Crime that Dared Not Speak Its Name,” which exposes Lang’s celebrated film as an evasion of the very truth it purports to reveal. Evans claims that Lang shifted the moral compass to a comfortable debate about collective hysteria, the public’s psyche, failed matriarchal supervision, capital punishment, and the inability of the State and police to protect its citizens – everything, in fact, except the most heinous crime, the anti-semitism of Weimar Germany, with which the film is complicit in its choice of a podgy, effeminate, Jewish actor to play the murderer.

And how does the victim plead? How does the victim speak? Very carefully, says Karen Doerr, in “Hidden Images of Scorn in Kafka’s Last Story.” Contemporary scholars agree that Kafka portrayed the precarious situation of the Jews in his stories of mice (and other creatures). This paper looks closely at the details of his last story, “Josephine the Singer or The Nation of Mice.” Evans and Doerr are both dealing with arguably the greatest evil of the twentieth century, if not of all history, and we are undoubtedly torn between the concepts of the evil deed versus the evil power. In both of these papers, we are faced with the reactionary force of the power of expression – in Lang, the propagating force of collusion with the dominant

cultural wave of thought, and, in Kafka, the lasting ironic strength of the metaphor, which speaks what needs to be said, but out of the side of the mouth.

What a great challenge of interpretation we have then, in Colette Balmain's, "And WHAT's on the Menu Today? Greed and Gluttony in Sato's *Naked Blood*." Cannibal cinema, she says, transgresses the injunctions against gluttony, lust, and greed – three of the original Deadly Sins or Capital Vices. These ARE evil deeds, and, through the wonders of the video frame, you and I get to participate: an engagement with excess. As pure excess and appetite, the cannibal is capitalism in its most ferocious form. Is this why we are so conflicted when we watch it? Because we see ourselves and the worst of our capitalist desires imaged in the gluttonous cannibal? Because we recognize our own evil deeds in the metaphor before us, and we suffer from the dual force of repellent attraction, which characterizes our modern sense of evil?

This is the underlying claim of my own essay, "Gaiman's *Coraline*: Teaching Children the Meaning of Evil, Post-9/11," which points out that the abhorrent act of terrorism which was 9/11 has spawned an equally abhorrent reaction: the vilification of 'the other.' The genre of horror has traditionally been used to show us the worst of ourselves, and yet we are strangely attracted to it. Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* turns our predictable world upside down and pulls no punches: the wicked woman, trapped souls, spiders – whatever our fears, they are there, and the narrative points to an urgent need for bravery in battle against the invasion of 'the other.' In life, though, this means seeing the entire world as 'mean' and turning our backs on our neighbours – one evil perpetrates another.

Like *The Shadow*, we researchers are on the trail of evil, flushing it out from its dark dens, and exclusion is high on the list of what we are finding. Ann-Marie Cook's "More Than Mateship?: Queer Desire in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*" focuses on attitudes towards homosexuality in Australian society during the 1960s and 1970s, when the novel and film were released, and shows that these (negative) attitudes necessitated the closeting metaphors which are evident.

Whatever we say about separating the evil deed from the evil force, we are nonetheless all too often in the grip of primeval forces we do not understand. In "Mass Violence, Polygyny, and the Logic of Sacrifice," Charles W. Nuckolls reveals the new evidence, which has come to light concerning a massacre of immigrants, 120 men, women and children, en route from Arkansas to California, in 1857. Evidence strongly implicates white Mormon militiamen from nearby towns in Utah. Nuckolls suggests that the massacre was a sacrifice of the innocents, a primeval ritual designed to increase the cohesiveness of a group, in this case the Mormons who were in crisis.

The Shadow may have rooted out evil, but he did not explain how we become the perpetrators of evil deeds. Vera B. Profit, in “The Seeds of Evil: Dorian Gray’s First Two Decisions,” explains that it happens one decision at a time. She asks the question, what constitutes the balance of forces acting upon and within the individual at the moment of decision?

One decision we are keen to make, or to use caution concerning, is that of altering the human genome. Jinnie M. Garrett, in “Preventing the Emergence of Evil in the ‘New Eugenics,’” discusses the need to monitor science for potentially negative social implications – and how poorly prepared the scientists of today are for debating such issues. Katheryn Doran, in “Building Better People? Three Secular Arguments Against Germline Genetic Engineering,” points out that the debate need not be centred on Western religious views, and she proposes three secular ones in an effort to avoid a sort of genetic arms race that would increase the stress with which we contend and would depersonalize us into the bargain.

Of course, we don’t need to get involved in debating relative evils, do we? We can leave that to others, can’t we? Ah, but refusal to evaluate is amoral, as Andrei G. Zavalij discusses in “Amoralism and the Role of Other-Directed Judgments.” Making a judgment is moral, whereas fence-sitting is not. The question arises as to whether laughing at immorality, or laughing at evil, is judgmental or amoral. Richard J. Piatt looks at evil cartoon characters in “Victory is Mine! C. Montgomery Burns and Steward Gilligan Griffin on the Lighter Side of World Domination.” These cartoons hold up the mirror to the cultural context in which they are created, both laughable and socially reprehensible. What does this say about those of us who faithfully watch their failed attempts at world domination and laugh? Robert W. Butler looks at “Evil Laughter: The Joy in Evil Throughout History,” to demonstrate how laughter has historically been used to resist, ameliorate, or accommodate evil.

When we begin to re-evaluate traditional stances and beliefs, when we open the floor to other possible judgments, much that we have taken for granted is called into question. Who, as children, was not brought up on fairy tales? And who was not taught the evils of the wicked wolf, who could overcome you if you stray from the path? Yet, make another judgment about the actions of the wolf and his tale becomes quite different. Cynthia Jones, in “Is the Big Bad Wolf Really Bad or Just Misunderstood?,” takes another look at the wolf in literature and shows how contemporary ambivalence to evil is changing the nature of the beast.

Media violence has long been a target for those who are concerned about the ramifications of participating, actively or vicariously, in evil deeds. Research has reported drastic increases in aggression centered behaviours of participants following exposure to violent images. These results are questionable in terms of actual interaction with and interpretation of violence. Denise Crisafi and Anthony Crisafi, in “Violence in Film: Measuring

Existential Reactions to Evil,” show that fictional violence, violent narrative, enables an audience to existentially identify with and cast judgments about the use of violence based upon the particular context in which it occurs. Thus, violence can and should be interpreted as a mechanism used within film to transmit messages about cultural occurrences, as something that is reflective of both us and our social systems.

Perhaps these interesting study results can be extrapolated to cartoon violence, as well: perhaps we interpret and pass judgment even as we laugh. To not do so might indeed be reflective of an amoral character.

In “Evil in the House of Truth,” Craig Hanks and Vincent Luizzi round off this discussion concerning how we interpret and judge the nature of evil. Focussing on our roles as educators, Hanks and Luizzi raise the question, do professors, in their capacity of serving their students and the public, do so more faithfully by highlighting the brilliance of what the profession has to offer, or by showing the moral shortcomings of some of the players and their works? They ask the same questions that were raised by that skulking vigilante figure, *The Shadow*: Can one know evil without being tainted by it? What evils attract us today, and in what guise do they come? Where is God in relation to evil? Can there be a secular approach to evil? Does evil continue to be ambiguous, as it was for *The Shadow* and his time? Only one thing is clear: we cannot resist or deal with what we do not know. *The Shadow* flushed evil out of the dark and into the light – and so must we.

Notes

¹ Introduction from *The Shadow* radio program (1937).

² 1930.

³ Murray, Will (2007-10), “Walter Gibson's Magical Journey”. *The Shadow* (Nostalgia Ventures) (#12 - The Magicals Mystery and the Serpents of Siva): 126–130.

⁴ Aurelius, Marcus, *The Meditations*, Book One.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.mb.txt>. Accessed 30/07/09.

Adolescents, Authenticity and Avowal: Views of Evil and its Relationship to Culture and Popular Culture

Phil Fitzsimmons and Edie Lanphar

Abstract

This paper discusses the outcomes of a project that initially sought to understand how one cohort of adolescents at one high school entered into, and came to understand the 'symbolic space' of current elements of popular culture when engaged in critical analysis.

The school they attend has been recognized internationally as being not only progressive but utilizing a curriculum and text forms that are not only responsive to the needs and interests of its students but also aims to develop critical awareness and critical literacy as a whole school focus. As indicated, a key component of this transference of ideology into practice is the use of graphic novels, film and cutting edge texts as the means of engaging its student body in critical discussion and awareness of the power of narrative. While it was this point of text-student-critical literacy interface that framed this investigation, in undertaking a 'grounded-emergent' design the student interviews revealed that they had actually developed an existential awareness and were clearly able to articulate an understanding of evil. This understanding grew out of an understanding, application and reorganization of the discursive visual and textual interplays common to this form of popular culture.

This contradicts the belief generally accepted in the popular culture research area that adolescents are some how infected with the themes of found in popular culture in general, and the concept of evil in particular, "drawing their passive minds downward into its gaping, manipulative maw, usually through titillation, shock value, and sheer repetition."¹

In this case the students had transacted with the text and rather than being infected with the themes from these popular culture texts that they had been investigating, had created a world view that not only explained evil, but provided them with linguistic platform from which they could explain the threads of contra-narrative entropy that are often viewed to be a characteristic of these texts.

Key Words: Adolescent view, evil, new views.

1. The Aspects, Approach and Applications

This paper grew out of understanding of ‘methodological appropriateness’² in that it took on a research life of its own from within a research project that had another primary focus. Arising out of a series of interviews that focused on a group of students’ ‘reader response’ reactions to the graphic novels they had been focusing on, a cohort of senior high school students at San Roque School, Santa Barbara, in the United States had begun to understand that these texts are highly ideological in nature. However, rather than taking on and taking in this ideology at face value as the current literature dealing with popular culture suggests is the case, they had begun to question the various strands of beliefs embedded at both the explicit text level and the polyvalent underpinnings.

While the concept of critical thinking and critical literacy is an overall aim of the school and a specific goal of their English class, closer critical examination of these student’s responses through ‘constant comparison’ revealed that they had entered a process of critical reflection that involved not only recognizing and questioning the threads of ideology but also transmuted these facets into a highly sophisticated set of personal definitions and personal realizations. While perhaps not too different from other adolescent readers who have gained an in-depth awareness of how critical awareness works, and how these forms of texts are created, these students appear to be somewhat different in that out of the deconstruction of texts that filled to the brim with Manichean binaries³ of evil often entangled in a web of schizophrenic estrangement, existential adolescent angst and narratives of displacement into liminal grey zones of psychological uncertainty these students had pulled these often disparate elements into a series of definitions of evil.

As stated previously, in the coding process and the constant ebb and flow between developing emergent themes and sourcing, transacting and compiling an associated emergent literature we came to the realization that the notion that for a long period of time in the First World “there had been a homogenization effect in which there was an attempt at a routinisation and standardization of a point of view.”⁴ Coming to the same conclusion Buck-Morris believes that the change over years between the last millennium and the twenty-first that this process entailed the focusing of cultural capital on a false point of view in which “there was a stark contrast between good and evil.”⁵ In other words as part of a geo-political Western agenda, which some commentators such as Bauman, Dreyfus and Butler believe was a deliberate and calculated ploy on the part of the print and news media, children’s and adolescent literature and many aspects of popular culture became enmeshed in a voice of “postulated togetherness, ...all this to keep the stranger at bay”⁶

This seemingly all pervasive underpinning series of political-religious messages of ‘otherness’, has also been associated with related

characteristics such as “the deeper the sincerity the more ruthlessly they should be eliminated” and “diversity is bad as the truth is one, and only error is multiple.”⁷

However, the concept of evil is a much more complex notion than the over simplistic Manichean dualities and the philosophic and linguistic debates around the logic fractures of that these automatically set in train. As Neiman suggests, evil is also a socio-cultural product and “can not be defined in a way that we can manage it. Rather it is “a network of assumptions.”⁸

While researchers and commentators are generally reaching consensus in regard to this assertion Neiman has also veered away from the process of associating evil as being purely elements of darkness, notions of ‘lesser evils’ and violence, conjoining evil with the concepts of happiness and virtue. Similarly other commentators and philosophers have come to the realization that the greatest evils have been committed by the most ordinary of human beings. As Norden⁹ has suggested, there has indeed a changing face of evil. While the concept of evil has a long history of inquiry and discussion and continues to not only be an ever evolving philosophic construct, it is also holds an on going fascination with the consumers of popular culture across the globe. However, these two areas are yet to meet in regards to an unpacking of how theoretical constructs are realized in the understandings of the everyday reader-viewer. This paper is an attempt to begin to bridge this divide.

2. Responding to Popular Culture: Adolescents Concepts of Evil

As indicated previously through a series of semi-structured interviews¹⁰ through ‘a teacher as researcher’ followed up with an ensuing process of identifying and coding the threads present across the student’s accounts by member checking from an external researcher, a set of ‘clusters of substories’¹¹ emerged from the data. From our perspective, the most aspect of these student’s narratives were that from the outset, these ‘student stories’ were couched in terms of what we would call ‘active interiority’. A deeply reflective ‘interiority’ that is morally based, but not in a religious or strictly legal sense but in the sense that contrary to the commonly held belief in some quarters of popular culture research, these young people have “stepped out of the adult discourse with its blurred boundaries of race, culture and gender”¹² and found in young adult literature and possibly through their classroom discussions a means of finding a moral self.

That is, these students consistently used the verb ‘to be’ in their responses. For these students, evil was seen to be an active agent rather than a person, thing or a facet. In many ways, just as in his discussion with children on the nature of ‘goodness’ Coles realized his respondents talked in Manichean binaries that revolved around definitions such as “respect for others, a commitment of mind and heart and soul to one’s family,

neighborhood and nation”¹³ so too these adolescents talked about evil in similar terms in that evil was a contaminant of ‘goodness’. In many instances, these aspects of contamination were seen to be deeply personal or personalized, as the greatest evil of evil is it causes them to be actively dysfunctional. In other words, these young adults generally believed that ‘evil as contaminant’ was grounded in, and grew out of the small voice in side their heads. This appears to be a voice of conscience akin to Heidegger’s ‘self knowledge, “... an inner voice of sorts but does not correspond to the traditional notion of moral reproach. ...an authentic voice or reticence. The call of conscience is rather a silent appeal.”¹⁴

For this group, the personal interrelated dysfunctional or disabling facets of evil included:

A. Evil is ‘seeing across borders without looking’

For these students, evil was an action that lay within, both inside their own sense of self as well as in their context of situation and culture. While there was recognition that there was a theological side to the society and culture in which they lived which also mirrored in the texts and media they encountered, by and large this was not a part of their thoughts. In seeing this in their reading of popular culture they had come to the personal understanding that evil is not a single entity, being or person, or the theological bogeyman, ethnic centered antichrist or ‘not of us other’ found in the myriad of texts that flooded their world. While they obviously recognized there were facets of evil in other areas, countries and entities, the primary facet that had the potential to cause the greatest harm was their own attitudes and the attitudes of those around them. As they saw it, evil within an individual causes the greatest harm, as it’s the inner voice an individual gives weight to through action that can then set in train a snowball effect of contamination. It almost appears that this cohort believes that one small lack of determination to reign in these thoughts and make decision about not hurting other beings constitutes just as much a definition of evil as would a discussion on more serious crimes. Without inferring that one equates exactly with the other certainly these students see that there are borders to be crossed in regard to evil and the concept of morality, and that “every time we make a judgment this ought not to have happened we are stepping onto the path of evil.”¹⁵

And while there were numerous references to popular culture in the formation of their beliefs, these were not simply used as examples of ‘this is what I saw’ but rather by reflection ‘this is what I now can see how things work’. In other words, in-class discussion and reflection on literature allowed them to see other worlds and other possibilities through empathetic eyes. As one respondent added, “they reveal a whole new world where anything is possible”. By this he meant that not only were other physical spaces able to

be seen but other moral spaces as well. These moral spaces could be different to his own, and the group as a whole, but as long as difference was celebrated and allowed to be nurtured then a sense of seeing the positive aspects in others would provide a platform for contentment and moral growth founded on acceptance of other's moral viewpoints of 'doing no harm' or 'not forcing other viewpoints'. Evil was viewed as being the opposite of this, construed as a personal force with a wider social possibility of creating dysfunction, disharmony and disunity.

B. Evil is 'looking across borders but not going'

While evil was seen as a dysfunctional agent of recognizing difference and ignoring it, these young people also saw this concept was linked to neglect at the personal and wider community level of not actually initiating change to combat this. In essence, thinking and understanding without action was akin to a notion of abandonment in the sense that only when an actual boundary was crossed could one fully empathize with another's plight, situation or understanding. However, this point was acknowledged as an integral part of a wider reflection on how to reconcile themselves with their own spirituality and a sense of a spiritual world as they found it, and as it was represented in popular culture forms of all kinds. As one student commented, He follows it so blindly at first and so diligently. His perspective changes because of the harsh realities of his life and he loses his faith. He sees how hard life is for the girl he loves and doesn't feel that religion should make life hard for people. All of these books show the problems that religion causes and at the same time how people turn to it for comfort.¹⁶

While an integral component of these student's concept of evil within a framework of morality was not attempt to do violence to what they saw as the very structure of the world and someone's world view, they also believed that actual action that combated the opposing dysfunctional forces give life meaning. Morality was more than bind allegiance to a concept or external source of understanding. Morality was more a 'doing' and evil was 'not doing'.

For these students these concepts were bound up in what they termed 'constrained 'religiosity''. And while there was obviously a recognized tension in the way they spoke about their feelings, their developing understanding of the way they were being positioned in certain sections of Infection or Refraction? Adolescents articulating their concept of evil the media and their developing awareness of what constitutes evil, this was clearly evidence of deep reflection and resolving entrenched viewpoints. Indeed this tension is an integral part of overcoming their definition of evil. They were 'looking over the border' and attempting to get there. Stunningly similar to the process of moral growth Noddings has termed 'everyday

spirituality'¹⁷, or the process of self transformation, for these students, evil could further be defined as mistrust, conflict, disrespect, being bogged down in one's own belief system bound within a refusal to change any of the previous facets.

C. Evil is 'going across borders and not looking around'

While these students were developing a moral understanding based on making positive choices in how they related to others, and that evil constituted an opposite set of choices, they also believed that this stage of their lives was first and foremost emotionally challenging. And while they saw the need to be able to put their understanding into action, once have metaphorically crossed over into new areas of understanding, they had to guard against 'normality'. For these adolescents the small facets that make up their life and the emotional entanglements that have the possibility to ensnare them constitute evil. In other words, one always has to be aware of being captured by the status quo and not questioning the nature of the full gamut of systems, relationships or belief structures of personal and social contexts. Voicing that in many ways they already feel entrenched in systems controlled by adults, to accept that this is the way it has to be both at the present time and in the future without question an integral component of their understanding of this framework of evil; "to feel like there is no place or space to 'question what they have been "taught".

Not to question once change has occurred invites a repeat of the subtle aspects of evil. An all encompassing framework of constant questioning, deep reflection and critical self interrogation are the key ongoing tools of these student's concept of morality, and the neglect of these the underpinnings of evil. As one student stated, "There is so much more to people who are arseholes because you can look into their lives and understand why. It literally makes you smarter."

3. A Not So Final Word

While there are elements of a Manichean concept of evil embedded in the discourse of these adolescents, there is a distinct sense of a repudiation of this concept in the way they talk about their world. For these students, is indeed a 'changing face of evil', and if this small sample is indicator, there is a shift away from the "old fashioned fundamentalist view of evil."¹⁸ While their definitions of evil appears to be a reaction against the political capital they have been immersed in most of their lives, it certainly has its source in the nature of the critical literacy and critical thinking process that underpin the school's ideology. And while this paper offers some insight into a possible shift, and the means by which evil can be held at bay, the data from this project raises more questions than it answered.

Notes

- ¹ D Kidd "Harry Potter and the Function of Popular Culture, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 40, 1, 2007, p. 69.
- ² M Quinn-Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Sage, London, 2002, p: 23.
- ³ S Giversen, *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in The Chester Beatty Library Vol. III: Psalm Book part I*. 1988, p. 43.
- ⁴ M De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non Linear History*. Swerve, New York, 2005, p. 21.
- ⁵ S Buck Morris, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and critical theory as the left*. Verso, New York 2006, p.35.
- ⁶ Z Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays on postmodern morality*. Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p.15.
- ⁷ I Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1990, p. 208.
- ⁸ S Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2008, p. 325.
- ⁹ M Norden *The Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television*. Rodopi, New York, 2007.
- ¹⁰ W Neuman, *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Pearson Education, 2004, p. 45.
- ¹¹ D Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005, p. 16.
- ¹² H Scutter, *Displaced Fictions*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p. 179.
- ¹³ R Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children*. Bloomsbury, London, 1997 p. 17.
- ¹⁴ M Heidegger, *Being and Time: A translation of Sein and Zeit*. Trans. J. Stambough, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996 p. 272.
- ¹⁵ Neiman, p. i.
- ¹⁶ Student interview, 20/2/08
- ¹⁷ N Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative approach to teaching*. Teachers College Press, New York, 1999, p. 31.
- ¹⁸ G Edgerton, W Hart and F Hassenchal, M Norden, (ed.), 'Television 9/11 and Its Aftermath: The framing of George.W. Bush's faith based politics of good and evil', Rodopi, New York, 2007, p. 211.

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Wrong View, Wrong Action in Buddhist Thought

Antoine Panaïoti

Abstract:

This paper examines the question of human wrongdoing, or ‘human evil,’ from the perspective of Buddhist meta-ethics, emphasising the relation between wrong view and wrong action in the framework of Buddhist moral psychology. More specifically the paper focuses on the relation between the ‘self-delusion’ - the fundamental, pre-reflective wrong view that the seat of personhood is a permanent metaphysical soul or self (*attan*) - and wrong, or bad, action. At the end of the paper, two objections to philosophical engagement with this feature of Buddhist thought will be presented and responded to.

This paper also seeks to explore the complex phenomenon of ‘human evil’ from the perspective of Buddhist meta-ethics.¹ More specifically, I will focus on what it *means* for an action to be wrong from a Buddhist perspective. The general question I will seek to answer is the following: what is the relation in Buddhism between the wrong view *par excellence* - belief in an enduring ego or self (*attan*) - and wrong action, and how is this relation supposed to work? To begin, I will highlight a few notable aspects of Buddhist moral philosophy as it compares to Western ethics. This will lead up to my discussion of Buddhist meta-ethics. Here, I will show how making a moral claim, for Buddhists, is really making a *psychological* claim and how wrong action is supposed to stem from a deeply-entrenched wrong view about the nature of personhood. After presenting the Buddhist view, I will consider and answer two objections to philosophical engagement with Buddhist philosophy.

Key Words: Buddhism, ethics, meta-ethics, moral psychology, wrongdoing, self/soul/*attan*

1. Buddhist Ethics: Two Points of Interest

The first thing I wish to discuss is the nature of Buddhist moral vocabulary. In my view, Buddhist moral terms are predominantly *descriptive* rather than explicitly moral, or normative. Wrong actions and the wrong states of mind from which they arise are described not as ‘evil’ or sinful, but simply as *bad*. The Buddhist word used to designate such states of mind and actions is *akusala*, which means bad, wrong, unskillful, or unwise - *kusala* meaning the opposite: good, correct, wise, skillful, or intelligent.² When referring to a ‘morally bad’ person, moreover, the Buddha mainly uses the term *bāla*, which means ‘fool’ or ‘child.’³ For Buddhists, then, an action may

be *wrong*, but mainly in the sense of ‘incorrect’ and inappropriate, and a person may be *bad*, though not in the explicit sense of ‘evil’ or ‘sinful.’

This overlap of normative and descriptive vocabulary is a feature of Indian languages in general. (There is no distinction, for instance, between a (moral) fault and a (mathematical) error - both translate into the Sanskrit *dosa*.) This being said, it is no mere linguistic coincidence if the Buddha couches his views on morality in descriptive terms. Human wrongdoing, according to him, stems from a *deep-set error* - a profound mistake -, which, in itself, is not moral in nature. Indeed, an important feature of Buddhism in opposition to traditional Judeo-Christian thinking is that the world’s sorrows are said to be due to an error, not to sin.⁴ It is this foolish error - this *wrong view* -, also, that is responsible for *wrong action* of all sorts. So the point really is that those who engage in immoral/*akusala* actions are foolish, not depraved or profoundly evil.

Another good reason to stress the descriptive nature of Buddhist moral vocabulary is the very scope of what counts as ‘moral’ in Buddhism. Bad actions are defined as those, which follow from three types of mental states, called the *kilesas* (‘flaws’). Actions are bad precisely in so far as they result from greed (*lobha/rāga*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). In reality, there is no adequate translation for any of the three flaws because each spans such an enormous spectrum of emotions. *Lobha/rāga*, for instance, includes everything from mild, barely conscious, desire or longing to full-blown lust, avarice, pride, etc., while *dosa* covers everything between mild, barely conscious, irritation and violent wrath. So the scope of each flaw, in itself, is very wide indeed. Bad ‘actions,’ moreover, also span over a very wide spectrum; they include not only verbal and physical acts, but also mental events - just having certain relatively banal negative *thoughts* is *akusala* for the Buddha, though it would be hard to describe this as immoral, let alone ‘evil.’ So those forms of behaviour, which we in the West consider to be immoral and evil, are just the more extreme elements of what, for Buddhists, is a much broader continuum. Some of the things Buddhists consider *akusala*, or bad, would not be considered ‘immoral’ per se in the West. Conversely, some of the things that Westerners would consider to be ‘profoundly evil’ are no more than ‘profoundly *akusala*’ for Buddhists. This is because all human wrongdoing is essentially of the same type - all of it, regardless of its intensity, results from the same three flaws. There is no distinction between ‘a-moral bad behaviour’ and ‘immoral evil’ in Buddhism; hence the descriptive nature of Buddhist moral terminology. For Buddhists there is badness, but no evil as we understand it.

The second thing I wish to discuss is Buddhism’s relation to the body when it comes to ethics. This is a relatively minor and straightforward point, but I think it is important. The physical body (*rūpa*) is one of the five constituents (*khandha*), which constitute a person according to the Buddha.⁵

The four others are sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). For my immediate purposes, all that matters is that these four are psychological rather than physical - I will return to the constituents in due time. Now, the important thing to note is that *in no way* are the three flaws in which all wrong actions are rooted exclusively related to the body. Contrary to the traditional Western account of the corrupt, sinful flesh, which pollutes the pure, immaterial soul, Buddhism does not target the body as the seat of immorality.⁶ Of the four constituents, it is in fact the psychological formations (*sankhāra*), which are responsible for the three flaws. I will have much more to say about this shortly. For now, suffice it to say that the formations - derived as they are from primary nescience - afflict not only the body with the three flaws, but the three other psychological constituents as well.⁷ More precisely, the formations infect the entire cognitive apparatus, which is itself composed of the body together with sensation, perception and consciousness. The point is that body *and* mind together are prey to the bad mental states leading to wrong action. Immorality, then, is not a matter of 'pure soul vs. corrupt flesh,' but of the body being polluted, just like the psyche, by a deep-seated, self-perpetuating delusion.

2. The Psychological Meta-Ethics of the Buddha

As far as I can see, Buddhism's meta-ethics ultimately reduces to psychology.⁸ This is true in two ways. It is true in a technical sense, in so far as making a moral claim in Buddhism is tantamount to making a claim about an agent's psychology.⁹ It is also true in a very literal sense, in that what this psychological claim ultimately concerns is the agent's relation to the *psyche*, or *attan* ('soul' or 'self').¹⁰ Indeed, Buddhist moral psychology focuses on the degree to which the agent is mired in what I shall call the 'self-delusion.' 'Self-delusion' in the context of this paper means the delusion that there exists a deep self.

Several scholars recognize the relation between the nescience (*avijjā*) of the self-delusion - the primordial 'wrong view' - and bad action in Buddhism. Consider Walpola Rahula's striking statement of this Buddhist view:

According to the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine,' selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.¹¹

This is a very strong view. It is thus eminently surprising that virtually no work has been done on exactly how the relation between the self-delusion wrong view and wrong action is supposed to work. Part of the difficulty is that the Buddha never explicitly tells that the self-delusion is 'responsible' for wrong, *akusala* action, or how it is supposed to be. This comes out as an explicit view only in later Buddhism (the so called Mahāyāna).¹² But the Mahāyāna sometimes departs from early Buddhism in important ways. This might explain the reticence on the part of scholars of early Buddhism to dwell at any length on the relation between the wrong view of 'attan' and wrong action in early Buddhism. In laying too much emphasis on the self-delusion-wrong action relation there might be a risk of reading too much of the Mahāyāna into early Buddhism. In my opinion, however, the meta-ethics I am interested in here are very much *implicit* in the whole of early Buddhist literature. I will thus attempt in the following pages to begin filling this gap in scholarship on early Buddhist meta-ethics.

My first task is to present the Buddhist *anattan* (no-soul/self) doctrine. *Anattan* is the hallmark of Buddhist philosophy¹³ - it is the crux of Buddhism's critique of metaphysics (the *ātman* after all, stood for the Brahmin's great monistic Absolute), but also of its meta-ethics and ethics. *Contra* his Brahmanical contemporaries, the Buddha presented a bold reductionist account of personal identity. A person is composed of fluctuating and incessantly changing psychophysical streams categorized under the headings of the five psychophysical constituents (listed above). When it comes to the sense of 'I,' the truth of the matter is that continuity is mistaken for identity. In reality, there is no 'me' over and above the streams of psychophysical factors that 'I' am composed of; there is no substance underlying 'accidents,' to use Aristotle's terminology.¹⁴ But this pre-reflective sense of 'I' is not just a mere, inconsequential mistake which can be quickly corrected through analysis; rather, it is a deeply ingrained cognitive and affective delusion which is extremely difficult to up-root and affects one's entire psychology. This is obvious from the Buddha's description of his own perfected state in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. The Buddha describes his only true 'knowledge' as insight into the five self-less, impermanent constituents - into their arising and cessation - and thus as freedom from the egotism, egocentrism and arrogance associated to the cognitive-affective sense of 'I.'¹⁵ Buddhist insight (*paññā*) - the cognitive correlate of the perfected state of *nirvāṇa* -, then, consists precisely in the complete up-rooting of the self-delusion.

Building on the fact that part of what the perfected state of *nirvāna* involves is the up rooting of the self-delusion (an important form of *paññā*), I can now look at further descriptions of *nirvāṇa* to build my case on early Buddhist meta-ethics. At one point in the discourses, the Buddha claims that all bad mental states (*akusala dhamma*) (i.e., the three flaws and their

derivatives) are “rooted in nescience, conjoined to nescience” (*avijjāmūlaka avijjāsamosarala*).¹⁶ But what is this nescience? Indeed, *avijjā* is glossed in many different ways at various places in the discourses. Can I really assume, then, that the nescience at play here really is the self-delusion itself? I believe there are good reasons for thinking it is. Consider the following definition of *nirvāṇa*: “*Nirvāṇa* is the destruction of the greed (*rāga*), the destruction of anger (*dosa*) and the destruction of delusion (*moha*).”¹⁷ *Nirvāṇa*, in other words, corresponds to the destruction of the three flaws. I can now construct the following syllogism:

- P1 All bad states are rooted in some form of nescience.
 P2 *Nirvāṇa* involves the definitive uprooting of the self-delusion nescience.
 P3 *Nirvāṇa* corresponds to the destruction of the three roots of bad states (and actions).
 Conclusion: The type of nescience in which all bad states are rooted is the self-delusion nescience.

This is what the later Mahāyāna interpreters probably saw, leading them to make the straightforward claim that all bad actions are rooted in the self-delusion. My reconstruction of the early Buddhist view is also corroborated by the Buddha’s description of insight (*paññā*) and morality (*sīla*) as wholly complementary and mutually supportive.¹⁸ As Keown explains, “*paññā* is the cognitive realization of *anattan* while *sīla* is its affective realization.”¹⁹ When it comes to the bad actions of ‘fools,’ then, the early Buddhist view is that the three flaws, which prompt such actions, derive from the self-delusion.

Now, I can turn to a more interesting question of how is this supposed to work. How and why does one’s natural tendency to think in terms of an enduring, self-identical ‘I’ lead to the negative states of mind responsible for human wrongdoing? To answer this question, we must turn to the fourth constituent, who I mentioned above when discussing the Buddhist relation to the body - formations (*saṅkhāra*). It will come as no surprise that, in several key passages,²⁰ the formations are described as the direct result of nescience.²¹ As Sue Hamilton points out, the constituent of formations is the only one that is not directly and necessarily involved in the cognitive process according to Buddhist epistemology.²² All of the other four constituents - the body, sensations, (ap) perceptions and consciousness - are necessarily involved in the cognitive process, but not the formations. In the framework of Buddhist epistemology, what these formations correspond to are *affective responses of like or dislike to what is cognized*. These psychological formations, then, are responsible for the arising of the two affective flaws:²³ greed (like) and anger (dislike). What is more, the formations are directly related to the self-delusion in that they invariably imply the notion of an ‘I’

and give rise to self-referential attitudes:²⁴ ‘I like this; this is *mine*; this is to *my* advantage; I dislike this; I do not desire this; this is to *my* disadvantage, etc.’ It is no coincidence, then, if *nirvāna* - which is intimately connected to both the insight of ‘no-self’ and the destruction of the three flaws - is also defined as “the quieting of all formations” (*sabbasakhārasamatha*).²⁵ Indeed, the self-delusion, formations and the flaws stand and fall together; the self-delusion gives rise to the flaws *via* the formations, which, by infiltrating our cognitive apparatus, infect body and mind with a deluded selfishness and egocentrism. The self-delusion results in immoral behaviour in so far as it pollutes our very attitude to the world so that everything we cognize or perceive is seen and evaluated in relation to an ‘I’ which doesn’t actually exist. It is this profound, in-built egoism that is responsible for the flaws, and thus for all of human harmful behaviour.

Now, one of the reasons egoism is so difficult to uproot is that these formations are not explicitly conscious mental events. The selfish attitudes that the formations give rise to be mostly pre-reflective and sub-conscious. In fact, the term *sankhāra* also translates as ‘dispositions.’ The Buddha also speaks of deep-set biases and proclivities which he called *anusayas*, or ‘latent dispositions,’ and explicitly linked to bad states and actions.²⁶ Of all these latent dispositions, that which is the deepest and most difficult to dissolve is said to be the very tendency to think ‘I am’ in the sense of ‘I am a substantial self.’²⁷ So the *anusayas* are sub-conscious traces of the self-delusion that congeal in deep-set proclivities. The Buddha, in other words, had something of a theory of the subconscious. One’s take on the world is in many ways determined by the deeply engrained, self-perpetuating dispositions and biases that the self-delusion gives rise to via the formations. What this notion of *anusaya* suggests, finally, is that the deep-set psychological ramifications of the self-delusion are far from being easy to remove. It is not enough just to think ‘Oh, yes, there is no deep ‘I’ beneath (or above) the psycho-physical continuities that constitute my being.’²⁸ On the contrary, uprooting the profound pre-reflective nescience at the basis of bad mental states and wrong action requires a great effort. And as long as we remain under the sway of this deeply entrenched wrong view, we will continue, in one way or another, to harm both others and ourselves.

Before I end this section, I wish to tie these results on the nescience-wrong action relation to what I said earlier on the Buddhist ethics. It has perhaps become clearer why Buddhist moral vocabulary is descriptive and, in a sense, naturalist. ‘Immoral’ people are just fools, not sinners or evildoers. They fail to realize that there is no ‘I,’ that there is no ontological grounding for their petty selfishness. ‘Evil action,’ then, is just bad action, deluded action. In this sense, there are bad people and actions, but no ‘evil’ per se in the Judeo-Christian sense. Second, ‘immorality’ bears no special relation to the body because the mind, just as much as the body, is affected/infected by

the self-delusion. This occurs via the formations which prompt affective, egocentric responses to what is cognized and which congeal as deep-seated, subconscious tendencies.

In summa, the Buddhist view seems to be that as one becomes emancipated from the self-delusion, one becomes less and less emotionally attached and obsessed about things and increasingly concerned with the welfare of others.²⁹ *Anattan*, as Brian P. Harvey writes, “undercuts selfishness by undercutting the very notion of a substantial self.”³⁰ Human ‘evil,’ according to the Buddha, can only really end when the self-delusion is removed. I personally find this view quite appealing; though I readily acknowledge that proper philosophical investigation must be carried out before any definitive judgment can be cast.

3. Two Objections

I wish to conclude this discussion, then, by removing two obstacles that stand in the way of proper philosophical engagement with Buddhist philosophy, and more specifically with the particular feature of Buddhist thought I have been discussing. The first objection is simple and easily dealt with. It runs as follows: ‘Buddhism is committed to the view that there is a natural system of retribution for moral and immoral action (*karman*) and that beings go through countless rounds of rebirth, the specificities of each birth being determined through the law of *karma* by one’s previous actions. This is a religious, un-philosophical view that is far removed from modern common sense. Hence, Buddhism is merely religion - not to say superstition- and ought to be excluded from the scope of philosophical discussion.’ The first thing I would like to point out is that by those standards Plato should also be ignored by philosophers. The reason Plato is not is that many of his (perhaps more interesting) views are logically independent of his views on metempsychosis. Similarly, we should seek to find out just how important *karman* and reincarnation really are to key features of Buddhist philosophy. As Mark Siderits points out, *karman* and reincarnation, after all, were just part of ‘common sense’ in Ancient India.³¹ They were simply taken for granted. What is more, when it comes to the key ideas that concern us here - the reductionism of the *anattan* doctrine and the psychological relation between the self-delusion and wrong action - *karman* and reincarnation play no role at all. That wrongdoing and harmful action is rooted in a misleading sense of ‘I’ is logically independent of any view concerning reincarnation and the law of *karman*.³² So the first objection I have considered can be easily discarded. There seems to be no good reason Buddhist meta-ethics should be ignored in philosophical circles.

The second issue I wish to deal with concerns Schopenhauer’s relation to Buddhism. Many philosophers today naïvely assume that what one finds in Schopenhauer is, roughly speaking, a Europeanized form of

Buddhism. Schopenhauer's philosophy, however, is particularly unpalatable to contemporary philosophical tastes. Many thus conclude that there is nothing much of interest in the tradition that had such a strong (and perhaps bad) influence on Schopenhauer's thinking. But are the Buddha and Schopenhauer really so similar? Consider what Schopenhauer has to say on meta-ethics. Schopenhauer describes egoism as the natural standpoint³³ and belief in the substantial, independent existence of the self as an illusion.³⁴ He also argues that it is this pre-reflective belief in the 'I', which is responsible for immoral action. There is no doubt that this at least sounds Buddhist. But it is important to keep in mind that Schopenhauer's views on ethics are actually grounded in a bold and extremely non-Buddhistic metaphysical monism. According to Schopenhauer, the more one mistakenly sees a difference between self and other, the more one is cruel and wicked, and the more one realizes that this difference is illusory; the more one feels compassion and acts with benevolence and love.³⁵ The emphasis is not on the fact that there is no such thing as 'self' or *attan*, but on the underlying metaphysical oneness of all things. Following a Kantian framework, Schopenhauer argues that plurality only holds at the level of spatiotemporal phenomena, while at the non-spatiotemporal metaphysical level of the *Ding an sich* everything is one.³⁶ So, for Schopenhauer, it is not just that there is no 'I,' but that that you and I and all of us are really just one. The more one sees through the illusory veil of plurality, the more virtuous one becomes; the more one takes apparent plurality and distinctions for real, the more morally depraved one becomes.

Now, it is important to see just how un-Buddhist such a system actually is. If anything, Schopenhauer's great 'one' corresponds to the Brahmanical *ātman*, which the Buddha rejected. His claims on the illusion (*māyā*) of plurality are also reminiscent of Brahmanical thinking, not of Buddhism. The Buddha had no interest in metaphysics whatsoever and never argued for metaphysical monism. It is also important to recognize that there is an enormous difference between saying that there is no abiding self, ego or soul and saying that we are all the same great 'one.' There might be a self-*delusion* for the Buddha, but there is no 'I am different from you' *illusion*. Buddhist thought, then, cannot simply be rejected on the grounds that it bears some superficial resemblance to Schopenhauer's thought. On the contrary, it is my view that the Buddhist views I have presented in this paper are worthy of serious philosophical attention and investigation. Who knows, perhaps there is something to the idea that human wrongdoing is rooted in a deep-set pre-reflective mistake concerning the nature of personhood?

Notes

¹ I bracket the phrase ‘human evil’ because, as I shall soon argue, it is not clear that the word ‘evil’ is appropriate in the Buddhist context. By ‘human evil,’ then, I mean human wrongdoing, or immoral behaviour.

² D Keown irritatingly mistranslates *akusala* as ‘evil’ to conform to common Western moral vocabulary, which I think is both philologically incorrect and philosophically misleading (*The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, London, MacMillan, 1992). See B P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 42–43 and L S Cousins, ‘Good or Skilful? *Kusala* in Canon and Commentary’ in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 3, 1996, p. 156 for further discussion of the terms *kusala* and *akusala*.

³ See, for instance, *Aguttara Nikāya I*, H Frowde (ed), London, Pāli Text Society, 1885, III.2–9.

⁴ This point is emphasized by H Blankleder and W Fletcher in their introduction to Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamaka Avatāra* (‘Translator’s Introduction’ in *Introduction to the Middle Way: Candrakīrti’s Madhyamakāvātāra*, London, Shambala, 2002, p. 17).

⁵ This central doctrine is the second the Buddha presented to his first disciples. See *Vinaya Piṭṭaka I*, H Oldenberg (ed), London, Pāli Text Society, 1879, VI.38–46.

⁶ A superficial reading of some Buddhist texts might give this impression, however. This is because the body - which decays over time and constantly produces various fluids - was a prime object of meditation when it came to developing insight into the truth of universal impermanence. For a thorough examination of Buddhism’s relation to the body, see S Hamilton, *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism*, Oxford, Luzac Oriental, 2002, pp. 169–193.

⁷ See S Hamilton, 2002, p. 176.

⁸ P De Silva has noted that “a close study of Buddhist ethics would show that it betrays a significant link with psychology.” (*An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, London, MacMillan, 1979, p. 3). My claim is that it is Buddhist meta-ethics which is distinctly psychological, in every sense of the term.

⁹ What this implies is that Buddhism’s meta-ethical position, when mapped onto the Western framework, is realist and naturalist.

¹⁰ I use the Pāli *attan* rather than the Sanskrit *ātman* because the vast majority of the texts cited are Pāli. I will use *ātman* only when referring to Brahmanism, whose language is Sanskrit. I stick to the Sanskrit *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *nibbāna*), however, because it is a word commonly known in the West in its Sanskrit form. The same goes for *karman* (Pāli: *kamma*).

¹¹ W Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Bedford, Gordon Fraser Gallery Limited, 1967, p. 51. Cf. S Hamilton, *Early Buddhism: A New Approach - The I of the Beholder*, Richmond, Curzon, 2001, pp. 209–210; H Blankleder and W Fletcher, 2002, pp.14–15; and B P Harvey, 2000, p. 59.

¹² See Candrakīrti (6th century C.E.), who claims, in his *Madhyamaka Avatāra* - now extant only in Tibetan -, that all the flaws and thus all immoral action stems from a mistaken belief in a deep ‘I’ (*Introduction to the Middle-Way: Candrakīrti’s Madhyamakāvatāra*, H Blankleder and W Fletcher (trans.), London, Shambala, VI.120 & 164). This is also obvious in Nāgārjuna’s (3rd century C.E.) analysis of *ātman* (see, especially, *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, J W de Jong (ed), Madras, Adyar Library and Research Center, 1977, XVIII.3–6).

¹³ D Arnold goes so far as to say that no-self is the philosophical “commitment whose elaboration and defence is arguably what all Buddhist philosophy concerns in the end” (*Buddhists, Brahmins and Belief*, New-York, Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 118). Cf. A K Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1970, p. 120.

¹⁴ This view is very much akin to that presented by D Hume in his 1740 *Treatise Concerning Human Nature* (Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 2001, pp. 436–457) and, more recently, by D Parfit (*Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984). Nietzsche also defends a version of the Western no-self view (See *Jenseits von Gute und Böse* in G Colli and M Montinari (eds), *Nietzsche Werke*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1977, ‘Vorrede’, §3, as well as a host of other passages in the *Nachgelassene Fragmente*.)

¹⁵ *Majjhima Nikāya I*, V Treckner (ed), London, Pāli Text Society, 1957, LXXII.

¹⁶ *Sayutta Nikāya II*, L Féer and R Davids (eds), London, Pāli Text Society, 1886, XX.IX.1.4: *eva eva bhikkhave ye keci akusalā dhammā sabbe te avijjāmūlakā avijjāmosaraā /*

¹⁷ *Sayutta Nikāya IV*, L Féer and R Davids (eds), London, Pāli Text Society, 1890, XXXVIII.IV.1.3: *yo kho avūso rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo ida vuccati nibbānan ti /*

¹⁸ *Dīgha Nikāya I*, T W R Davids and J E Carpenter (eds), London, Pāli Text Society, 1890, IV.22: “For, Brahmin, insight is purified by virtue and virtue is purified by insight. Where there is virtue, there is insight. Where there is insight, there is virtue. Insight is endowed with virtue and virtue is endowed with insight.” (*sīlaparidhotā hi brāhmaa paññā paññāparidhota sīla yathha sīl tattha paññā yathha paññā tattha sīla sīlavato paññā paññāvato sīla /*)

¹⁹ D Keown, op. cit., p. 112.

²⁰ I am referring to the doctrine of dependent origination (*paiccasamuppāda*) - which I unfortunately have no time to delve into here. In short, dependent origination is the causal framework which the Buddha presents to account for the arising (rather than *existence*) of ‘beings’ as an alternative to the metaphysical *ātman* theory of the Brahmans. The initial cause of our appearing in this world of sorrow and suffering (*sasāra*) is said to be *avijjā* (nescience). *Nirvāa*, which is the opposite of *sasāra*, comes about when one puts a definitive end to all nescience - as mentioned above. It is on the basis of this nescience that the formations arise. The doctrine of dependent origination can be found at several places in the discourses of the Buddha. See, for instance, *Vinaya Piaka I*, op. cit., I.1–2; *Sayutta Nikāya II*, op. cit., XII.17.2 and XXII.22.4.

²¹ One could argue that the *sakhāras* mentioned in the teaching on the five constituents and the *sakhāras* that feature in the teaching of dependent origination are not the same. I think this is wrong. Following S Hamilton (2002, pp. 70–71), I believe there are very good reasons to think that they refer to the same thing in both contexts.

²² See S Hamilton, 2002, p. 176.

²³ The case of delusion (*moha*) - which is cognitive - is more complicated. In my view, the fundamental delusion must be the self-delusion itself.

²⁴ Such self-referentiality would fall under the rubric of the cognitive flaw - delusion.

²⁵ See, for instance, *Aguttara Nikāya I*, op. cit., XXXII.1 and *Sayutta Nikāya I*, L Féer and R Davids (eds), London, Pāli Text Society, 1884, VI.1.1.3.

²⁶ In the *Suttanipāta*, a collection of Buddhist verses, it is said that s/he in whom no traces of the *anusayas* remain is free from the bad roots (D Andersen and H Smith (eds), London, Pāli Text Society, 1913, I.I.14: *yassānusayā na santi keci / mūlā akusalā samāhatāse /*).

²⁷ Consider the story of the mendicant Khemaka, who had purified himself of all *akusala* states, but who was still prey to the *anusaya* leading him to think ‘I am’ (*asmī ti*) (*Sayutta Nikāya III*, L Féer and R Davids, London, Pāli Text Society, 1888, XXII.IV.7).

²⁸ See *Madhyamaka Avatāra*, op. cit., VI.141–142.

²⁹ Cf. D Parfit’s remarks on the ethical consequences of his reductionist views on personal identity:

When I believed that my existence was such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. [...] I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the life of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my life, and more concerned about the lives of

other people (*Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 281).

³⁰ B P Harvey, 2000, p. 36.

³¹ M Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, p. 10.

³² The Buddha certainly tried to make such an account fit into the framework of *karman* and reincarnation by claiming, for instance, that it is the formations which cause one to accrue karmic demerit (*pāpa*) and merit (*puñña*) and thus to be reborn. Strictly speaking, however, the psychological account of moral behaviour presented by the Buddha can be true independent of the truth of *karman* or reincarnation.

³³ A Schopenhauer, *Über das Fundament der Moral* in P Deussen (ed), *Sämtliche Werke*, München, R Piper and Company, 1911, §14: The principal and fundamental incentive in men, as in the animal, is egoism. [...] Therefore, as a rule, all of his actions spring from egoism. (*Die Haupt- und Grundtriebsteder im Menschen wie im Thiere ist der Egoismus. [...] Daher entspringen, in der Regel, alle seine Handlungen aus dem Egoismus.*) Cf. A Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I* in P Deussen (ed), *Sämtliche Werke*, München, R Piper and Company, 1911, §61.

³⁴ See A Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I*, op. cit., §63 and *Über das Fundament der Moral*, op. cit., §22. Here, as in several other places, he refers to the illusion of plurality with the Brahmanical term *māyā* (illusion). Indeed, Schopenhauer was a very avid reader of early Indological works.

³⁵ The relation between compassion and seeing through the veil of *māyā* is very explicitly stated towards the end of *Über das Fundament der Moral*, op. cit., at §22. That between evil-doing and being deeply enveloped by the ‘veil of *māyā*’ (*der Schleier der Maja*) is presented at *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I*, op. cit., §65.

³⁶ Schopenhauer’s argument for monism from Kant’s transcendental aesthetic can be found at *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I*, op. cit., §23. The argument is straight-forward and quite compelling (as long as one accepts that space and time are just forms of the intellect). Schopenhauer argues that plurality only makes sense in spatiotemporal terms and so that the Kantian *Ding and sich* must be singular, and not plural, since it is beyond the categories of space and time.

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Acedia's Avatars in the Medieval World: Medical, Religious and Literary Perspectives (The Portuguese Case)

Ana Maria Machado

Abstract

In this paper I aim at studying the representation of the acedia in Portuguese medieval literature focusing mainly on hagiography and on moral didactic texts. I will begin by analyzing the concept of acedia, how it relates to such sins as sadness and sloth through the Middle Ages, how it links to the medical approach and how it is reflected in the narrative literature.

The ascetic Evagrius Ponticus is the first to identify acedia as an evil thought in a list of eight companions. Cassiano and Gregory the Great inherited his list and made some changes to the now-called vices, due to their different contexts and objectives. In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas established acedia's meaning and reintroduced the word in the index of the seven deadly sins. What prevails is the idea of a universal moral disorder, disconnected from bodily symptoms, despite the fortune of humoral theories. Nevertheless, literary representations did not always follow those discussions. In Portuguese late medieval copies and translations of the Lives of the Desert Fathers, the exotic word acedia is most of the times replaced by synonymous or periphrasis, even though the situation or sin are clearly *acedious*.

The *aggiornamento* can be seen only in the 15th century's *Leal Conselheiro*. In a first set of chapters its author, King Duarte, equates the spiritual sense of acedia with the medical interpretation of melancholic humour as well as its semantic links with the Portuguese word *saudade*. He adds his personal experience on how he obtained a cure and concludes that melancholy was in fact a sin. At the same time, King Duarte replaces acedia with sloth, a very laic conversion and a sign of the new times.

The values of acedia, classical explanations of melancholic humour and its bonds with today's depression are quite significant in Portuguese medieval literature.

Key Words: Acedia, Sloth, Melancholy, Sin, Depression, Middle Ages, Portuguese Literature, Apothegms, Hagiography, *Leal Conselheiro*.

The term '*acedia*' has now almost completely disappeared from everyday vocabulary. Consequently, the use of it at a conference on evil will

inevitably evoke a remote past, when spiritual ill-being, resulting from tedium and anxiety, was considered a serious threat to human salvation.

Based on a corpus consisting of the desert apothegms and hagiographies (copied and translated in Portuguese libraries) and the *Leal Conselheiro*, a work of moral education by the Portuguese king Dom Duarte (1391-1438), I will describe the way in which the vice or sin¹ of *acedia* was conceived at two crucial moments: (1) in the religious treatises of the Eastern hermits, with desert literature (1.1) as its most expressive manifestation; and (2) by Gregory the Great, and later, in the scholastic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. Then, (3) I will go on to examine how, in the medical world, the melancholic humour was considered to display symptoms very similar in nature to those covered by the religious concept of *acedia*. In the last part (4), I will describe a case that is unusual in that it links the ancient (though still active) religious tradition with a personal account of melancholy experienced by the Portuguese king. Finally, I will conclude (5) with some observations on the relationship between *acedia* and the modern concept of depression.

I will argue that by the time *acedia* had almost been forgotten and replaced by sloth, Dom Duarte merged it with melancholy. From his point of view, the melancholic humour turned out to be a sin, despite his considerable knowledge about medicine.

1. The concept of *Acedia* in religious treatises and desert literature

In his *Treatise on the Practical Life*, a work designed to transmit knowledge acquired from the Desert Fathers, Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345-c. 400) describes the soul's route to purification. This involves overcoming eight demons that assail the hermit, including that of *acedia*. Here we have the first systematic formulation of what would later become one of the seven deadly sins. Despite the affinities between *acedia* and the Stoic vice of 'neglect', not to mention its presence in Origen (185-232), the fact that it was included in this grouping was something new. The demon of *acedia* is presented through the effects that it produces. Likened to the *daemonia meridiano* of Psalm 91, it provokes in the monk a sense of timelessness, which causes him to stare fixedly at the window or prompts him to leave his cell in the hope of a change or merely to catch sight of a brother. He feels an aversion to the place where he lives, to the life he leads and to manual labour, and begins to have doubts about the value of charity, as well as feelings of having been abandoned. He is attracted by the idea of seeking out another place and is haunted by memories of his former life, which exacerbate the hardship of asceticism and tempt him to flee. The danger of this vice is such that it is expressly observed that "No other demon follows on immediately after this one"².

With Cassian (c. 360-c.435), this most unstable of vices moves out of the desert into the monastery³ and simultaneously becomes westernized. The

original formulation is maintained, although it is now more detailed in the implications that it has for one's daily life and relationship with companions. Following his conference with the Abbot Serapion, Cassian proceeds to list the vices that arise from the principle ones, which, in the case of *acedia*, are laziness, sleepiness, rudeness, restlessness, roving about, instability of mind and body, talkativeness and curiosity⁴.

There are slight differences between these two authors; in particular, Cassian insists more on the seductiveness of social activities, probably as a result of the monastic context, which of course is more propitious to communication than the hermitage.

Representations of *acedia* in eremitic literature and the success of the *Vitae Patrum* in the west will have perpetuated an awareness of this vice and its prevention or cure, at least in the monastic context. The similarity between doctrinal formulations and the hagiographies and apothegms of the Desert Fathers, who were its most eloquent witnesses, warrants further illustration⁵. In medieval Portugal, this oriental literature acquired an important position, through Latin copies and, to a lesser extent, translations into Portuguese⁶. In the light of research carried out, priority will be given here to the Codices of Alcobaca XV/367 (12th century) and CCLXXXIII/BNL 454 (end 12th century-beginning 13th). Despite the time span separating these texts from their originals, they are nevertheless very faithful to the Latin translations. The scarce and partial versions existing in Portuguese refer only twice to manifestations of *acedia*. This could be interpreted as a loss of sensitivity to what had been the eremitic sin *par excellence* at a time (14th and 16th centuries) when *acedia* had already been supplanted by its rival 'sloth'.

The Latin and Portuguese texts we received describe the monk's condition as being one of constant restlessness⁷ and temptation⁸ (although serenity is also presented strategically as the conquest of immobility). It is noticeable that, although the vice is clearly present, it is rarely mentioned by name, but instead tends to be represented through its symptoms. We could perhaps deduce from this that the term never fully entered the Latin vocabulary.

The *Life of St Anthony* by St Athanasius (c. 295-373) is the only text in which the Latin translation makes use of the term. It does so in the context of a list of symptoms of harmful thoughts, all of which coincide with the hyperonymic conceptualization of 'vice' and its hyponym '*acedia*'⁹.

In one of the saint's temptations, the description of *acedia* is so impressive that the episode is evoked pedagogically as the example to follow¹⁰. Goaded by boredom and by confused thoughts, the saint begs help from God. Some time later, he arises and sees someone like himself who is seated and working, from time to time getting up to pray. The angel of the Lord, sent to correct him, tells him that if he proceeds in this way he will be saved. In the Portuguese translation, the temptation is imputed to a second

personage, who requests clarification from the saint. This reveals the increasing tendency to idealize saints, particularly in vernacular translations, which actively resist representing them with failings of this type¹¹.

In the apothegms, the sense of *acedia* is amplified and often expressed through the radical injunction "Remain in your cell"¹². Hence, the error of sinful thoughts is countered by the practice of constant patience in the cell¹³. That is to say, the *pervagatio mentis* is perceived as a lesser evil, provided that the monk does not abandon his own space¹⁴.

The shame associated with *acedia* leads some disciples to reject suggestions that they move out of their cell, after it has been built, for fear of being misinterpreted. However, for the abbot, who is indifferent to the possibility of scandal, it signifies merely detachment¹⁵. As *Vitae Patrum* are made up of sentences and short stories related by the monks, it is natural that the demands made on the hermits were not received in a uniform fashion; consequently, they oscillate between radicalism and tolerance, opening up the way for a blurring of boundaries.

In this corpus, *acedia* is taken as the starting point in only one narrative, where it is responsible for the monk's perdition, proving that *fuga mundi* was not an option for everyone. Moreover, in the apothegms, when the narrative expands, this vice appears linked to lust, although the two are far apart in causes and derivations. The same occurs with the sin of pride, as we can see in the *Life of St John of Lykopolis*. This vice leads to deterioration into *acedia*, unleashing sensual desires in a whirl of thoughts that would propel the hermit out into the world were it not for the support provided by the brotherhood, even while he is wandering in the desert¹⁶. On the other hand, in another episode from the same *Life*, the outcome for the monk, now overcome by lust, is fatal; despair of salvation culminates with return to the world, the utopia towards which *acedia* tends¹⁷. Thus, we are presented with a hierarchy of sinfulness, in which flight into the world constitutes the last stage of perdition, much more serious than negligence, inertia and restless thoughts.

There is a tension between the inner temptation to flee and the urge to escape those that seek out the hermit to learn from him, which the abbot, a disinterested critic and an inner voice try to overcome. This is then, an unstable vice, oscillating between tedium and the proliferation of projects that invade the monk. This opposition between hypo- and hyperactivity persists, in different forms, over time.

2. The concept of *Acedia* in Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas

When Gregory the Great took up Cassian's list of vices, he did so in a context, which, despite being monastic, offered opportunities for a more universal application. This is illustrated by the fact that *acedia* is now omitted from the list, having merged with sorrow. Instead, it is envy, the new social

vice, that prevails, as it undermines community relations. The suppression of *acedia* marked a substantial alteration in the target public. Nevertheless, three of its derivations, in Cassian's formulation, are in Gregory shared between sorrow (torpor in relation to precepts and a roving mind) and avarice (dissatisfaction).

Throughout these treatises and narratives, *acedia* is characterised by what Wenzel describes as a lack of definition, falling somewhere between anxiety and indolence, tedium and sloth, uneasiness and sleepiness¹⁸.

Despite having been formally erased from the list of deadly sins, *acedia* continued to represent a danger for monks, particularly through the influence of Cassian, one of the readings recommended by St. Benedict and Cassiodorus, and the importance that Benedictine monasticism had on penitential practices in Europe¹⁹.

With Thomas Aquinas (1225 or 1227-1274), *acedia* reappears in the place of sorrow. Following Gregory and Isidore of Seville (the only authors referred to in this respect), Aquinas analyses the origins and effects of this evil. Sorrow for the divine good is caused by antagonism between the desires of the soul and of the flesh; those that allow themselves to be governed by the latter experience spirituality as a constraint and long to reject the cause of their sorrow and give themselves over to bodily pleasures. The various phases of the flight from God coincide with the vices derived from *acedia*: hopelessness, belligerence, torpor, rancour, malice, and uneasiness of the mind. When the soul is dissipated in all directions, it becomes restless, and as a consequence, curiosity and talkativeness develop. As for the body, its inability to remain in one place is described as nervousness, and there is instability as regards places and projects. Although Aquinas does not neglect some of the outer manifestations of this sin, his formulation clearly focuses upon the internal spiritual dimension, going beyond an oscillation between the *acedia* of the body (understood as sloth) and the *acedia* of the soul (i.e. sorrow)²⁰.

From the 13th century, with the reformist attitude adopted by the Church, the obligation to take annual confession established by the 4th Lateran Council (1215), the pastoral activities of the mendicant orders, and the subsequent surge in catechisms and penances, the sin of *acedia* became relatively familiar to the laity as one of (what were now known as) the seven deadly sins. However, the meaning was now closer to the bodily sense of *acedia*. Since Carolingian culture, there had been a stress upon *acedia vel ociositas* (Jonas of Orleans m. 843 or 844), with the sense of indolence or sloth. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, this conception was taken up again, and sloth became one of the vices most used to describe the sin of the laymen. Indeed, the universalisation of *acedia* as a vice was paralleled by a new value attributed to work and to man's role as social being²¹. Hence, this was the dimension that prevailed, as is attested by the present day catechism, which

maintains equivalence between sloth and *acedia*. However, the second term has fallen into disuse in everyday language²².

3. **Melancholic humour in the medieval world**

During this period, there was little dialogue between the religious-didactic discourse on *acedia* and the medical writings of the time. On the margins of this theological reflection (and long before it), natural philosophy and medicine had attempted to explore the origins of melancholy in different ways. It was Hippocrates, or his son Polybius, that was responsible for the theory that related the pathology of the humours to cosmological speculations. The four humours considered essential to human nature (the sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic), produced by blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm respectively, were thus affected by the four seasons of the year and distinguished by the doctrine of qualities. In this case, black bile (the etymological root of the term 'melancholy')²³ was described as cold and dry, like autumn. As a disorder, it was characterised especially by mood alterations; later, there would also be physical and mental repercussions.

With this particularity, it moved into the sphere of psychology, as the main symptoms were constant anxiety and weariness²⁴. The idea of pathological melancholy was important for the development of the concept, both from the point of view of moral philosophy and therapeutic medicine. The Stoics considered it to be a serious and dangerous disease²⁵. In medicine, Galen (129-216) and the Arab doctors of the 9th and 10th centuries, including Avicenna (980-1037), developed the doctrine of Rufus of Ephesus (2nd century AD), establishing its symptoms as depression, misanthropy, assailment by all kinds of desires and eccentricities, unreasonable sorrow or euphoria, a propensity for phobias and manias – that is to say, a long list of psychological disturbances, some of which bear affinities with *acedia*. Despite this, *acedia* and melancholy are only occasionally extended beyond their respective domains.

4. ***Acedia* and melancholy in the *Leal Conselheiro* of Dom Duarte**

Returning now to the Portuguese corpus, there is very little information as regards the bibliography used in the field of medicine. In the universities, Aristotle, Galen and Hippocrates were taught²⁶, while King Duarte's library contained books by Avicenna ("*livros Davicena*")²⁷. Isidore of Seville also requires a mention, as he reflected upon both the philosophical-religious and medical approaches to the issue, though separately. This legacy common to the medieval western world notably includes Petrus Hispanus, Portuguese author of medical works in the 13th century, and an important divulger of Aristotle and Arab medicine in the west.

In medieval literature, the most interesting Portuguese case concerns the monarch, Dom Duarte and his *Leal Conselheiro*, not so much for the

syncretism of doctrines on sin, but rather for his critical description of his own experience of melancholy. In this “guide to applied moral philosophy”²⁸, the coexistence of different versions of the deadly or capital sins (both as regards number and content) suggests that, in the conventional culture of the era, the boundaries between many of these sins were blurred, in the absence of rigid doctrine on the issue. His reflection stretches over three thematic sections of different lengths, each taking a different perspective. The focus is on Cassian and Gregory the Great²⁹, but authors such as Isidore of Seville, Hugh of Saint Victor, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas are also taken into account.

I will focus here on the first sequence of chapters dealing with nine sins (pride, vainglory, envy, wrath, sorrow, idleness, avarice, lust and gluttony) for various reasons. *Acedia* appears in the guise of sloth (the more appropriate name for idleness)³⁰ and is characterised by the “procrastination of deeds to be done”, a “lack of devotion”, “disgust with life” and “excessive repose”³¹. Maintaining its pre-Aquinas ambivalence. The greatest development in relation to the texts mentioned up to now lies in the replacement of *acedia* with melancholy. In fact, in the chapters immediately preceding this sequence, Dom Duarte connects the vice of sorrow, which is deliberately presented in Cassian’s terms³², with its “offspring”, which includes, after “*saudade*” (a form of yearning considered to be specifically Portuguese), the “disconcerted disposition, the true disorder of the melancholic humour”³³. In the Portuguese medieval world, this appears to be the first occurrence of a physical explanation for a specific sin, although, given the development of sorrow and idleness, and considering the descriptions of symptoms, melancholy is perhaps closer to *acedia*, even when it is verbally disguised as sloth. The humoral explanation appears to be relatively recent, because, after referring to “the sin of sorrow which proceeds from the disconcerted will”, he adds “which is today considered in most cases to be a disorder of the melancholic humour”³⁴. This adaptation to a new terminology illustrates the extent to which the new kind of medically sanctioned knowledge was already widespread. From the symptomatological perspective, however, it is not new, except perhaps for the identification of the cause of his own “despair” in a sudden excess of work, which took him away from the outdoor pursuits that he was used to, and also in the horrors of the plague that was devastating Lisbon. The king thus saw himself as prevented from “experiencing legitimate enjoyment”, in a process of gradually developing sorrow. As Avicenna argues in the *Canon of Medicine* (1564), these conditions were enough to alter an individual’s mood, even if the melancholic humour was not dominant in his temperament³⁵. However, when “the grace of God” granted him the “knowledge that it was an infirmity and that all wrong care was temptation from the enemy”, he himself sought a cure that did not clash with Christian morality. Melancholy was thus transformed into a sin³⁶ and Dom Duarte, and, understanding the advantages of assisting

his sick mother, dispensed with the help of physicians. With his pain attenuated, he gradually started to experience “feelings of pleasure and enjoyment” when he was out “on the hillside hunting” and in conversations with friends, and by abandoning solitude.

5. *Acedia* and the modern concept of depression

The clear similarity between melancholy and moral *acedia* has interested many thinkers, philosophers and doctors. Jackson sees in *acedia* something more than depression or a synonym of melancholy³⁷; Irvine likens it to the *ennui* (spleen, saturnine melancholy, etc) of poets, artists and intellectuals³⁸, while Lauand relates it to the causes of depression³⁹, or more precisely, like Daly, to dysthymia (a light and prolonged depressive state that excludes mania and euphoria)⁴⁰. These precise technical distinctions, resulting from the development of psychiatry, show just how sophisticated were the anthropological and medical intuitions of the past, even more so given the lack of technical methods of diagnosis.

In the specific case of Dom Duarte's cure, the psychiatrist Fusswerk-Fursay considers it an example of “creditivty”, an indispensable component of the cure for neurosis. As regards both the obsessive aspect (which Dom Duarte suffered from in relation to death) and the delirious, the patient has to be fully convinced that a particular solution will work, for this will set off psychic dynamics that will lead him to a new state of health⁴¹.

From this brief exploration, we can conclude that psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychiatry had precursors in medieval reflections on *acedia* and melancholy. *Acedia* differs from depression as regards the moral responsibility that was attributed to the individual sufferer in the past. Today, the concept of guilt has almost entirely disappeared with “the notion that all acts, processes and mental dispositions have specific neuronal correlates”⁴². Indeed, in many cases, these insufficiencies are no longer imputed to individual freedom but to disorders of the organic material of which man is made. Once more, this is a field in which the theological domain overlaps with the psychoneurological.

Notes

¹ These terms are not always used with precision and are today often taken as synonyms, just as they were in many medieval treatises. R. Daly, ‘Before Depression: The Medieval Vice of Acedia’, *Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes*, vol. 70, 1, 2007 <<http://www.atypon-link.com/GPI/doi/abs/10.1521/psyc.2007.70.1.30>>. A. Machado *A representação do pecado na hagiografia medieval. Heranças de uma*

espiritualidade eremítica. Coimbra, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 2006, *passim*.

² <http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm>. Evagrius Ponticus, *Traité pratique ou le moine*, A. Guillaumont and C. Guillaumont (eds.), t. II, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971, p. 527.

³ C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio, *Histoire des péchés capitaux au Moyen Age*, Paris, Éditions Flammarion, 2003, p. 128.

⁴ J. Cassian, *Conférences*, t. I, E. Pichery (ed.), Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1955, p. 209.

⁵ In the light of the aims of this work, I have chosen these texts because they constitute a vast laboratory on the subject of *acedia*. This has meant that medieval works from the 14th and 15th centuries (e.g. *Horto do Esposo* or *Castelo Perigoso*), which contain fewer examples of this particular vice, will have to wait for a future study.

⁶ For a more detailed reference to these texts, see A. Machado (2006), pp. 119-216.

⁷ Cod. 454, f. 128v, *Patrologia Latina* (from now on *PL*) 73, Lib. V, 7.5, col. 893. Please refer to quotation 1, in the Appendix.

⁸ Cod. 454, f. 143v; *PL* 73, Lib. V, 15.2. Please refer to quotation 2, in the Appendix.

⁹ Athanasius. "Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis interprete Evagrio". *PL* 23: 143. H. Ellershaw (trans.), 'Life of Antony, Select Writings of Athanasius', in *Library of Nicene and post Nicene Fathers*, New York; 1957, pp. 195-221 <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/VITA-ANTONY.html>>. Please refer to quotation 3, in the Appendix.

¹⁰ Cod. 454, fl. 130; *PL* 73, Lib.V, Pelágio, 7.34; col 901.

¹¹ *PL* V, 7.1, p. 60. The Latin version by Jacobus de Voragine uses the term "tedio" (2000); the Portuguese translation is included in the *Flos Sanctorum*, of 1513, fl. 26v.

¹² Again cod. 454, fl. 130; *PL* 73, Lib.V, Pelágio, 7.34; col 901. Please refer to quotation 4, in the Appendix.

¹³ Cod. 454, fl. 130, *PL* 73, Lib V, 7.30, col 900. Please refer to quotation 5, in the Appendix.

¹⁴ Cod. 454, fl. 130v, *PL* 73, Lib V, 7.37, col 902. Please refer to quotation 6, in the Appendix.

¹⁵ Cod. 454, fl. 126 v; *PL* 73, Lib. V, 6.4, cols. 888-889. Please refer to quotation 7, in the Appendix.

¹⁶ Cod. 367, fl. 9; *PL* 21, 402. Please refer to quotation 8, in the Appendix.

¹⁷ Cod. 367, fl. 8; cod. 454, fs. 118v-120. Please refer to quotation 9, in the Appendix. On the Portuguese translation of this passage, see Machado, 2007.

¹⁸ '«Acedia» 700-1200', *Traditio*, vol. XXII, 1966, pp. 73-102.

¹⁹ S. Wenzel, *The sin of sloth: acedia in medieval thought and literature*, Chapel Hill, SW, University of North Carolina Press, 1967, p. 29.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, D. Saurel (trad.), 2005, qu. 11, a.4. <<http://docteurangelique.free.fr>> ; *Somme théologique*. R. Bernard (transl.), Paris – Tournai – Rome, Desclée & Cie, 1931, II. II. Qu. 35 a.4. Wenzel may be exaggerating when he presents the *acedia* of Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics as a general and universal form of moral disorder. Although the various manifestations of this vice clearly cover this spectrum, we should not forget that the ultimate goal is the Divine good and the salvation of the soul.

²¹ C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio (2003), pp. 143-151.

²² For the philosopher Josef Pieper (1904-1997), this notion of sloth represents a great depreciation of the ethical concept of *acedia*. Underlying this is the “religious sanction of the capitalist work ethic”, which not only diminishes the former theological and moral dimension of *acedia*, making it into something banal, but also inverts it. J. Lauand, ‘O Pecado Capital da Acídia na Análise de Tomás de Aquino’ (notas de conferência) proferida no Seminário Internacional *Os Pecados Capitais na Idade Média*. Univ. Fed. do Rio Grande do Sul, 2004 <<http://www.pecapi.com.br/>>.

²³ *Mélas, aina, an 'negro'* [black] + *kholê, ês 'bílís'*[bile]. A. Houaiss, M. Villar, and F. Franco, *O Dicionário Eletrônico Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa* (versão 1-0). Rio de Janeiro, 2001, s.v. ‘Melancolia’..

²⁴ I have not mentioned natural melancholy and its relationship with art the thesis presented in *Problem XXX, I* as this was only reassessed in the 15th century. R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, Erwin and F. Saxl, *Saturne et la mélancolie: études historiques et philosophiques: nature, religion, médecine et art*, [Paris], Gallimard, 1989, pp. 39-44 and 123-124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

²⁶ A. Marques, *Portugal na crise dos séculos XIV e XV*, Lisboa, Editorial Presença, 1987, p. 414.

²⁷ “These are the books owned by the king, Don Duarte”. D. Duarte, *Leal Conselheiro*. J. Piel (ed.), Lisboa, Bertrand, 1942, p. 414.

²⁸ R. Lorenzo, ‘*Leal Conselheiro*’, in G. Lanciani and G. Tavani (eds.), *Dicionário da Literatura Medieval Galega e Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Caminho, 1993, p. 383.

²⁹ On the reception of these doctrines, see Machado, 2006, 368-377.

³⁰ J. Piel (ed.), Lisboa, Bertrand, 1942, Ch. 26, p. 98.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 26, pp. 99-101.

³² “St John Cassian says of sorrow, in his book of Establishments, and in the Collations of the Fathers (...)”. *Ibid.*, ch.. 18, p. 64.

³³ *Ibid.*, ch. 18, p. 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 19, p. 67.

³⁵ David-Peyre, "Neurasthenie et croyance chez D. Duarte de Portugal", *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, Vol. 15, 1980, p. 527.

³⁶ In the 12th century, Hugh of Saint Victor also established a link between sorrow/*acedia* (he uses them synonymously) and melancholy, although he does so in other terms: "Rancor este ex atrabili". *PL* 176, col. 1001.

³⁷ S. Jackson, *Melancholia & Depression. From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*. New Haven - London, Yale University Press, 1986, p. 66.

³⁸ I. Irvine, 'Acedia, Tristitia and Sloth: Early Christian Forerunners to Chronic Ennui', *Humanitas*, 1999 <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6691/is_1_12/ai_n28755280>.

³⁹ J. Lauand, 'O Pecado Capital da Acídia na Análise de Tomás de Aquino' (notas de conferência) proferida no Seminário Internacional *Os Pecados Capitais na Idade Média*, Univ. Fed. do Rio Grande do Sul, 2004 <<http://www.pecapi.com.br/>>.

⁴⁰ R. Daly, Robert, "Before Depression: The Medieval Vice of Acedia", *Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes*. vol. 70, 1, 2007 <<http://www.atypon-link.com/GPI/doi/abs/10.1521/psyc.2007.70.1.30>>.

⁴¹ Fusswerk-Fursay, 'La notion de croyance et son importance en psychiatrie'. *Revue d'Histoire de la Médecine hébraïque*, vol. 124, 1978, pp. 17-20, *apud* Y. David-Peyre, "Neurasthenie et croyance chez D. Duarte de Portugal". *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, Vol. 15, 1980, pp. 528-530.

⁴² O. Sacks and J. Hirsh, 'A Neurology of Belief', *Annals of Neurology*. vol. 63, 2, 2008, pp. 129-130.

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Appendix Quotations in English

1. A hermit who was anxious went to Theodore of Pherme and told him all about it. He said to him, 'Humble yourself, put yourself in subjection, go and live with others.' So he went to a mountain, and there lived with a community. Later he returned to Theodore and said, 'Not even when I lived with other men did I find rest.' He said to him, 'If you're not at rest as a hermit, nor when you're in a community, why did you want to be a monk? Wasn't it in order to suffer? Tell me, how many years have you been a monk? He said, 'Eight.' Theodore said, 'Believe me, I've been a monk for seventy years, and I've not been able to get a single day's peace. Do you expect to have peace after only eight years?' (Ward, 2003:60-61)

2. Anthony also said, 'I saw the devil's snares set all over the earth, and I groaned and said, "What can pass through them?" I heard a voice saying, "Humility".' (Ward, 2003:148)

3. From which arise fear in the heart, tumult and confusion of thought, dejection, hatred towards them who live a life of discipline, indifference, grief, remembrance of kinsfolk and fear of death, and finally desire of evil things, disregard of virtue and unsettled habits. (Ellershaw, 1954)
(Latin: ... tristitia, odium circa studentes in bono, acedia)

4. A brother asked a hermit, 'What am I to do, abba? I do nothing like a monk. I eat, drink and sleep as I like, I am much troubled by vile thoughts, I shift from task to task, and my mind wanders everywhere.' The hermit answered, 'Stay in your cell, and do what you can without anxiety. It is not much that you do now, yet it is the same as when Anthony did mighty things in the desert. I trust God that whoever stays in his cell for God's sake, and guards his conscience, will be found where Anthony is.' (Ward, 2003:71)

5. A brother said to a hermit, 'My thoughts wander, and I am troubled,' He answered, 'Go on sitting in your cell, and your thoughts will come back from their wanderings. If a she-ass is tethered, her foal skips and gambols all round her but always comes back to the mother. It is like that for anyone who for God's sake sits patiently in his cell. Though his thoughts wander for a time, they will come back to Him again.' (Ward, 2003:70)

6. When a brother was troubled by thoughts of leaving the monastery, he told this to his abbot. He said, 'Go and sit down, and entrust your body to your

cell, as a man puts a precious possession into a safe, and do not go out of it. Then let your thoughts go where they will. Let your mind think what it likes, so long as it does not drive your body out of the cell.' (Ward, 2003:72)

7. They told this story about Agatho. He and his disciples spent a long time in building his cell. When they had finished it he lived in it, but in the first week he saw a vision which seemed harmful to him. So he said to his disciples what the Lord said to his apostles, 'Rise, let us go hence'. But the disciples were exasperated and said, 'If you meant the whole time to move from here, why did you have to work so hard and spend so long in building you a cell? People will begin to be shocked by us, and say: "Look, they are moving again, they are restless and never settle:"' When Agatho saw that they were afraid of what people would say, he said, 'Although some may be shocked, there are others who will be edified and say, "Blessed are they, for they have moved their abode for God's sake, and left all their property freely." Whoever wants to come with me, let him come; I am going anyway.' They bowed down on the ground before him, and begged to be allowed to go with him. (Ward, 2003:53-54)

8. (...) there was another monk who had settled in the further desert and had practised the virtues for many years. (...) since God held him in honour, at a prescribed time every two or three days he made a loaf appear on the table, a real loaf which could be eaten. (...) He grew spiritually every day (...) But he came to be almost certain that the better portion was indeed his, as if he already had it in his grasp. And once this happened, it only needed a little time to make him fall as a result of the temptation which was to come to him afterwards. (...) when he came to this presumption he began without realizing it to think that he was superior to most men (...) Before long there was born in him first of all some small indolence, so small as not to seem indolence at all. Then there developed a more serious negligence. Then it came just perceptible. For he became more reluctant to rise from sleep and sing hymns. The work of prayer now became more sluggish. The singing of psalms was not so prolonged. The soul (...) wished to rest. The mind turned its gaze earthwards. Thoughts became subject to distractions. (...) His mind fell upon the thoughts with even greater alacrity, while his memory composed an image like that of a woman actually present and lying with him. He had the whole scene in front of his eyes as if all along he was actually performing the act. (...)The thoughts then returned in throngs, enveloping him on all sides and (...) they dragged him back to the world. (...) (Ward, 1980: 59-61)

9. (...)there was a monk (...) who lived in a cave in the nearer desert and had given proof of the strongest ascetic discipline. (...)Then the Tempter asked for him (...) and in the evening presented him the image of a beautiful woman lost in the desert (...) She told him how she had lost her way and sowed in him words of flattery and deceit. She kept on talking to him for some time, and somehow gently enticed him to fall in love with her. (...)With so much talking she led him astray. Then she began to touch his hand and beard and neck. And finally she made the ascetic her prisoner. As for him, his mind seethed with evil thoughts as he calculated that the matter was already within his grasp, and that he had the opportunity and the freedom to fulfil his pleasure. He then consented inwardly and in the end tried to unite himself with her sexually. He was frantic by now, like an excited stallion eager to mount a mare. But suddenly she gave a loud cry and vanished from his clutches, slipping away like a shadow. And the air resounded with a great peal of laughter. It was the demons who had led him astray with their deception rebuking him and calling out with a loud voice, "Whosoever exalted himself shall be abased." (...) In the morning he got up, dragging behind him the miserable experience of the night. He spent the whole day in lamentation, and then, despairing of his own salvation, which is something he should not have done, he went back to the world. (Ward, 1980:56-57)

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**Destructive, Concrete Evil as Absence:
A Re-evaluation of the Theory of *Privatio Boni*
In the Context of Mass Atrocity**

Peter Admirand

Abstract

The tradition of *privatio boni* has claimed that evil is the absence of good or a privation of good. Such a tradition is not without its detractors who stress that evil is not merely an absence, as evinced in the massive destruction and suffering present in this world. While incorporating these detractors' concerns, I will still argue why the theory of *privatio boni*, with certain qualifiers, cannot be discarded without dire consequences for theological belief, or what I refer to as a fractured faith through a fractured theodicy.

After a brief historical analysis of the *privatio boni* theory, I will analyse its potential viability in the context of belief in God despite mass atrocity, especially through analysing Didier Pollefeyt's theory of *privatio/perversio boni*. Key questions of this chapter include: What are the theological and practical consequences of discarding such a theory? What moral dangers are posed in maintaining the validity of such a theory after Auschwitz and the genocide in Rwanda? What impact does the *privatio boni* theory have on theories of justice for both the perpetrator and victim?

As I interpret the *privatio boni* theory and apply it within the context of theodicy and anthropodicy, it is denying the possibility to judge that a human being is undeniably beyond redemption in this world. Positively, it is stressing that all human beings are fundamentally good because God created them. However, because of the gift of free will, some individuals may commit horrifically evil deeds that can corrupt their character. This corruption contributes to why additional evil may then occur. The suffering (or consequences of these evil acts) as experienced by the victim - and the perpetrator - is real and often, devastating.

Key Words: *Privatio boni*, fractured theodicy, fractured faith, testimonies of mass atrocity, free will, responsibility, human nature

1. A Fractured Theodicy

Before I begin to try to defend what is perhaps indefensible: the *privatio boni* theory, let me provide a context and wider-picture for my arguments. In my work, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theodicy: Searching for a Viable Theodicy*,¹ I assess the theological and pastoral viability of key

theodic texts within post-Holocaust Jewish thought, liberation theology, and Christian philosophical theodicy through textual analysis of testimonies from the Holocaust, communist gulags, Rwandan genocide, and other mass atrocities. I aim to develop a viable theodic position that is theologically acute and pastorally sensitive for our contemporary age.

This means, namely, that while turning to the voices of survivors and victims can give one hope or reason to maintain faith or belief in God, it is a fractured faith, which is assaulted by the myriad cries of injustice and loss of this world. Cries that often go unheeded - and can never be justified in themselves. Thus, all theodicies, strictly speaking, will fail because humankind can only glimpse a sense of the Divine and because our incomplete knowledge of any afterlife context means we only have certainty of this life. And this life is abundantly clear: Goodness, beauty, the sublimity of love and altruism - all these exist, and even thrive, but rarely for long, and are certainly not equally experienced by all. For some individuals, this life has been, and is, a cosmic joke, hell, an aberration. Many, like Job, lament the day they were born. A failure to bear in mind these voices and individuals are why theodicies, or theories like *privatio boni*, are dismissed or ridiculed. And yet, such dismissal often has a steep price. As I have stated elsewhere,² contra those who try to denounce theodicy *in toto* and still be theists, theism needs theodicy. However, this is also to say that our fractured faith, built upon a fractured theodicy, also reveals our fractured theism. Some of us may passionately and deeply believe in what we profess by various names - God, Allah, the Spirit, Christ, Brahma, and so on - but any superficial or penetrating sense of the way of this world must lead to questioning, protesting, and doubt, which inevitably colours theism.

Bearing the above in mind, in this paper I will first sketch a brief analysis of the *privatio boni* theory and will then analyse its potential viability in the context of belief in God despite mass atrocity, especially through analysing Didier Pollefeyt's theory of *privatio/perversio boni*. Throughout the essay, accounts from what I term testimonies of mass atrocity will be in 'dialogue' with theological and philosophical sources to further flesh out a sense of absence and privation that remains brutal and overwhelming for the victims - and amidst the faith responses of many theists.

2. *Privatio Boni: The Tradition*

The reality of mass atrocity challenges, if not undermines, many theological beliefs and arguments. However, in order to best evaluate such claims, one needs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the *privatio boni* theory. Key questions include: What are the theological and practical consequences of discarding such a theory? What moral dangers are posed in maintaining the validity of such a theory after Auschwitz and the genocide in

Rwanda? What impact does the *privatio boni* theory have on theories of justice for both the perpetrator and victim?

In *Salvifici Doloris*, the only Catholic encyclical with a sustained grappling with the problem of evil, John Paul II uses the phrase “mystery of suffering”, not to aim to describe the origin³ of evil but to account for the good that can arise in response to it. For John Paul II, such redemptive good and the existence of evil are discerned in part through the tradition of *privatio boni*. As he writes: “Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good”.⁴ Especially in light of mass atrocities, the tradition of *privatio boni* is not without its detractors, who stress that evil is not merely an absence, as evinced in the massive destruction and suffering present in this world, or who argue that this tradition “fails to deal adequately with the virulent and aggressive forms evil can take”.⁵ In applying such a term, one must also acknowledge that the theory of *privatio boni* has a contextualised meaning within the “traditional Western cosmology” of an Augustine or Aquinas, which is not scientifically applicable today. As Peter J. Haas writes: “In this cosmology, the distance between the absolute perfect periphery and the earthly center was the space in which there was a *privatio boni*”.⁶

As I interpret the *privatio boni* theory and apply it within the context of theodicy and anthropodicy, it is denying the possibility to judge that a human being is undeniably beyond redemption in this world.⁷ Positively, it is stressing that all human beings are fundamentally good because God created them. However, because of the gift of free will, some human beings may commit horrifically evil deeds that can sully and corrupt their character. This corruption contributes to why additional evil may then occur. The suffering (or consequences of these evil acts) as experienced by the victim – and the perpetrator – is real and often, devastating. As Didier Pollefeyt writes, *privatio boni* “does not deny the reality of evil at all, but only points out that evil is always parasitical. It always depends on a preceding, greater or more fundamental reality which is good.”⁸

Is such a term applicable to the case of perpetrators of mass atrocity?

3. A Perversion of the Good?

In the essay “*Horror Vacui*: God and Evil in/after Auschwitz,” Didier Pollefeyt has offered what a “reinterpretation of *privatio boni*... could mean in wrestling with the evil of the Holocaust.”⁹ For Pollefeyt, such a reinterpretation entails a recognition that evil is often committed through self-deception or because of a fragmented self (in a process that Robert J. Lifton has called “doubling”) by those whom I would describe as otherwise “morally mature or responsible” human beings.¹⁰ As an example of doubling, think of a doctor in the concentration camps who could send people to the

crematoria but be a (supposedly) loving husband at home. In the process of self-deception (which Pollefeyt connects with his term “*perversio boni*”¹¹), he writes: “When evil is done, the good is not only absent but also manipulated, deceived, and perverted”.¹² The theory of *privatio/perversio boni*, therefore, is a means not only to maintain the humanity of the perpetrator and to keep open the possibility for repentance and remorse, but “for the perpetrator to be made morally responsible (and punishable) for his or her evil acts”.¹³ According to Pollefeyt, to claim an evil act was chosen for its own sake is to make such people, “incomprehensible, even ‘unpunishable’”.¹⁴

Of course, context is essential in coming to evaluate and interpret individual cases. For example, Varnado Simpson, an American perpetrator of the My Lai massacre, who has confessed to murdering twenty-five people, acknowledges:

But like I say, after I killed the child, my whole mind just went. And once you start, it’s very easy to keep on. Once you start. The hardest - the part that’s hard is to kill, but once you kill, that becomes easier, to kill the next person and the next one and the next one. Because I had no feelings or no emotions or no nothing. No direction. I just killed. It can happen to anyone.¹⁵

In this case, the ‘decision’ or responsibility in committing such outrages has its ‘reasons’ in a host of explanations and factors - the brutal context of the Vietnam war, the loss of fellow U.S. soldiers, and the indoctrination process that named the Vietnamese as “gooks” or “enemy - that do not minimise Simpson’s responsibility, but prevent demonising him as inhuman and so unable to be tried before the law.

“It could happen to anyone”, Simpson remarks. Non-perpetrators resist such claims (often, perhaps, with good reason), but Pollefeyt is right in stressing why refusing to deny the humanity of the perpetrator is essential for justice, ethics, and faith after Auschwitz. Note, too, that Simpson said that he acted without feeling or reason. He is still responsible but a lack of thinking or reasoning is what contributed to his crimes. Likewise, he speaks of how it became easier to kill after the first time. For others, it is not the first actual killing that is memorable, but something specific or unique in a subsequent one. Adalbert, a Hutu convicted of genocide, does not remember the precise details of his first killing, but he recalls the exact date in 1994, April 17th, when he shot and killed two children:

...For me it was strange to see the children drop without a sound. It was almost pleasantly easy. I

walked on without bending over to check that they were really dead. I don't even know if they were moved to a more suitable place and covered up. Now, too often, I am seized by the memory of those children, shot straight out, like a joke.¹⁶

Pio, another Hutu convicted of genocide, admits: "I had killed large chickens but never an animal the stoutness of a man, like a goat or cow. The first person, I finished him off in a rush, not thinking anything of it, even though he was a neighbour, quite close up on my hill. In truth, it only came to me afterward."¹⁷ What does one say, then, of a perpetrator who goes on killing or assisting in the process of killing? Does there not reach a point where such killings contaminate a person's character, de-humanising him, as it were? What Pollefeyt calls this "fundamental reality, which is good" is rightly tested by certain accounts of mass atrocity in which victims depict gulag or concentration guards or genocidal perpetrators who have abused and tortured them.

In describing the liquidation of the family camp at Auschwitz, Filip Müller writes:

One could see that most of the SS men had a bad conscience. They hadn't shown any scruples about annihilating Jews...yet they clearly found it unpleasant and distressing to help exterminate people with whom they had been on quite good terms up to now.¹⁸

Müller is careful to distinguish between the sadistic guard who seems to brutalise and torture for his own pleasure, as seen in his depiction of *Hauptscharführer* (Sergeant Major) Moll, as opposed to the guard who feigned aggressiveness in front of his superiors or was "badly upset by the ghoulis spectacle."¹⁹ Someone like Moll, however, does seem to challenge what Pollefeyt refers to (and critiques) as the paradigm of "diabolicisation," in which the perpetrator is deemed an immoral monster.

To some witnesses, there were individuals who (even if inherently good or meant to be good) were undeniably (and presumably, irrevocably) evil, regardless of how they treated their family at home. The child soldier Ishmael Beah writes of the point where such killings became automatic. Full of rage, high on drugs, and manipulated by his surroundings, to his victims, he must have seemed a devil or demon. Now, however, he is rehabilitated. As Pollefeyt astutely remarks: "For a good post-Holocaust anthropology, the distinction between evil and evildoer is crucial."²⁰ Without such a distinction, we commit an injustice against the perpetrator and God by declaring such a

being is beyond redemption or justice, or potentially ignoring those who were more responsible.

While I remain sceptical of Pollefeyt's claim that "the theory of *privatio/perversio boni* [can] sustain a 'religion without theodicy (Levinas)'"²¹ - as I cannot envision a viable faith or religion that claims the existence of evil 'overcomes' the possibility to defend or justify belief in God despite such evil - I would contend that especially when linked with the gift of free will, the theory of *privatio/perversio boni* is crucial for any theodicy to uphold the belief that even the worst of perpetrators were created and meant for good. In theological terms, refusing to acknowledge the possibility for repentance and conversion tries to limit the potential for God's gift of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to work even through the most depraved of perpetrators. As Pollefeyt argues, "[a victim's] fundamental trust may have been hurt so much by evil that - in order to protect himself from the ethical dualism of which he has been a victim - he creates an ethical dualism himself in order to be able to survive."²² Thus, some victims may view their perpetrators purely as evil, as the loss and pain suffered is too destructive and depersonalising to begin the process of understanding and forgiveness.²³ While most academics who develop theories about forgiveness must acknowledge their 'blessed' position as non-victims, Pollefeyt adds: "By not being able to forgive the perpetrator the victim gives evil the final word and he allows the memory of it to dominate his whole life in a negative way".²⁴

Pollefeyt's reinterpretation of *privatio boni* helps to minimise many of the standard criticisms against the theory while providing reasons to validate the pervasive goodness of the world and giving grounds to hope that perpetrators of evil can be tried, and possibly, redeemed.²⁵ This hope (and testament) also supports the belief that suffering calls upon all of us to give freely to the other in need and so is a fundamental calling "*to unleash*" the love within us, as John Paul II writes.²⁶ All are thus called to transcend our selfishness (or sinfulness) and reach out both to victims and perpetrators, even if this may entail a further sense of failure and vulnerability.

4. Conclusion

The theory of *privatio boni* provides a realistic but hopeful anthropology that acknowledges our frailty and our susceptibility to be seduced by and to seek erroneously after actions and goals that ultimately will imprison one another and ourselves. As a reminder that no human being is born evil, or as tempting as it may seem in some instances, becomes evil incarnate, this theory means that all of us are linked and have responsibility to the face of the other, even that Other who has seemingly renounced what for many, is our calling and destiny to be. Such a theory not only remains hopeful for the possibility of reform or conversion of even the most depraved of individuals, but also ensures that such individuals remain responsible for

the gravity of their actions so that human justice, no matter how flawed or inadequate, may be upheld. You cannot put an ogre, demon, or animal on trial.

Such a theory, however, does not adequately address why there are destructive earthquakes, horrific and crippling diseases, or mass famine (though such works as Jared Diamond's *Collapse* or David Montgomery's *Dirt: the Erosion of Civilisation* reveal how human beings have caused or exacerbated many natural disasters). Nor does such a theory silence or counter the cries of the survivors and victims. Even for those individuals who may take joy in seeing everyone - including themselves - as intrinsically good - the reverberations of victims' cries last long, long after their lives on this world end. And one of our obligations is to ensure that such cries are not forgotten and are heard whenever theological language or arguments are attempted.

Notes

¹ P Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theodicy: Searching for a Viable Theodicy*, doctoral dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 2008, unpublished.

² P Admirand, 'Testimonies of Mass Atrocity and the Search for a Viable Theodicy,' *Bulletin ET: Journal for Theology in Europe*, 18: 88-99.

³ The encyclical does refer to Satan and original sin, though they are not contextualised. For an interesting recent discussion on original sin, see D Domning, with M Hellwig, *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in the Light of Evolution*. Hellwig writes: "We are not concerned, therefore, with one event that took place somewhere near the beginning of human history which somehow queered the pitch for all that followed in human history. Rather we are concerned with the cumulative effect of choices and actions which were less than worthy of human freedom and community. Each action has consequences that tend in greater or lesser degree to make it more difficult for others afterwards to act justly, truthfully, compassionately, constructively" [(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 15]. While John Paul tends to view original sin as a specific moment, Hellwig's interpretation seems more credible and spiritually useful.

⁴ John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, Par. 7. Viewed 5 April 2009.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_j-p-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html.

⁵ D Lee, 'Theodicy and Eschatology in John', in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, B Barber and D Neville, eds, Adelaide, ATF Press, 2005, p. 44. In *Evil and the God of Love*, John Hick, in evaluating Augustine's use of the doctrine, emphasises the need to distinguish between a metaphysical and an empirical

understanding of *privatio boni* (52). While he states that what this doctrine “recommends is nothing less than the whole Christian interpretation of life” (54), he argues: “As an element in human experience, evil is positive and powerful. Empirically, it is not merely the absence of something else but a reality with its own distinctive and often terrifying quality and power” (55). He thus points to a weakness in any argument that empirically says evil is only a privation. See his *Evil and the God of Love*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

⁶ P Haas, ‘In Response to Didier Pollefeyt’, in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, D Patterson and J Roth, eds, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2005, p. 235.

⁷ Aquinas asserts that “evil cannot wholly consume the good. . . [because] the aforesaid aptitude of the soul is not wholly taken away for [the good] belongs to its very nature” [*Summa Theologica*, Anton C. Pagis, ed., New York: The Modern Library, 1948, 268 (Q.XLVIII.3)].

⁸ D Pollefeyt, ‘Ethics, Forgiveness and the Unforgivable After Auschwitz’, in *Incredible Forgiveness: Christian Ethics Between Fanaticism and Reconciliation*, D Pollefeyt, ed., Leuven, Peeters, 2004, p. 144.

⁹ D Pollefeyt, ‘*Horror Vacui*: God and Evil in/after Auschwitz’, in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, David Patterson and John Roth (eds), Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2005, p. 220.

¹⁰ I use these terms to distinguish what Pollefeyt refers to as “psychopaths whose cognitive, affective, and moral capabilities are damaged severely” [‘In Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas’, *Fire in the Ashes*, p. 239]. Other exceptions can also be mentioned.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹² D Pollefeyt, ‘*Horror Vacui*’, pp. 226-7. Notice that his description is similar to John Paul II’s above.

¹³ D Pollefeyt, ‘In Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas’, 242.

¹⁴ D Pollefeyt, ‘*Horror Vacui*’, p. 221.

¹⁵ Quoted in J Glover, *A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, London: Pimlico, 2001, p. 62.

¹⁶ Adalbert, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, L Coverdale, trs., New York, Picador, 2005, p. 25.

¹⁷ Pio, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, pp. 23-4.

¹⁸ F Müller, “*Eyewitness to Auschwitz*”: *Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, S Flatauer, trs., Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 1999, p. 151.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 138.

²⁰ D Pollefeyt, “Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable”, p. 154.

²¹ D Pollefeyt, “Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas”, p. 240.

²² D Pollefeyt, “Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable”, p. 158.

²³ For a victim of apartheid's encounter and subsequent meetings with the infamous Eugene de Kock, commanding officer of state-sanctioned death squads under apartheid, see P Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003. For a critical assessment of Gobodo-Madikizela's work, see L Langer, 'Memory and Justice After the Holocaust and Apartheid', in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 82-96.

²⁴ D Pollefeyt, 'Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable', p. 158. For his argument that "the basic structure of ethics after Auschwitz should be openness to the vulnerability of the other," see his 'The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust', in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, John Roth, ed., St. Paul, Paragon House, 1999, p. 239.

²⁵ The conversion of the Roman centurion may best illustrate this catharsis in Scripture, though one may also include Zacchaeus (as a chief tax collector), the apostle Matthew (tax collector), and Saul (a persecutor of Christians). The Hebrew Bible, particularly the Book of Judges, is one long story of a people faithful to God, then unfaithful, and then faithful again. In our contemporary times, the stories of child soldiers like Ishmael Beah and Emmanuel Jal also testify to this phenomenon. See their memoirs, J Emmanuel, with M Davies, *Warchild: A Boy Soldier's Story*, London, Abacus, 2009; and I Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, New York, Sara Crichton Books, 2007.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 29.

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Questioning the 'Witch' Label: Women as Evil in Ancient Rome

Linda H. McGuire

Abstract

During the late Middle Ages many women were 'criminalised' on the pretence that they committed evil acts (*maleficium*) or belonged to a secret sect which worshipped the devil (heresy). In other words, this term came to denote an evil person. Two thousand years ago in Latin literature there was a popular literary stereotype of a woman who used sorcery and had magical powers. These characters are particularly concentrated between 30 BC to AD 170 and they occur in the works of Virgil, Horace, Lucan and Apuleius, among other authors. In modern translations, these Roman figures are usually called 'witches'. Using the term 'witch' in the study of Latin literature can imply that similar beliefs existed in ancient Rome as in later Europe. This paper seeks to question if the ideas of 'evil' and 'enemy of society' were gender-related to women in ancient Rome. What crimes were associated with Latin literary sorceresses and women in Roman society? Who in Roman society were associated with similar crimes to the later witch? In fact, it might be possible to suggest that the idea of 'evil' in ancient Rome did not have a female face as the use of the term 'witch' in translations of Latin literature might infer.

Key Words: Witch, evil, crime, murder, crop destruction.

1. Introduction

It became popular during the early Roman Empire for authors to depict women using magic in their writing. Such women appeared in almost every literary genre (satire, love poetry, epic and novels) during a span of 150 years. They can be found in the works of Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Lucan, Petronius and Apuleius. They were not a particularly coherent group, although they share certain common characteristics. Besides their link with magic there is only one other thing that they all share in common – these women are usually called witches by scholars today regardless of the Latin terminology used to refer to them.¹

What these scholars mean when they use the term 'witch' is difficult to know as this the use of this English word is rarely explained.² This paper seeks to question the validity of using this modern term in the context of an ancient society, in this case Rome. First of all, what do scholars mean by 'witch' today and what are the main ideas behind this term. Second, what

similarities exist between the witches of the late Middle Ages and women using sorcery in Latin literature? As the topic is broad, this paper will focus specifically on the crimes of these women. Finally, who in Roman society were connected with particularly evil or unnatural crimes such as those witches were accused of?

2. Witches and their crimes

First found in a ninth century manuscript, the term 'witch' is thought to derive from the old English word *wicca*, meaning someone who casts a spell.³ It is likely, however, that our understanding of the term today is influenced from the period known as the witch-hunts which affected most of Europe from the 15th to 17th centuries and resulted in many thousands of deaths. At this time two ideas became attached to this term. Not only was it used almost exclusively in the feminine, but also it came to signify 'evil' and 'secret society'.⁴

It is very difficult to distinguish between the terms 'witch' and 'sorceress' not least because many people during this period who used sorcery or similar activities were accused of being witches.⁵ In this paper, the terms will be defined as follows. The term sorceress, like sorcerer, defines a person according to an activity, but does not imply any moral judgement. A sorceress is a woman who uses sorcery but is by definition neither good nor evil.⁶ The term 'witch' on the other hand denotes an evil person.⁷ The Church perceived witchcraft as the ultimate in human evil and its opposite was sanctity or the ultimate in human good.⁸ The terms magic and sorcery are used interchangeably in this paper.

According to anthropologists studying witch beliefs in modern tribal cultures, the witch is always attributed with values that negate the values of 'normal' society.⁹ As such they were associated with particularly immoral and unnatural acts including incest, bestiality, cannibalism. In this sense the European witch-hunts were little different from other witch persecutions. In the first general ban on witchcraft published in a Papal Bull of 1484, it is not a description of a witch that is given but rather a long list of the alleged crimes and offences of these enemies of the people.¹⁰ Where most people in society are concerned about procreation and the crop harvest, the Papal Bull accuses witches of attacking the fertility of humans, animals and the land.

Both the ideas of 'evil' and 'secret society' can be seen in the crimes allegedly committed by witches. In Scotland and England, it was *maleficium* which was most feared. *Maleficium* involved causing harm through hatred or through the manipulation of objects or incantations.¹¹ So the witch became the scapegoat for many misfortunes such as sudden deaths or unexplained illness. In some areas of Scotland where accusation was rife among the wives of tenant farmers, it included the drying up of milk in livestock and illness or

death in cattle.¹² Witches could also cause hailstorms to ruin the crops.¹³ In fishing villages, *maleficium* helped explain disasters at sea.¹⁴

Witch prosecutors on the Continent favoured heresy as the main threat of the witch - the idea that witches swore allegiance to the devil. This allegedly took place at a nocturnal ceremony called the sabbat. As this ceremony was pure fabrication, any number of crimes could be said to have been committed there. They usually included the sacrifice of children, cannibalism, orgies and certain forms of Devil worship.¹⁵ Witches were particularly known for killing of babies and young children because it was thought they required their corpses. According to some beliefs, witches were cannibals that loved nothing better than to eat the flesh of an unbaptised baby. According to other beliefs, a salve could be made from the fat of murdered children and when applied to the body of a witch allowed him or her to fly off at night to meet the devil.¹⁶

But one common feature of the witch-hunts throughout Europe is the idea of collective threat. Even if they performed *maleficia* alone, witches belonged to a secret society, which met regularly.¹⁷ Logically, if a witch attended the sabbat, then this person should be able to name other witches present at the same meeting. Torture was used in Scotland and on the Continent for the purpose of extracting confession and for the naming of other witches. In England, where torture was officially banned, methods such as starvation and sleep deprivation were used instead to the same effect.¹⁸ It has been argued that the use of torture in Scotland and on the Continent had a significant impact on the overall size and importance of this event.¹⁹ As the idea of a witch was gender-related to women, it takes the appearance of women hunting.²⁰ According to statistics on the gender ratio, 92% of witches in England were female and just under 80% for Germany, Scotland and France.²¹

3. Women as witches in Latin literature

So using the term 'witch' in a translation of these Latin texts could imply that similar beliefs existed in ancient Rome. Is this the intention of the translators and commentators of these texts? Are they trying to convey the idea that Latin literary sorceresses were evil and threatening? This section will examine what similarities existed between these two figures, which belong to different time periods, and different cultures, focussing specifically on their crimes. In fact, there are several possible reasons why the term witch might be used.

The ideas of 'evil' and 'threatening' do not easily apply to Latin sorceresses as a whole. The majority were comic figures that made love potions. It is possible to say though that they bear some resemblance to the later witch stereotype. Those using sorcery tended to be women and tended to be old. There is only one reference to a man using sorcery but fifteen

women who figure as main or minor characters.²² Eleven out of fifteen of the main literary characters are specifically old. The reason for this is probably because they were based on a popular stereotype of an old woman from Greek comedy. In the plays of Aristophanes old women are drunk, aggressive and lusty and the same traits can be found among Latin literary sorceresses.²³ The description of magic rites and magical powers appears to have been added for further comic effect.

There were, however, two exceptions and they are probably the most evil women in Latin literature. One of these two women is named Erictho and she can be found in book 6 of Lucan's epic entitled *Pharsalia*. One scholar describes her as "a living caricature of wickedness".²⁴ Unlike other sorceresses who use magic in order to attain money or sex, Erictho commits evil for the sake of it and she does so with enthusiasm and delight. Lucan describes her as willing to commit any crime, but only two of them will be mentioned here. First of all, she sacrifices babies and children to the gods. In one reference she reminds the gods that she has never hesitated to murder a child in order to offer them the entrails.²⁵ In another she tore the foetus from the womb of a pregnant woman in order to make an offering of it.²⁶

Second, she is attributed with possessing inherent powers which is a rare theme in literary magic descriptions. All sorceresses in Lucan's work are described as being more poisonous than snakes.²⁷ So Erictho is able to destroy all the crops in a field just by walking over it.²⁸ Crops occur in two earlier works where the magic practitioner used magical powers to move crops from one field to another.²⁹ Interestingly, these criminal activities of Erictho make her resemble the later witch stereotype. And this is perhaps the reason why she has been called "the first recognisably modern witch".³⁰

The second woman named Canidia occurs in the 5th *Epode* of Horace and she is also a child murderer. Like other sorceresses she makes love potions - unlike them she uses the body parts of children as ingredients. Along with three other women, she kidnaps and murders a young boy in order to use his bone marrow in an erotic spell. Horace cleverly taps into one of the most common fears shared by parents in all time periods and societies - that for the safety of their children. Kidnapping continues to feature in popular entertainment today, such as on television or in the cinema, for the same reason.

Child murder when committed by a woman has always been considered a particularly unnatural crime. Yet here it is the motive of her crime that is important to understanding how a Roman audience would have reacted to this poem. Canidia, who is described as an indecent old hag, sacrifices a young boy in order to lure back her lover - a worthless young man named Varus.³¹ In Greece and Rome, sexuality in the aged was considered ridiculous, disgusting and unnatural.³² This theme is handled in

Epodes 8 and 12 where Horace describes the effects of old age on the genitalia of women. And he couples with that the fact that their lust is so strong that they are willing to perform indecent sexual acts to satisfy it.³³ Already killing a child for a magic spell is a terrible crime, but to do so to fuel the lust of an old woman is especially shocking.

In addition, there are four women using magic together in this poem. Usually in Latin literature, the woman performs a magic rite alone (as in the case of Ovid's *Dispas*) or aided by an assistant who is often her slave (as in Virgil's 8th *Eclogue*). The relationship between the four women in *Epode* 5 is never clarified. Was Canidia the mistress and the other three women her slaves?³⁴ Or were they all just friends? This is the only example from ancient Rome from both literary and non-literary sources of four women using magic together, which makes it difficult to comment on.³⁵ But it does raise an interesting question - is this poem more threatening for the involvement of four women rather than one? It is probably the case.

There are a couple of reasons why the term witch might be used in translations of Latin literature. First, there are predominantly old women using magic. And second, Canidia and Erichtho come close to resembling the later witch stereotype as they are both old and evil women.

4. Women as evil in Roman society

Does the presence of women like Canidia and Erichtho in Latin literature imply that the Romans considered sorceresses to be a threat in society? A commentator on the fifth *Epode* of Horace has suggested that Romans feared the existence of women like Canidia in society, implying that she mirrored an actual threat.³⁶ This section will look at evidence for the punishment of women for sorcery use. But in fact these cases bear little resemblance to the persecutions in later Europe.

For the time period corresponding to the literary picture, there were four cases where women were condemned for using magic or consulting magicians. They involve Claudia Pulcher, Lollia Paulina, Domitia Lepida, and Servilia who was the daughter of Marcius Boreas Soranus.³⁷ These were women from the noblest families of Rome and they either belonged to or had close relations with the imperial household. In all four cases magic was a secondary charge. The main charge was treason or more specifically trying to kill either the Emperor or the Augusta. In reality they were rivals among powerful noble families. For example, after the death of the Emperor Claudius' wife, Agrippina successfully eliminated her rival Lollia Paulina in order to marry the Emperor.³⁸ The role of magic accusation here is probably similar to that of adultery, a very effective and ruthless way to destroy the reputation of another person.³⁹

A fifth example occurs much later in the 4th century AD. Ammianus Marcellinus writes that an old woman was summoned to cure the daughter of

a prominent man and she was put to death by the Emperor for using incantations.⁴⁰ This figure recalls the later witch stereotype, as she is an old woman who uses charms or spells to heal. Certainly, a number of people in healing professions such as wise women and midwives were persecuted as witches in later Europe.⁴¹ It is also worth noting that this historian makes a couple of statements that speak of magic as an activity particularly associated with old women.⁴² As it is a unique example of a non-noble woman condemned for magic use, it does not really suggest that the Roman authorities considered such women to be threats.

Taken as a whole, it is simply not possible to draw an accurate comparison with the later witch-hunts. For one the quantity of surviving cases is not similar. From 1563 to 1735 in Scotland alone, court records reveal the names of 3000 witches, and it is estimated that half were executed. The five Roman cases do not indicate a significant threat. But also in later Europe hundreds of books were written to advertise the existence of this evil in society. For ancient Rome there is simply no repetition of this fear of evil women. Perhaps the fears of the Romans lay elsewhere?

5. Enemies of the Roman people

There is little concrete information to suggest that the Romans considered women using magic as threatening. This leaves the question, who were associated with these types of crimes in Rome as a way of designating them an enemy of society? This section will look at the way Roman historians handled the subjects of immoral or unnatural crimes. Who was responsible and how were these acts interpreted?

First the crimes of child murder and cannibalism were linked to a handful of different individuals. In some cases these accusations were used against those who tried to overthrow the government. One of these is Catiline who was the governor of Africa in 67 BC. In 65 BC he plotted a revolution, which failed. The historians recording this event claim that he sacrificed a boy and ate his flesh in the company of others.⁴³ Another claims that he was in the habit of drinking human blood.⁴⁴ However, there were other men with similar aims who were not described in this way. Take the example of Lucius Aelius Sejanus who came dangerously close to seizing control of the Empire under the rule of Tiberius. Tacitus describes him as the 'author of every crime' yet no specific crimes are mentioned.⁴⁵ Ancient history texts are full of stories about those who tried to seize power. Treason trials were the main method of eliminating unwanted political rivals or threats, particularly in the early Empire.⁴⁶

Other targets for these types of accusations included philosophers and magicians. The philosopher Apollonius of Tyana was charged with performing a rite of divination that involved cutting up a boy at night under a waning moon.⁴⁷ Cicero is able to assassinate the character of a senator in

court by implying that this man sacrifices boys in order to divine the future from their entrails. The accusation is based on the fact that this senator was known to be a Pythagorean.⁴⁸ Pliny the Elder depicted the *magi* (magicians) as frauds, charlatans and liars.⁴⁹ In Book Twenty Eight, he claims that Osthanes, a Persian *magus* who lived in the 5th century BC, encouraged people to drink human blood and use parts of corpses of men who died violently in magic rites.⁵⁰

Philosophers and magicians were both groups that came under frequent attack as enemies of society. But it has to be kept in mind that they were not persecuted systematically nor through an inquisition. Some were banished or even forced to commit suicide, but they were not hunted down and eliminated from society. Philosophers were well integrated into the Roman nobility.⁵¹ And on the whole, the Romans were tolerant of magic and it was only repressed in particular circumstances and on an individual basis.⁵² Of those who were persecuted even fewer were accused of immoral or unnatural acts.

Crop destruction is handled in a completely different way by ancient writers. The act of moving a crop from one field to another was a crime according to the earliest surviving legal source for Rome called the Twelve Tables.⁵³ This complaint might arise when one person's crops fail, while the crops in the neighbouring field can be harvested. However ancient historians did not attribute the destruction of crops to a human agent. The Romans perceived it to be a sign of divine displeasure. Tacitus relates that Nero not only committed criminal acts himself but he was responsible for the immorality rampant in Rome at that time which he actively encouraged. As a result, the gods sent a hurricane to Campania that destroyed the orchards and crops and Rome was visited by a plague.⁵⁴

Certain events perceived by the Romans as 'outside the norm' were considered prodigies. Prodigies signaled a breakdown in the relations between gods and humans and they had to be expiated by priests in order to placate the gods.⁵⁵ They included extreme weather conditions (hurricanes, earthquakes, destructive storms and lightening), famine and plague. They could also include monstrous births, androgynous births and strange behaviour in animals (such as talking cows).⁵⁶

For instance, there existed a strict set of rules to be followed in times of plague, which were considered indications of the anger of the gods.⁵⁷ It was customary to consult the Sibylline Books which sometimes instructed prayers to be used or a temple to be erected.⁵⁸ When the plague was particularly devastating, then extreme measures were employed, such as a ceremony called *lectisternium*, which involved 8 days of feasting and supplicating to the gods.⁵⁹ The sorceress Erichtho's destruction of crops can also be understood as part of these beliefs. Homeric epic included a pantheon of gods who were actively involved in the affairs of humans. Lucan

substitutes the usual gods with a number of strange and nameless powers. Erichtho was the embodiment of these powers, which were both evil and destructive.⁶⁰

Prodigies and divine providence also played a part in later Christian beliefs. Certain natural disasters, like comets and floods, were perceived as God's punishment of sinners.⁶¹ And according to some moralists, those who committed sins such as incest or adultery could be punished with illness or monstrous births.⁶² Satan was also recognized as playing a part in these divine punishments, so the affliction of strange diseases or crimes that had no motives were thought to be caused by him.⁶³ Therefore the belief in witches as Satan's little helpers fit well into the predominant beliefs of this period.⁶⁴

This brief look only tells us that the Romans had a very different system of beliefs from that which existed in later Europe. They did not fear the same enemies and they did not express their fears in the same way. On the one hand, Romans rarely attributed unnatural or immoral crimes to people in their society. On the other hand, they believed that the gods were responsible for the many misfortunes that befell humankind. All of which might mean that the Romans were more afraid of their gods than evil people in their midst.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that based on this one criterion - crime - it is possible to say that the term 'witch' can be misleading when used in the context of Latin literature or Roman society. It is true that two literary characters are witch-like but both the crimes and their interpretations differ in Roman society. Our use of the term witch in translations does not necessarily indicate that we misunderstand Roman society. It is more likely that we are not even aware of all the cultural baggage that this term carries with it. The witch-hunts were a unique political event that upset the whole of Europe for several hundred years and we still feel the repercussions today perhaps without realising it.

So when we apply the term witch to an ancient society, we might also be bringing with it modern ideas and perceptions. In this case, the term sorceress might be better as it only defines a person according to an activity and does not make moral judgements. It is important to remember the massive impact that the Roman world has had on the history and development of Europe. It might be more fruitful not to call these Latin figures 'witches' but instead to study them as a possible influence on the later witch stereotype.

Notes

- ¹ Latin terms include *anus, femina, lena, maga, mulier, nutrix, saga, sacerdos, Thessala*.
- ² MW Dickie recognises the distinction made by Evans-Pritchard (see note 7) but claims that this distinction does not exist in current English usage, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World*, Routledge, London, 2001, p.16.
- ³ J B Russell, *A History of Witchcraft*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980, pp.12-14.
- ⁴ For one of many discussions on witch hunting as woman hunting, see C Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1984, pp.84-88.
- ⁵ K Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1971, p.520.
- ⁶ J B Sykes, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford University Press, 1983, s.v., sorceress.
- ⁷ There is no fixed way of defining these terms and many follow Evans-Pritchard's distinction that witchcraft is a supernatural manifestation of malice, whereas sorcery was an intentional act that required specific actions, see E E Evans-Pritchard, *Sorcellerie, oracles et magie, chez les Azandé*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1972. Thanks to Dr Martin Mills at the University of Aberdeen for his valuable advice.
- ⁸ Larner, pp.85-86.
- ⁹ P Mayer, 'Witches', *Witchcraft and Sorcery*, M Marwick (ed.), Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, 1970, p.60.
- ¹⁰ M Summers, *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1971, pp.29-32.
- ¹¹ Larner, p.80.
- ¹² *ibid*, p.74.
- ¹³ N Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p.145.
- ¹⁴ Larner, p.74.
- ¹⁵ Cohn, pp.145-147.
- ¹⁶ *ibid*, p.145.
- ¹⁷ *ibid*, p.147.
- ¹⁸ Thomas, p.617.
- ¹⁹ H R Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Penguin Books, London, 1967, pp.43-4.
- ²⁰ see note 4.
- ²¹ Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, p.61.
- ²² A man named Moeris occurs in Virgil *Eclogue* 8.95-99, E V Rieu, trs., *Virgil The Pastoral Poems*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.99.

²³ J Henderson, 'Older Women in Attic Old Comedy,' *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol.117, 1987, pp.118-120.

²⁴ W R Johnson, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his heroes*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1987, p.20.

²⁵ *Pharsalia*, 6.710-11, J W Joyce, trs., *Lucan Pharsalia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993, p.163.

²⁶ *Pharsalia*, 6.558-9, *ibid*, p.159.

²⁷ *Pharsalia*, 6.491, *ibid*, p.157.

²⁸ *Pharsalia*, 6.521-2, *ibid*, p.158.

²⁹ Virgil, *Eclogue* 8.99, E V Rieu, trs., *Virgil The Pastoral Poems*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.99 and Tibullus 1.8.19, M C J Putnam, trs., *Tibullus: A Commentary*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma, 1973, p.30.

³⁰ Johnson, p.19.

³¹ *Epode*, 5.73, C E Bennett, trs., *Horace The Odes and Epodes*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1964, p.379.

³² T G Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, p.200.

³³ A Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983, pp.109-116.

³⁴ S Eitrem, 'La magie comme motif littéraire chez les Grecs et les Romains', *Symbolae Osloenses*, vol. 21, 1941, p.64 thinks that Sagana is the slave of Canidia in *Satire* 1.8.

³⁵ A stucco panel in an underground basilica at Porta Maggiore, Rome is believed to depict two men and two women using magic together, see M Beard, J North and S Price, *Religions of Rome Volume 1: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp.273-4.

³⁶ C E Manning, 'Canidia in the Epodes of Horace', *Mnemosyne*, vol.23, 1970, p.394.

³⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.52, 12.22, 12.65 and 16.30, M Grant, trs., *Tacitus The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp.183-184; p.261; p.281 and pp.394-395.

³⁸ *ibid*, p.261.

³⁹ An adultery conviction for a woman meant loss of status and the privileges that go along with it, see C Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in ancient Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.40.

⁴⁰ 29.2.26-7, W Hamilton, trs., *Ammianus Marcellinus The Later Roman Empire (A.D.354-378)*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1986, p.380.

⁴¹ For example, some scholars claim that midwives were accused because they were an obstacle to the budding field of medicine, see B Ehrenreich and D English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A Story of Women Healers*, Feminist Press, New York, 1973, p.15.

- ⁴² In the year AD 356-7, Constantius inflicted death on anyone caught using an old wives' charm to relieve pain, 16.8.1, Hamilton, p.96. The fate of death is also recorded under Emperors Valentinianus, Valens, and Gratianus in AD 371-2 for use of similar charms of old women, 29.2.3, *ibid*, p.376.
- ⁴³ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 37.30.3, E Cary, trs., *Dio Cassius' Roman History*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1924, p.149.
- ⁴⁴ Sallust, *Catiline*, 22.1-2, J C Rolfe, trs., *Sallust*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1971, pp.39-41.
- ⁴⁵ *Annals*, 4.9, M Grant, trs., *Tacitus The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971, p.162.
- ⁴⁶ R A Bauman, *Women and Politics in ancient Rome*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.12.
- ⁴⁷ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 7.20, F C Conybeare, trs., Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, London, 1912, vol.1, pp.203-205.
- ⁴⁸ *In Vatinius* 14, R Gardner, trans, Cicero The Speeches Pro Sestio and In Vatinius, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1958, pp.257-259.
- ⁴⁹ L Thorndike suggests that Pliny disliked the *magi* for intellectual reasons more than moral reasons, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, MacMillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1923, p.62.
- ⁵⁰ *Natural History*, 28.6, W H S Jones, trs., *Pliny Natural History books 28-32*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp.5-7.
- ⁵¹ R MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp.46-94.
- ⁵² C R Phillips III, 'Nullum Crimen Sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic' in *Magika Hiera*, C A Faraone and D Obbink (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, p.261.
- ⁵³ The law (VIII.8b) reads *neve alienam segetem pellexeris* and an interpretation can be found in C Pharr, 'The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol.63, 1932, p.277.
- ⁵⁴ *Annals*, 13.57, p.387.
- ⁵⁵ B MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation: a study in religion and politics in ancient Rome*, Latomus, Revues d'Études Latines, Brussels, 1982, p.7.
- ⁵⁶ B MacBain, *ibid*, Appendix A, pp.82-106.
- ⁵⁷ Livy 3.6, A de Sélincourt, trs., *Livy The Early History of Rome*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971, p.189.
- ⁵⁸ Livy, 4.21; 4.25, A de Sélincourt, trs., *ibid*, p.293 and p.296.

⁵⁹ H H Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1981, pp.20-21 and p.29 lists all the occasions on which we know such banquets occurred in Roman history.

⁶⁰ Johnson, p.18.

⁶¹ Thomas, pp.96-97.

⁶² Thomas, p.125.

⁶³ *ibid*, p.568.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.569.

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The Feminine Voice of Vice in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

Stephen Morris

Abstract:

The Ladder of Divine Ascent, a classic of Byzantine Christian spirituality written by an abbot of Mount Sinai's monastic community in the sixth century, presents the spiritual life as a climb up a ladder of 30 rungs. Each rung (chapter) describes a virtue to be nurtured or a vice to be eschewed and many chapters that describe the vices conclude with a question regarding the interrelationship of various vices and how one spawns several others: "Who is your mother? Which are your daughters?" The vices are always addressed as and respond as female personifications. They are mothers and daughters of each other, wicked (step)sisters and evil temptresses who seek to cause the monk to stumble as he climbs the ladder and fall headlong to his doom.

Given the male monastic audience for which the Ladder was intended, we might expect the virtues to be given masculine voices. However, the virtues - when given voice - are nearly always feminine as well. In fact, only four times in the course of the Ladder are spiritual personifications given masculine identities and of these masculine entities, two are vices.

Byzantine Christianity seems to conceive spiritual powers for both good and ill as overwhelmingly feminine powers, even though the Devil himself and his closest associates in hell are always depicted as male. But even these male personifications of wickedness are often comic figures who have no real impact on daily life. It is the female spiritual entities that interact with humans in practical terms. These feminine voices both spur the monk onto heroic accomplishments of virtue and despicable enactments of vice. Are these feminine spiritual powers connected to the social, political, and ecclesiastical power of Byzantine empresses? Or is the depiction of the spiritual world as primarily a feminine sphere of influence a reflection of some other daily reality encountered by the monks?

Key Words: Vice, virtue, feminine, masculine, Byzantine, Ladder of Divine Ascent, Eastern Christianity

The Ladder of Divine Ascent, a classic of the Eastern Christian spiritual tradition,¹ points out that "no order or reason can be found among the irrational passions, that indeed every brand of disorder and chaos may be discovered in them."² Nevertheless, since "pious mothers bear pious daughters" and "it makes good sense to apply this norm in reverse,"³ the Ladder does attempt to bring some order to the chaos of the passions and

examine them in an orderly fashion to assist the devout in their ascetic struggle to regain the likeness, as well as the image, of God. Written by one John, a sixth century abbot of Mount Sinai's monastic community, it is a guide to the spiritual life arranged in thirty chapters, the "rungs" or "steps" on the ladder that must be climbed from earth to heaven if one is to see God. Each rung (chapter) describes a virtue to be nurtured or a vice to be eschewed. (This description of the spiritual life in terms of a ladder has given rise to an iconographic genre, the ladder itself. Monks are shown struggling to climb to its pinnacle, where Christ awaits. Devils are attempting to distract the monks and succeed in pulling some from the ladder, causing them to plunge headlong to their doom in Hell. Some of these ladder-icons show St. John at the top of the ladder, leading the way. Others show him at the foot of the ladder, pointing out to his monks the way they must begin the rough ascent.⁴) Many previous studies have attempted to discuss whether these rungs are meant to be necessarily climbed only in order and each achieved before ascending to the next or whether they are a less rigid guide to the spiritual task and meant to provide rather a broad outline and the inter-relatedness of the vices with each other, as well as the virtues.⁵ In any case, none of the previous examinations of *The Ladder* have looked at the vices and virtues in terms of their perceived gender and how the voices of the vices, when personified, describe their relations to each other. (This interest in the association of gender and sin is an age-old one that never seems to go away. As recently as February 2009, the Vatican released a study of which sins are more likely to be confessed by men or women. It seems that among Roman Catholics, women are more likely to confess instances of pride, envy, and anger whereas men are more likely to confess acts of lust, gluttony, and sloth).⁶

Many chapters of *The Ladder* that describe the vices conclude with a question regarding the interrelationship of various vices and how one spawns several others: "Who is your mother? Which are your daughters?" The vices are always addressed as and respond as female personifications. They are mothers and daughters of each other, wicked (step)sisters and evil temptresses who seek to cause the monk to stumble as he climbs the ladder and fall headlong to his doom. Anger and Tedium (Despondency) both confess to having a multitude of mothers: the mothers of Anger are Vainglory, Avarice, Greed and Lust⁷ while the mothers of Tedium are Stolidity of Soul, Forgetfulness of the Things of Heaven, and Too Heavy a Burden of Troubles.⁸ Anger, however, also admits to having a father (Conceit). Unspeakable Blasphemy has no father and only a single mother (Dreadful Pride)⁹ whereas Gluttony has no father(s) but three mothers (Unbroken Habit, Dullness of Soul, Failure to remember Death).¹⁰

An unusual departure from this pattern are the sins of Fornication and Insensitivity of Spirit, neither of which admits to having a mother or

mothers but having rather fathers (Love of Self, in the case of Fornication,¹¹ and Big Meals, Bad Habit, and Time for Insensitivity¹²) that beget them with no maternal input.

However, both Fornication and Insensitivity are listed among the children of “the mother of every evil”¹³ in the discussion of Gluttony. Gluttony is portrayed as truly the most insidious of the vices (as opposed to Pride, which is often considered the root of all sin in most spiritual tracts¹⁴). The *Ladder* describes fasting as “the delight of paradise” and gluttony as “the fall of Adam,” which the pre-lenten Byzantine liturgical hymnography asserts as well.¹⁵ This association of gluttony with the primordial sin appears as early as the second century, when Irenaeus of Lyons writes

For as at the beginning it was by means of food that [the enemy] persuaded man, although not suffering hunger, to transgress God’s commandments, so in the end [the devil] did not succeed in persuading [Christ] that was hungry to take that food which proceeded from God.¹⁶

Gluttony gives birth to nearly 25 other sins, of which some are considered her sons and others her more numerous daughters.¹⁷ Gluttony is the mistress that few – if any – men escape prior to death¹⁸ but there is one reference to Gluttony as male, the “prince of passions” as Lucifer is the prince of demons.¹⁹ This central role of Mistress Gluttony as the doorway to all wickedness seems curious to many in the 21st century West but should not be glossed over too quickly. Gluttony is mother of all sin because the intake of food is the most basic act of self-control or lack thereof available to most people, whether monastic or lay. If the goal of the ascetic life is to train oneself in self-denial so as to be available to others, to say “Yes” to the opportunities to serve and minister to others, to express the love of God even at great cost to oneself, then the first and most constant battleground in that struggle is against the demands on one’s own stomach. Furthermore, although we currently like to think of the heart as the seat of human emotion, in the past this seat of emotion has been identified as the liver or even the stomach.²⁰ The haze of emotional confusion that can render mortals susceptible to the wiles of the devil rises from the stomach and can be most effectively cleared away by controlling the demands of the stomach.

Gluttony is also the vice most disruptive of the community’s life, especially given the limited resources of a community such as John’s on Mount Sinai. The sin of “secret eating” is among those on the daily examination of conscience to be performed each evening (attributed to Macarius the Great)²¹ and would mean either stealing/hoarding food which the monk was not entitled to and the performance of virtue in public while indulging in vice away from the scrutiny of prying eyes. Food would be,

presumably, more available than sex and subject to more misuse or abuse which would threaten the physical as well as emotional survival of the community.

Given the male monastic audience for which the Ladder was intended, we might expect the virtues to be given masculine voices. However, the virtues -- when given voice -- are nearly always feminine as well. In fact, only nine times in the course of the Ladder are spiritual personifications given masculine identities and of these masculine entities, five are vices. The virtues, which also conceive or beget and give birth to further virtues, are given genealogies similar to those of the vices, though in less detail. The closest one of the virtues comes to mimicking the centrality of Gluttony is the family whose origin is the patriarch Good Intention (see Genealogy of Virtues II, below).

Byzantine Christianity seems to conceive spiritual powers for both good and ill as overwhelmingly feminine powers, even though the Devil himself and his closest associates in hell are always depicted as male.²² But even these male personifications of wickedness are often comic figures who have no real impact on daily life. It is the female spiritual entities that interact with humans in practical terms. These feminine voices both spur the monk onto heroic accomplishments of virtue and despicable enactments of vice. Are these feminine spiritual powers connected to the social, political, and ecclesiastical power of Byzantine empresses? Or is the depiction of the spiritual world as primarily a feminine sphere of influence a reflection of some other daily reality encountered by the monks?

Women were a much more present, powerful reality in Byzantine culture than in the medieval West. Women existed as legal entities, able to own property or enter into contracts. Empresses would rule in their own name, not simply as regent or representative of underage sons or other male relatives. (Charlemagne justified his appropriation of the title "emperor of the Romans" by claiming that the throne in Constantinople was empty although the Empress Irene was very much alive and well.) Abbesses were important religious figures, though perhaps less common than abbots. To put the Ladder in its political and social context, what was going on at the time? Were there particularly powerful women shaping Byzantine society at the time the Ladder was composed?

Gregory the Great was Pope of Rome at the time, struggling to provide organized relief for those suffering as a result of the Lombard invasions. Maurice was emperor in Constantinople, engaged in the Persian War to defend the empire against encroachments from further east. The empress Constantina, while involved in the life of the capital, was not an especially central figure. The period was one of considerable social, military and economic difficulty in both East and West.²³

Living in the remote wilderness of Sinai (already a pilgrimage site in the fourth century),²⁴ John was far removed from the worst of this unrest though no doubt informed of it. Standing in prayer in the principal church of the monastic complex built around the Burning Bush,²⁵ John led his monks in the struggle to bring order to the chaos of their own passions if not to the political or other forms of chaos in the world outside their doors. John might not preside at the hours long liturgical prayer of the community but he would be present there with his brethren, day by day by day. As they stood there in the church, built fifty years earlier by the great imperial benefactors Justinian and Theodora²⁶, John would have seen Theodora's name prominently displayed in the carved work of the central beam before the altar-screen. He would have been very aware of her role in providing both for his community and for the larger Church throughout the empire. Prayer for both Justinian and Theodora would be offered on a regular basis in their role as departed benefactors (if not "second founders") of the monastery.²⁷

Even more than Theodora's very real presence on Mt. Sinai, John would have been steeped in the foundational monastic practices and tradition, which had their source in the Egyptian deserts, and the first monastic communities established there. The monks had gone into the desert to find the One, the Other and it was Evagrius – nearly 300 years before John – that first codified the theory of their spiritual struggle, including the discussion of the eight capital thoughts (gluttony, lust, greed, sadness, acedia, anger, vainglory, and pride) which later became the seven deadly sins.²⁸ Slightly predating John and his Ladder, perhaps the most widely read and influential restating and expansion of Evagrius' work was the collection of writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34) and now widely known as simply Pseudo-Dionysius.²⁹ The Pseudo-Dionysian collection stresses the complete and utter unknowability of God as he is, in and of himself, and introduces the classic approach of apophatic theology, in which it is considered safer to say what God is not rather than what God is. Pseudo-Dionysius asserts at one point, that God's transcendent goodness

is at a total remove from every condition, movement, life, imagination, conjecture, name, discourse, thought, conception, being, rest, dwelling, unity, limit, infinity, the totality of existence. ...It is at the center of everything and everything has it for a destiny.... Realizing this, all theologians praise it by every name – and as the Nameless One.... And so it is as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is.³⁰

God is identified as so completely Other as to be “above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself,” itself transcending existence.³¹ But, Pseudo-Dionysius insists, we limited humans must use some words, some names to describe this ineffable Other and that those names that begin to approach some aspect of reality are those revealed in the Scriptures. Prominent among them is “Bridegroom.” God identifies himself as the Bridegroom of Israel and Christ as the Bridegroom whose arrival the faithful eagerly await and prepare for. It is toward this totally Other Bridegroom, completely outside our understanding and comprehension that John’s *Ladder of Divine Ascent* attempts to guide the monks and hermits on Mt. Sinai. Before this awesome Incomprehensibility, referred to as Bridegroom for simplicity’s sake, that all creation is therefore Other as well, totally different from it, and identified by the image of “Bride.”³² If God is Bridegroom, then everything else is Bride. Above and beyond gender, the Ineffable is referred to in shorthand by the metaphor “masculine” and everything else is therefore referred to as “feminine.” It is in this context and worldview that John lives and breathes and writes to his monks. C.S. Lewis puts this same thought into the mouth of one of the characters appearing in the last of his space trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*:

The male you could have escaped, for it exists only on the biological level. But the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.³³

Out of this intuition grows John’s identification of the virtues and vices as all feminine characters in *The Ladder*. It is this same intuition that identifies the saved, the righteous of humanity as all fundamentally feminine characters as well. The icon of the Pure Soul, in one example taken from medieval Russia (17th century Pskov),³⁴ depicts the saved human as a crowned and glorious feminine character, able to control her passions – the lion on a leash – and ascends to sit at the right hand of Christ in glory. It is the unsaved, the damned and emaciated character confined to the dark pit of Hell which is stripped of gender and rendered inhuman, exiled to the lifeless desert outside the life-giving monastic community of the wilderness.

Genealogy of Vices

Fathers That Beget	Mothers Who Conceive	VICE	Which is Then Mother To:
Conceit	1.Vainglory 2.Avarice 3.Greed 4,Lust	ANGER	1.Remembering Wrongs 2.Hate 3.Hostility 4.Self-Justification
	1.Stolidity of Soul 2.Forgetfulness of Things of Heaven 3.Too Heavy a Burden of Troubles	TEDIUM/Despondency	1.Changing From Place to Place 2.Disobedience to One's Superior 3.Forgetfulness of Judgment to Come 4.Abandonment of One's Vocation
Love of Self		FORNICATION/Lack of Chastity	Sins in General, which then BEGET Despair
1.Big Meals 2.Bad Habit 3.Time		INSENSITIVITY/Numness of Spirit	(mother of)Laughter (nurse of) Sleep (friend of) Full Stomach (ally of) Fake Piety
	Dreadful Pride	Unspeakable Blasphemy	

Genealogy of Gluttony

Mothers Who Conceive	VICE	Sons	Daughters
1.Unbroken Habit 2.Dullness of Soul 3.Failure to Remember Death	Gluttony	1.Fornication 2.Hardness of Heart 3.Sleepiness 4.Dirty Thoughts 5.Filth 6.Impurities	1.Laziness 2.Talkativeness 3.Breezy Familiarity 4.Jesting 5.Facetiousness 6.Contradiction 7.Stubbornness 8.Contempt 9.Disobedience 10.Stolidity of Mind 11.Captivity 12.Boastfulness 13.Audacity 14.Love of Worldly Things 15.Impure Prayer 16.Distracted Thoughts 17.Catastrophes 18. Despair

Genealogy of Virtues

Fathers That Beget...	Mothers Who Conceive...	VIRTUE	...Which Are Then Mother to:
		Intelligent Silence	1.Prayer 2.Freedom From Bondage 3.Custodian of Zeal
	1.Stillness 2.Obedience	Chastity	
Self-criticism		1.Obedience 2.Longing for Salvation	
	Self-criticism	Salvation	
	1.Thought of Death 2.Memory of gall & Vinegar	Self-control	
	1.Hard Work 2.Upright Heart	Faith	
	Prayer	Tears	Further Prayer

Genealogy of Virtues II

Father...	Mother...	VIRTUE
Good Intention		Laboring for Salvation
	Virtue	Perseverance
	Perseverance	Habit
	Habit	Good Character
Good Character		Fear
Fear		Observance of the Commandments

Notes

¹ Still read in its entirety by most monastic communities each Great Lent and in abridged versions by many lay people as well. Its author is commemorated each year on the fourth Sunday during Great Lent as “St. John of the Ladder” or “St. John Climacus.”

² Step 26, English translation available in *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, (trans. C. Luibheid and N. Russell; notes on trans. by N. Russell and introduction by K. Ware), Paulist Press, New York, 1982. pp. 235-6.

³ Step 26, p. 244.

⁴ See icons on the website of the Orthodox Church of America, Wikipedia, and Google Images.

⁵ cf. Introduction to the translation used here: John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (trans. C. Luibheid and N. Russell; notes on trans. by N. Russell; intro by K. Ware) New York: Paulist Press. 1982.

⁶ BBC News report on February 18, 2009, viewed 13/03/2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/7897034.stm>>

⁷ Step 8, pp. 150-1.

⁸ Step 13, pp. 163-4.

⁹ Step 23, p. 211.

¹⁰ Step 14, p. 170.

¹¹ Step 15, p. 186.

¹² Step 18, p. 192.

¹³ Step 17, p. 190.

¹⁴ cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Secunda secundae, Quest. clvii* (“Inordinate self-love is the source of every sin”)

¹⁵ *Lenten Triodion*, Matins for Cheesefare Sunday, verse on the Praises; see *Lenten Triodion*, (trans. Mother Mary and K. Ware), Faber and Faber, London, 1977, p.179.

¹⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* 5.21.2; translation available in *Early Christian Fathers*, (trans. C. Richardson), Macmillan, New York, 1970, p.390.

¹⁷ Step 14, p. 170.

¹⁸ Step 14, p. 165.

¹⁹ Step 14, p. 169.

²⁰ See *Biblical Hebrew E-Magazine*, Nov. 2004 (issue #009), <<http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/emagazine/009.doc>> and the following:

At one time moral courage was supposed to reside in the heart, physical courage in the stomach, wisdom in the head, affection in the reins (kidneys), melancholy in the bile and spirit in the blood." in *Brewer's Dictionary of*

Phrase and Fable, revised by A. Room, HarperCollinsPublishers, New York, 1999, Sixteenth Edition.

²¹ *Orthodox Daily Prayers*, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press: South Canaan, PA, 1982, pp. 72-4.

²² See the Gospel of Nicodemus or the kontakia of Romanos, available in *The Kontakia of Romano, Byzantine Melodists*, (trans. M. Carpenter), University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1972, for examples of these.

²³ D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500 – 1453*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, restwood, New York, 1971. p. 76.

²⁴ Described by the famous pilgrim Egeria in her travel diary; see *Egeria's Travels*, (trans. J. Wilkinson), Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1999.

²⁵ The Burning Bush was itself protected by a chapel built by the empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, thus marking the presence of another powerful feminine figure. Furthermore, the Bush was itself often identified with the Mother of God in the liturgical hymnography of the services John would participate in.

²⁶ John, having entered the community at age 16, would have been living in the midst of the construction site during his most formative years.

²⁷ For detailed photographs and discussions of the monastic complex on Mt. Sinai provided by Justinian and Theodora, see G. Forsyth and K Weitzman, *The Church and Fortress of Justinian*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1973 and J. Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1980.

²⁸ See his *Praktikos* and the *Chapters on Prayer*, as well as his writings included in the *Philokalia*.

²⁹ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (trans. C. Luibheid with forward and notes by P. Rorem, preface by R. Roques, introduction by J. Pelikan, J. LeClercq and K. Froehlich), Paulist Press, New York. 1987. p. 13.

³⁰ *Divine Names*, 1.5-7.

³¹ *Divine Names*, 1.1

³² Ps-Dionysius, *Letter 9* (pp. 282-284)

³³ Lewis, C.S. *That Hideous Strength*, Macmillan: New York. 1946. p. 316.

³⁴ Roozmond-Van Ginhoven, Hetty J. *Ikon: Inspired Art*. Wijzenburgh Foundation: Echteld, The Netherlands. 1980. Plate 66 and commentary.

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The Question of Evil and the ‘Cross Pressures’ of the Secular Age: Zola and Huysmans on the Lourdes Phenomenon

Scott M. Powers

Abstract

Theologians and philosophers from Antiquity to the modern era, faced with the reality of evil, have grappled with the notion of God. Questions of Theodicy, which attempt to account for the existence of an all-good and powerful deity, have often arisen because evil and human suffering appear to us as an undeniable dimension of the human condition. Whereas (and because) evil appears to us as (part of) the Real, God’s existence is immediately questioned. Increasingly perhaps, Western thinkers have been enlisting existing theories of evil to defend an already established system of thought or philosophy. This essay argues that this way of “using” evil is due in large part to the rise of secularism over the past few centuries. In *The Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor describes the essence of “the secular age” not as rooted in a marked decline in religious faith and practice, but rather as the existence of a multiplicity of religious and non-religious positions. What’s more, Taylor argues that this multiplicity has a “fragilisation” effect on any given system of thought. Accordingly, in our secular society of competing construals, believers and non-believers alike feel more “cross-pressured” than assured. Naturalism and Catholic mysticism traditionally perceived as two distinct and opposing movements of the time, can be understood rather as caught in the same “cross-winds” so to speak. They are challenged to negotiate between the forces in conflict—that is to say between a movement’s official belief system and the “other” side that threatens or “fragilises” it—as much as they convey their own vision of things. To illustrate this, this paper looks closely at Zola’s and Huysmans’s writings on the Lourdes phenomenon. At the levels of narrative voice, imagery, and theme (faith healings), this essay demonstrates that the two writers’ official position on God and science was constantly being compromised by their attraction to “the other side” as a compelling alternative.

Key Words: Evil, theodicy, secularization, Lourdes, Emile Zola, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Charles Taylor, cross pressures, Naturalism, Catholicism

Emile Zola is an obvious choice for a study on secularization. As the leader of the Naturalist movement, Zola advocated a strictly scientific method of observation and documentation as the basis of his fictional accounts of modern society and human nature. Throughout his career, he often expressed religious belief as merely superstition. He espoused a perspective on secularization increasingly critiqued by scholars, that perceives scientific advances as the propellers history, and that through time societies will abandon religion. Evil, for Zola, is overall bodily (as in the inheritance of behavioral traits), but it can also be exacerbated or mitigated by environmental conditions. This essay is interested in the extent to which, and why, the religious continues to play a role in Zola's works despite all of this.

In a subsequent study, I intent to argue that in order to avoid the pitfalls of nihilism, Zola's texts sublimate evildoers. By sublimation, I am drawing from a psychoanalytical perspective that describes sublimation as a defense mechanism that protects the subject from the affect of anxiety that accompanies the apprehension of a godless world of chaos and meaninglessness. What I would like to explore today is another explanation for the surfacing of quasi-religious thought in Zola's later works, not as much as a response to chaos, but rather as a result of a fear of, as well as of an abiding allure of, "the other" –and by other, here, I mean the opposing system of thought or discourse: Catholicism.

In my study of Zola's novel on the Lourdes phenomenon, I have identified what I believe to be several instances in which religious thought emerges, usually obliquely, in an otherwise vehement denunciation of Catholicism and all religious sentiment for that matter. It is precisely because Zola perceives the Lourdes phenomenon as compelling, and therefore as threatening that we are presented with a very curious narrative that hosts the concomitant forces of attraction and repulsion. A primary goal of my research here is to come to a better understanding of the relationship between religious and secular thought as well as of the role that discourse on evil plays in this relationship.

I should mention a few words about the time period in which Zola wrote. Scientism surely dominated the social imaginary in late 19th-century France, including the literary imaginary, especially in the case of Naturalism. But there was also a revival of religious sentiment, as historians have underscored a marked increase in Church attendance, in the construction of churches and basilicas, and in the number of religious pilgrimages.¹ A most striking example is Lourdes which, by the end of the 19th century, was fast becoming a mega-shrine, hosting hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. As part of this revival, there emerged alongside Naturalism Catholic and mystical literary movements. My approach to texts written during this time of heightened ideological conflict understands the two rival literary traditions as developing alongside one another. I perceive them as engaged in

a sustained dialogue as they challenged each other and responded to each other's ideologies.

In his recent mammoth publication, Taylor defines "the secular age" not as rooted in a marked decline in religious faith and practice, but rather as the existence of a multiplicity of religious and non-religious positions. And this multiplicity creates cross-pressures that "fragilize" all systems of thought. In a society of competing construals, the self feels more "cross-pressured" than assured, or pulled in different directions by rivaling frames of mind. No single belief system remains uncontested as religious and secular systems of thought continuously challenge one another. Consequently, in the social imaginary "religion remains ineradicably on the horizon of areligion; and vice versa."²

I find Taylor's description of cross-pressures curiously similar to Bakhtin's definition of the novel itself. Bakhtin describes the novel as constituting a particular assemblage of discourses that define specific cultures. Language in the novel is a living mix of varied and opposing forces. Whereas poetry is mostly monologic, the novel is dialogic, characterized by heteroglossia. The novel exerts a primarily centrifugal force, engaging in a multiplicity of voices and rhetorical modes. The novel therefore is the juxtaposition, opposition, and orchestration of socio-economic and ideological discourses.³ What I'm interested in is how the novel, during Zola's time, constitutes a primary medium that hosts the play/tension between religious and secular discourse; but also, and especially, how an author's less-than-perfect orchestration of discourses unveils what I call an abiding allure of the other discourse.

Published in 1894, the 600-page novel, entitled *Lourdes*, recounts the pilgrimage of a group of Parisians to the shrine. The main character, a young priest named Pierre, in some respects the fictitious double of the Naturalist narrator, has a secret: he has lost faith in God. In the story he accompanies to Lourdes his childhood friend, Marie, who seeks a cure for her physical handicap: she cannot walk, due to a fall from a horse several years earlier. The lengthy plot introduces a large number of characters suffering from a variety of ailments, but only a small portion is eventually healed. The most spectacular healing is Marie's. On the final day at the shrine during a faith-healing service, she stands up from her wheel chair and walks as if she had never been afflicted. But the Naturalist vein of the novel reinterprets this physical healing as psychological. The narrative suggests that Marie's physical injury had in fact healed itself long ago, but Marie, suffering from neurosis, remained convinced of her ailment up to the moment of her healing at the Grotto.

Zola's narrative is very complex in that it comprises a heterogeneous (or in Bakhtin's words, "heteroglossic") juxtaposition of a variety of subject positions. Thanks to various literary techniques, the reader is made privy to

the thoughts not only of the Naturalist narrator who “observes” and “documents” from a distanced but biased perspective, but also we read the thoughts of the skeptical priest, of impious doctors who nonetheless believe in the power of faith-healings, of other doctors who discredit all so called “miracles,” of a once incredulous doctor who converted to Catholicism, and finally of many ardent believers who interpret happenings as signs of God’s intervention. In addition, in each of the chapters of the novel, an official Catholic account of Lourdes temporarily replaces the Naturalist narrative in order to familiarize the reader with the legend.

The *Lourdes* narrative is a difficult one for the reader in that she must try not to get distracted by this cacophony of ideological discourses and subject positions in order to discern and especially to remain attuned to the Naturalist voice. The beginning of the novel does rather clearly present the Naturalist perspective on religion as illusion, but the reader often loses sight of this perspective at various points during the lengthy novel, and the conclusion in fact does not present quite the same Naturalist perspective on faith as the introduction. That is to say, Zola’s position on religious sentiment appears to evolve. While the incredulous priest, as the Narrator’s fictitious double, does not in any fashion undergo “conversion,” he does reconsider religious sentiment as an inextricable part of human nature, and recognizes its power to heal certain human ailments that medical science has not (or not yet) been able to cure. In a lengthier version of this paper I have identified what I believe to be some narrative inconsistencies that suggest that more is going on in the novel than simply an “orchestration” of discourses that aims to dramatize a secular perspective on Lourdes.

To being to account for these inconsistencies, let me briefly explain Zola’s interest in Lourdes. The shrine imposed two challenges to Zola’s Naturalism. As Zola perceived history as the inevitable march of progress away from “superstition” and toward “scientific truth,” he felt the need to provide an explanation of the surge in religious fervor at the shrine and throughout France at a time otherwise marked by reason and scientific inquiry. Second, Zola felt the need to provide a scientific explanation of the faith healings that had begun to flourish there.

But in his correspondence, journal entries, and interviews, Zola also expressed fascination with Lourdes. He expressed great wonder with regard to what he had witnessed at the Shrine during his initial visit. His comments suggest that he had experienced what he himself called “the mystical city” much like the faithful pilgrims. He used terms such as “merveilleux” (marvelous) and “religious astonishment” to describe his experience at the Shrine. He further explains that he observed there “extra-natural things.”⁴ Zola’s writings of the time suggest that he had become enraptured with the atmosphere of Lourdes. In fact, his sympathetic portrayal of Catholic belief in interviews led priests and others to hope for the author’s imminent

conversion. Zola's extra-literary comments about the shrine help us to recognize the complexity of his impetus to write *Lourdes*.

Let me briefly list a few types of instances in Zola's novel in which the text, much like Zola's reaction to the events at the shrine, appears to become enchanted by the "other." I am especially interested in passages in which what seems to be a Naturalist or scientific observation begins to exhibit mystical attributes. Such is the case, for instance, in lengthy narrative passages in which the Naturalist narrator describes the appearance of the Shrine, and the ceremonies that take place there, in mystical language, in religiously charged vocabulary, and with Catholic metaphors.

I am also interested in what I would consider Zola's overuse of what Dorrit Cohn calls consonant psycho-narration.⁵ In Zola's earlier novels, the narrator's uncritical description of a character's thoughts and perceptions would be limited to a few lines or a paragraph at best, and neatly self-contained by literary signals that alert the reader to the beginning and end of a character's thoughts. However, in *Lourdes*, psycho-narration of a believer's perspective on faith healings can last several pages. The reader is tempted to forget the overarching nature of the novel that she is reading, and too becomes enraptured.

On other occasions, the boundary between psycho-narration or free indirect discourse and the narrator's own voice becomes blurred. For those not entirely familiar with the term free indirect discourse, this is a technique often employed in literary prose by a narrator to relate a character's verbal utterances without quotes and by avoiding the tedious repetition of writing "So and so said such and such." Consequently, it is often very difficult to determine whether the voice speaking is the narrator's or a fervent Catholic, which can be problematic for the reader. The problem with both free indirect discourse and consonant psycho-narration is precisely that the distance between the narrator's perspective and the characters' appears little to nil. This is why Flaubert, notorious for writing in the free indirect mode, could claim, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!" I raise the question of whether Zola's exploitation of consonant psycho-narration and free indirect discourse here stems from his attraction to the other discourse.

Most puzzling is the "Invisible Roses" passage that scholars have not convincingly explained, in my opinion. At the novel's halfway point, there contains a passage cloaked in mystery, and is by no means contained by a rival or authoritative Naturalist account. Perched on a hillside overlooking the Shrine, Pierre and Marie suddenly detect a powerful smell of roses. Logically, they begin to search the premises for roses, which give them inexplicable joy and peace but which, despite great effort, they fail to find. As a well-known symbol of the Virgin, the roses contribute to the mystical dimension of the novel. And while they are referred to in subsequent passages, they are never "scientifically" explained but remain a mystery.

Could it be said that the narrative momentarily “forgets” itself in order to dabble in the mystical?

I would argue here, that if the reader finishes the novel with a definitive grasp of the Naturalist’s perspective of events, it is due in large part, to the text’s enlisting of an established discourse on evil. What I am saying, in sum, is that through all of the curious and ambivalent positions towards religion and religious sentiment that the narrative weaves in and out of, it regains its footing in a Naturalist account of the Lourdes phenomenon most definitively by falling back on negative theodicy, and which emerges in the final sections of novel. By negative theodicy, I mean a reasoning that perceives the harsh reality of physical evil, or bodily suffering, as proof of God’s inexistence.

Immediately following the lengthy description of miracles that concludes the fourth section of the novel, the narrative seems to “take a step back” in order to refocus its attention on the human suffering that persists at the shrine. Instead of allowing itself to remain mesmerized by its own recounting of a handful of awe-inspiring healings, the narrative redirects its attention toward those who are not healed, especially children. One is the case of a boy whose terminal illness the narrator highlights in order to dismiss belief in a benevolent deity. The passage uses a number of verbs conjugated in the past conditional to express what should have taken place -- that this young boy should have been healed. These sentences with the past conditional imply the relative clause “if God were good,” or “if God existed.”⁶

To cite but one other example, during one of the enrapturing ceremonies at the Grotto, a mother implores the Virgin to heal Rose, her dying infant (and as a side note I’m still working through my interpretation of the author’s choice of this name, and its possible relationship to the “invisible roses” scene.) It is ironically during the mother’s fervent prayer to the Virgin Mary that Rose expires. Consequently, the mother loses faith in God. As the pilgrims depart from Lourdes, Pierre and Marie take note of the mother, who, in her lamenting, cries out: “There is no holy Virgin!”⁷ I suggest that this retreat in the narrative from lengthy and oftentimes complicit descriptions of miraculous healings to a description of the enduring ailments of the majority of the pilgrims, especially children, constitutes nothing less than a re-anchoring of the narrative in a resolutely secular perspective. This resort to a negative theodicy in the novel’s denouement, I argue, protects the Naturalist ego from the threat of existential dissolution.

In a lengthier version of this paper, I will discuss the novelist Huysmans who wrote a lengthy response to Zola’s novel. In his semi-biographical work entitled *The Crowds of Lourdes* (1906) we see the same dynamic of cross-pressures but in reverse fashion. This time, the writer of faith is attracted to the discourse of the impious other, which leads him into

states of depression as recounted in the biographical piece. But much like Zola, to regain footing in his faith and cure himself of his existential angst, Huysmans falls back on an established discourse on evil and theodicy, a Catholic one to be sure, which interprets physical suffering as serving a greater good. Just as Christ suffered on the cross to save humanity, or perhaps a bit more provocatively, just as the innocent children of Judea suffered in death to save the infant Christ, the sufferings of the pilgrims are surely saving the souls of humankind elsewhere in France and beyond. Huysmans finally dismisses Zola's negative theodicy by arguing that the Lourdes Shrine should be a place of *suffering*, not of healing.

In this essay I have briefly discussed the discourses (and literary traditions) of Catholicism and Naturalism in France as mutually influential cross-pressures that have a destabilizing effect on each other. Whereas we often times more frequently analyze evil in literature as a topic of inquiry for a writer, it is sometimes, most certainly, an *a priori* discourse that authors lean on to solidify their established agendas, or to convince themselves of their point of view. At the same time, given the conclusions that Pierre makes in the final passages of the novel regarding the undeniably religious dimension of human nature and some positive side-effects of religious sentiment, I would say that this notion of cross-pressures also suggests, at least with Zola, that there can be a real dialogue between religion and secularism, and that the latter can gain greater insight from the former into the human condition.

Notes

¹ G. Cholvy and Y-M. Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine (1880-1930)*, Editions Privat, Toulouse, 1968, pp. 67-228.

² C. Taylor, *The Secular Age*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 592. Taylor's notion of "cross-pressures" is in fact an elaboration of William James' description in *The Will to Believe* of the phenomenon in which competing visions of the world prevent individuals from believing in one vision without themselves on some level of consciousness doubting that vision and imagining the possibility of the "other" perspective. See W. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, Longmans Green and Co., New York, 1987, pp.1-31, and Taylor, op.cit., pp. 549-51.

³ See M.M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel,' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp. 259-422.

⁴ J. Noiray's 'Preface', in *Lourdes*, E. Zola (author), Gallimard, Paris, 1995, p.9, and R. Ternois, *Zola et son temps : Lourdes, Rome, Paris*, Société Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1961, pp. 211, 238, 240.

⁵ D. Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978, pp. 22-57.

⁶ Zola, *Lourdes*, op.cit., pp. 459-62.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 533.

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Snowflakes and Tigers: R. S. Thomas And the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

The Welsh poet-priest R. S. Thomas spent much of his creative life searching for religious meaning in a world suffused with undeserved pain. As a nature poet, he questioned the waste and rapaciousness of the animal world; and his religious verse was marked by bewilderment in the face of an absent and apparently uncaring God. While some critics have noted Thomas' preoccupation with the problem of evil, there has been no systematic attempt to evaluate his responses to this problem or to view his whole work in relation to this central theme. This paper begins this task. It examines the main threads of Thomas' reaction to evil in the natural and human world, and suggests that these help to explain a major feature of his religious poetry: his embrace of the *via negativa*, or "negative way" to God.

Key Words: Christ, death, faith, God, nature, predation, poetry, suffering, Thomas, time

The Welsh priest and poet R. S. Thomas often likened God to a predator. The image suggested majesty and grace, but also a shocking violence. As a bird of prey, Thomas' God could clasp men and women in His talons, or circle the sky with a vigilant eye for blood.¹ He was also a tiger, with "glacial / eyes that had looked on / violence and come to terms / with it."² Thomas' use of such images touched on a central but neglected theme in his work: his engagement with what theologians call the "problem of evil". The problem can be stated simply: why does an all-loving and all-powerful God permit horrendous events that cause the innocent to perish? For Christians and other theists, this problem involves all forms of innocent suffering, from epidemic disease to the political atrocities of the twentieth century; but calamities arising from natural forces, which cannot be attributed to human wickedness or folly, pose the question of God's responsibility for evil most starkly. Thomas was mainly concerned with suffering of this kind - or "natural evil".³ The privation of labourers trapped in a bare and hostile environment, the pain of those visited with incurable sickness, and the waste and ferocity that seemed to characterise nature: all led him at times to imagine a God with the countenance of an eagle rather than a dove.⁴

Thomas spent most of his life in small rural parishes, and his religious speculations emerged in this context. The "vicar of large things in a

small parish”, the theological range of his poetry expanded considerably in the course of a publishing career that lasted more than half a century: he began to explore explicitly the nature of God and His relationship with humankind in his collection *Pietà* (1966), and with increasing force and focus in his work from the early 1970s until his death in 2000.⁵ But his interest in the problem of evil was evident, at least implicitly, from the beginning of his writing career. He took the title of his first collection, *The Stones of the Field* (1946), from the Book of Job, in which God assails an innocent man with appalling misfortune to test his faith.⁶ A number of his early poems charted his response to the apparently barren and thankless lives of his peasant congregation, while his nature poetry drew attention to the suffering the outward beauty of the landscape concealed: “the fluke and the foot-rot and the fat maggot / gnawing the skin.”⁷ From the mid-1960s he began to explore the problem of evil directly.⁸ Indeed, in “Look” (1968) he placed this exploration at the heart of religious experience.⁹ The poem begins with two peasants meeting to express their despair in the face of an uncaring God:

Look, here are two cronies, let's
Listen to them as the wind
Creeps under their clothes and the rain
Mixes with the bright moisture
Of their noses. They are saying,
Each in his own way, 'I am dying
And want to live. I am alive
And wish to die'. And for the same
Reason, that they have no belief
In a God who made the world
For misery and for the streams of pain
To flow in. . . .

Here, Thomas insisted, was an authentic expression of human experience. The peasants were true “voices of the earth”; their pain grew from the ugliness and stink of the countryside in which they were obliged to pick out a living. Religious belief meant nothing if it could not face this reality:

We must dip belief
Not in dew or in the cool fountain
Of beech buds, but in seas
Of manure through which they squelch
To the bleakness of their assignations.¹⁰

It was this desire to root faith in human experience that made Thomas contemplate the destruction and suffering that seemed to be knotted into life, and to return again and again to the question posed by the peasants' plight: Why should we believe in "a God who made the world / for misery"?

1. **The Economy of the God of Love**

At the heart of R. S. Thomas' engagement with the problem of evil was the "pitiless commentary" of wild places - the violence of nature itself.¹¹ The fact that predation was built into animal life raised what he called "the problem of killing as part of the economy of the God of love".¹² It appears that Thomas was troubled by this question from the beginning of his ministry in the parish of Manafon in the 1940s. In a passage from his third-person autobiography, *No-One* (1985), he recalled his early impressions of the rapaciousness of nature:

The young rector would himself see the birds of prey hunting, and the weasel and the stoat going about their bloody work. . . . These are the masters of the world of nature. One of the unfailing rules of that world is that life has to die in the cause of life. If there is any other way on this earth, God has not seen fit to follow it. This is a doctrine that plays straight into the hands of the strong. . . . And too often in this world, the race is to the swift, the battle to the strong.¹³

In his poetry Thomas acknowledged God as the author of this condition. He developed this idea most fiercely in a sequence of creation poems in the 1970s. In "Rough" (1975), for instance, God fashioned the world as a perpetual arena for hunters and their prey:

God looked at the eagle that looked at
the wolf that watched the jack-rabbit
cropping the grass, green and curling
as God's beard. He stepped back;
it was perfect, a self-regulating machine
of blood and faeces. . . .¹⁴

In this and many other poems, Thomas imagined a Creator who placed the struggle for existence at the heart of nature, and observed it with un pitying satisfaction.¹⁵ "God's economy" was a cycle of violence and death.

But this was only part of the problem. Nature was not merely a system of killing; it was also a place of torment. Thomas often noted the beauty and drama of predation - the thrill of watching a falcon fall "like

lightening on its prey” - but he was also an unsparing observer of the pain and ugliness of animal life.¹⁶ He evoked this most starkly in “January” (1955):

The fox drags its wounded belly
Over the snow, the crimson seeds
Of blood burst with a mild explosion,
Soft as excrement, bold as roses.

Over the snow that feels no pity,
Whose white hands can give no healing,
The fox drags its wounded belly.¹⁷

Here death is lingering and raw, and has none of the majesty of the falcon’s strike. The “bold roses” of blood only emphasise the bareness of the scene. The fox’s pain is stripped of meaning: there is no sense of a greater purpose or the renewal of life - the “crimson seeds” that seep from the wound are sterile. God has not only decreed that “life has to die in the cause of life”, but has filled the world with waste and horror. Thomas appeared to accept this truth in the final poem in his collection *Pietà*: “the God / we worship fashions the world / from such torment, and every creature / decorates it with its tribute of blood”.¹⁸

The rapaciousness of nature provided the background for Thomas’ most direct encounter with natural evil: his ministry to an impoverished rural population in the 1940s and 1950s. Like the animals in his nature poetry, his parishioners were exposed to an unfeeling landscape that drained and battered their lives.¹⁹ Thomas often assumed the pose of a detached observer in his reflections on peasant life; but this was not the case when he described his most intense and affecting encounters with natural evil – the deaths of his parishioners. In “Death of a Peasant” (1952), “Evans” (1958) and “The Mill” (1963), he offered his experiences of the deathbed in bare detail.²⁰ In each of these poems he charted the thankless and desolate last days of its subject, and his own sense of impotence in the face of what appeared to be meaningless pain.²¹ This was captured indelibly in the last verse of “Evans”, as the pastor stepped into the night after visiting the dying man:

It was not the dark filling my eyes
And mouth appalled me; not even the drip
Of rain like blood from the one tree
Weather-tortured. It was the dark
Silting the veins of that sick man
I left stranded upon the vast
And lonely shore of his bleak bed.²²

Thomas published these lines some ten years after the death of William Evans, and apparently recalled the experience to exemplify the hopelessness of his ministry before the fact of human suffering.²³ He did the same with “The Mill” in 1963, which tracked the long and fatal illness of another parishioner he claimed to have known decades earlier.²⁴ In this case the man’s sickness also consumed the life of his family, who attended his bedridden decline over many years. Their pastor also felt the slow crush of his protracted death:

Nine years in that bed
 From season to season
 The great frame rotted,
 While the past’s slow stream,
 Flowing through his head,
 Kept the rusty mill
 Of the mind turning –
 It was I it ground.

This experience posed the problem of natural evil in stark terms. The man’s death was extended and undignified, and brought his family only hardship. As Thomas asked with unsettling directness, “Was the meagre price / such bones can command / in death’s market / worth all their trouble?”²⁵ In choosing to tell this story he was drawing attention to the fact of undeserved human misery in God’s world. Thomas returned to this fact often and with unflinching clarity, and challenged his readers to find an adequate response. The poet’s own replies are considered below.

2. Time and the Cross

At times in his career Thomas appeared to resolve the problem of natural evil by retaining an all-powerful Creator but abandoning faith in His goodness. This idea was expressed most ferociously in “The Island” (1972):

And God said, I will build a church here
 And cause this people to worship me,
 And afflict them with poverty and sickness
 In return for centuries of hard work
 And patience. . . .²⁶

This malign deity returned in “Rough” (1975), where He delighted in the disfigurement and “tears of pus” caused by the germs He sowed into his creatures.²⁷ Thomas evoked a less personal but equally pernicious God - a being “that is more power than reason, more reason / than love” - in the first cycle of poems in *Counterpoint* (1990).²⁸ This being was the “architect / of

our failure”; it created disability and injustice, and evaded all human attempts to approach or comprehend it. From its hidden observation point, it looked “sideways into the shocked face / of life, challenging it to disown it”.²⁹

While Thomas explored the possibility of an uncaring or even cruel God, this prospect could never satisfy such a profoundly Christian, if unorthodox thinker. Rather, the malicious Creator of “The Island” and “Rough” represented only one aspect of his understanding of God that he never intended to present in isolation. The wrathful creation myth in “The Island” was set against more loving versions of the same story in the collection *H’m* (1972).³⁰ In “Making”, for instance, God created humankind in an act of unconditional giving.³¹ Thomas signalled his practice of creating harmonies and tensions within his collections in the title of *Counterpoint*, which also balanced visions of a destructive deity against the sacrificial love of the cross. The musical metaphor suggests that he viewed individual poems as parts of larger compositions. This allowed him to set questions and contradictions within bodies of work that achieved balance and a kind of artistic unity when experienced as a whole.

The contradictions remained, however, even when they were presented in delicate equipoise. Thomas’ God had “precipices” within Him that seemed unbridgeable - at least to the human mind. He expressed this view with particular directness in one of the later poems in *Counterpoint*:

You show me two faces,
that of a flower opening
and of a fist contracting
like the gripping of ice. . . .

The poem ends in a snare of contradictions and an unanswered question:

Mild and dire,
now and absent, like us but
wholly other - which side
of you am I to believe?³²

The fission in Thomas’ understanding of God was evident in two areas throughout his career. First, there was the gap between the loving deity of the New Testament and the harshness of the created world. As he wrote in “Which” (1975), “in the book I read: / God is love. But lifting / my head, I do not find it / so”.³³ The second tension was between those aspects of God’s creation that seemed to point in opposite directions. In “Tell Us” (1992), God was “Lord of the snowflake / and the sabre-toothed tiger”.³⁴ There can be no

doubt that for Thomas God was the author of both beauty and horror; he was the God of love *and* the architect of innocent suffering.

Why then, did God make tigers as well as snowflakes? And how should we understand the suffering of men and women in a world seemingly blind to their needs? Here Thomas contrasted human perception to the boundless vision of God. The difference between God's perspective and that of humankind was measured most importantly in terms of time. To Søren Kierkegaard – whom Thomas acknowledged as a defining influence – the relationship between an eternal God and a time-bound world was the “absolute paradox” of religion.³⁵ In this paradox Thomas sought a response to natural evil. He explored the timeless perception of God in “At It” (1978). Here God wears “the face / of a clock, and the time told by it / is now, though Greece is referred / to and Egypt and empires / not yet begun”. The judgements of this God were beyond mortal comprehension, as they issued “eternally / in the silence beyond right and wrong”.³⁶ Thomas evoked this divine viewpoint in an extraordinary poem in *The Echoes Return Slow* (1988):

You have to imagine
a waiting that is not impatient
because it is timeless. How long
from *habilis* to *erectus*,
from the gill to the lung?
The eye closed and the dinosaurs
were no more. It opened again
on Greece, London. . . .

From this extra-temporal standpoint, all mortal assumptions and meanings were lost, and could not unsettle the divine gaze:

The stars are as dew
in its world, punctuating
an unending story. It is the spirit-
level which, if love cannot
disturb, neither can evil.³⁷

To mortal eyes, the relationship of such a God to His world was inevitably opaque. Thomas imagined the divine hand working through “adjustments” on a scale that was imperceptible to minds trapped in time. Before a God who fashioned cliffs through the long attrition of waves, and used the invisible movement of grass to slice through rock, our best response was patient and prayerful acceptance.³⁸

Thomas balanced his belief in a timeless and unknowable God with the saving power of the crucifixion. Like Simone Weil, he appears to have

viewed the passion as an event beyond time.³⁹ “The blood ticked from the cross”, he wrote in *Counterpoint* (1990), “but it was not their time it kept”. Rather, Christ’s face stared “over twenty centuries . . . from unfathomable / darkness into unfathomable light”.⁴⁰ The philosopher D. Z. Phillips has argued that Thomas overcame the problem of evil by replacing the “God of theodicies” with a God who came in weakness rather than power.⁴¹ This reading is inconsistent with the poet’s frequent depictions of a fearsome deity; but it does touch on his understanding of the cross.⁴² The crucifixion was an abiding theme in his poetry from the 1960s onwards, and was sometimes invoked in response to the problem of evil. In “Tell Us” (1992), he appealed to the cross to reconcile God’s love for humankind with his responsibility for “the mosquito, [and] the tidal wave”:

You have answered
us with the image of yourself
on a hewn tree, suffering
injustice, pardoning it . . .⁴³

Here Christ replied to the innocent suffering of creation by embracing it himself. It is possible that Thomas, like Karl Barth and Paul Ricoeur, understood the crucifixion as the timeless and absolute defeat of evil, manifest only to God but guaranteed in scripture and accessible through faith.⁴⁴ His appeals to the eternal cross - “the original fork / in existence” - imply that he was attracted to such a view. If this was the case, however, he remained aware of the paradoxical nature of God’s sacrifice. Christ gazed from the cross in “perverse triumph” in “Amen” (1975).⁴⁵ Thomas also joined the idea of a suffering saviour with the fierce deity that often commanded his imagination. In “The Indians and the Elephant” (1995), the cross appeared “with spread wings / like the fiercest of raptors”.⁴⁶

In his treatment of time and the cross, Thomas’ response to the problem of evil was integrated into his religious vision as a whole. His engagement with evil was also related intimately to the most striking theme in his religious poetry: the hiddenness of God. This theme emerged early in his work and had implications far beyond the problem of evil, but the two aspects of his thought were clearly linked. Both were rooted in his commitment to finding truth in the concrete experiences of life, and not to compromise these experiences for the sake of theological satisfaction. His awareness that prayers were not answered led him to accept a silent God - that “great absence . . . that compels / me to address it without hope / of a reply”.⁴⁷ Equally, his acquaintance with innocent suffering implied a Creator who had withdrawn from the world. “I have looked it in the face”, he wrote in 1961: “I have seen land emptied of Godhead”.⁴⁸ Thomas may, in effect, have reversed St Augustine’s theory of evil. Augustine argued from the absolute goodness of

God to the goodness of the whole creation; thus evil existed only as the absence of God's light, like the darkness that remained when a candle was extinguished.⁴⁹ Thomas went the opposite way. The undeniable fact of evil meant that God was experienced as an absence, though the traces of His departure were everywhere. It required a Kierkegaardian leap of faith to embrace such a God, and Thomas' poetry testified to the possibility of such faith. While holding fast to the bitter facts of the world, he remained true to a God who watched in silence beyond the abyss of time, and whose love was "fiercer than we can understand".⁵⁰

Notes

There is no complete edition of Thomas' poetry. The references below are to the original collections that were published before 1988. For convenience, I have provided additional references for poems that can also be found in the (substantial but misleadingly titled) *Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (Phoenix 1993) (CP). Thomas' last five books of poetry are available in the single-volume *Collected Later Poems, 1988-2000* (Bloodaxe 2004) (CLP). All references to poems from this period are to this edition.

¹Thomas compared God to a circling eagle in "Burgos" (1968). In "Raptor" (1995) he imagined Him as a great owl that screamed and sank talons into human prey. *Not That He Brought Flowers*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968, p. 42; CP, p. 204; CLP, p. 256.

²"The White Tiger", *Frequencies*, Macmillan, 1978, p. 45; CP, p. 358.

³"Natural evil" can be distinguished from "moral evil", which results from human actions. The latter has traditionally been explained as the unavoidable consequence of God's decision to create men and women as free creatures and therefore capable of sin. It is harder to account for natural evil in this way, though it can be attributed to the fall that occurred because of the misuse of freedom by Adam and Eve. Thomas touched on this idea in "Parent" (1968) and "Making" (1972), but he did not present human freedom as an answer to the theological problem of evil. *The Bread of Truth*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963, p. 28; CP, p. 136; *H'm*, Macmillan, 1972, p. 17; CP, p. 221.

⁴It is possible only to outline Thomas' understanding of God and natural evil in this brief presentation, which is extracted from a much longer article. I am grateful for the many comments I received after giving this paper: I will pursue these in writing a more comprehensive treatment of the themes touched upon here.

⁵The quotation is taken from Thomas' cycle of autobiographical poems and prose fragments, *The Echoes Return Slow*, Macmillan, 1988, reproduced in CLP, p. 23. *Pietà*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1966.

⁶*The Stones of the Field*, Druid Press, 1946. The Biblical quotation implies that the endurance of Thomas's peasants will be rewarded, and signals their kinship with nature. "At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee," (Job 5: 22-3).

⁷This line is from "The Welsh Hill Country", *Song at the Year's Turning*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955, p. 46; CP, p. 22.

⁸The earliest poem to address the problem explicitly and at length was "Because", in *Pietà*, p. 8; CP, p. 153.

⁹*Not That*, 153.

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹Thomas referred to "the moor's / pitiless commentary" in his radio play, *The Minister* (1953). This was published in *Song at the Year's Turning*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958, pp. 79-80; CP, p. 44.

¹²This quotation is from Thomas' autobiography "No-One", which was published in Welsh in 1985 and translated into English in 1997. R. S. Thomas, "No-One", in *Autobiographies*, trans. Jason Walford Davies, J. M. Dent, 1997, p. 107.

¹³R. S. Thomas, "No-One", pp. 95-6.

¹⁴*Laboratories of the Spirit*, Macmillan, 1975, p. 36; CP, p. 286.

¹⁵The Creator God of *Counterpoint* (1990), for example, founded the world on the principle of universal predation: "God smiled. The controls / were working: the small / eaten by the large, the large / by the larger". "God smiled," CLP, 87.

¹⁶Thomas wrote in his autobiography that anyone who sees a peregrine falcon strike its prey "is sure to experience a certain thrill that makes him feel quite humble". "No-One", p. 95.

¹⁷*Song*, p. 107.

¹⁸"Ah!" *Pietà*, p. 45.

¹⁹The affinity between Thomas' peasants and the natural world was implied in his frequent allusions to their tree-like stubbornness and endurance under life's burdens. See, for example, "A Labourer," "Peasant Greeting," and "An Old Man," *Song*, pp. 18, 28, 33; CP, pp. 2, 12.

²⁰*Song*, 59, CP, p. 34; *Poetry for Supper*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958, p. 15, CP, p. 74; *Bread*, pp. 39-40, CP, pp. 144-5.

²¹The earliest poem in the series, "Death of a Peasant" (1952), recalled the unedifying last days of a man named Davies, and the "gruff words / of meaningless comfort" offered by his neighbours. *Song*, p. 59; CP, p. 34.

²²*Poetry for Supper*, p. 15; CP, p. 74.

²³Thomas recorded the death of William Evans, aged 49, in the deanery magazine for February 1946. His death came "after a long and trying time in

bed after his fatal accident.” Byron Rogers, *The Man Who Went Into the West: The Life of R. S. Thomas*, Aurum, 2006, 154.

²⁴In the opening lines of the poem Thomas dates the events to “twenty years at least” earlier. This would place them in his ministry at Chirk or his early years at Manafon, where he became rector in 1942. It is of course possible that he invented the incident, or took the story from another clergyman. If so, this makes his decision to write as he did on such a painful subject even more revealing. *Bread*, pp. 39-40; CP, pp. 144-5.

²⁵*ibid.*

²⁶There are echoes here of Thomas’ earlier and less bitter poem, “There” (1966). “The Island” develops one possibility implied in the earlier work: that people worship a merciless Creator who is responsible for their pain. *H’m*, p. 20; CP, p. 223.

²⁷*Laboratories*, 36; CP p. 286.

²⁸“There is a being, they say,” *Counterpoint*, Bloodaxe, 1990, 20; CLP, p. 88.

²⁹*ibid.*

³⁰On this point I am indebted to Christopher Morgan’s acute reading of the “mythic” poems in *H’m* (1972). Christopher Morgan, *R. S. Thomas: Identity, Environment, Deity* (Manchester University Press 2003), pp. 158-68.

³¹*H’m*, p. 17; CP, p. 221.

³²“You show me two faces”, CLP, p. 121.

³³*Laboratories*, p. 54.

³⁴CLP, p. 170.

³⁵Kierkegaard held that acceptance of this paradox was the essence of real faith. For Thomas’ engagement with the philosopher, see Justin Wintle, *Furious Interiors: Wales, R. S. Thomas and God*, HarperCollins, 1996, pp. 417-9, and Rowan Williams, “Suspending the Ethical: R. S. Thomas and Kierkegaard”, in Damian Walford Davies (ed.), *Echoes to the Amen: Essays After R. S. Thomas*, University of Wales Press, 2003. Michael Watts, *Kierkegaard*, Oneworld, 2003, pp. 90-2.

³⁶Thomas returned to this image in the poems written shortly before his death. The God in “He?” was “a clock / without hands”. *Frequencies*, p. 15; CP, 331; CLP, p. 302.

³⁷“You have to imagine”, CLP, p. 52.

³⁸In “Adjustments” (1978) Thomas presented this view in relation to the problem of evil. *Frequencies*, pp. 29-30; CP, p. 345.

³⁹Weil argued that God was “unpardonable” for the evils in the world unless the passion was a non-temporal event, with the power to reach all people at all times. Simone Weil, *Letter to a Priest*, Routledge, 1953; reissued 2002, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰“They set up their decoy”, CLP, p. 108.

⁴¹D. Z. Phillips, *R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God* (Palgrave Macmillan 1986), pp. 78-81; the quotation is from p. 78.

⁴²The idea of a “suffering God” holds only in relation to those poems in which Thomas invokes Christ or the cross. An interesting poem on which to test - and challenge - Phillips’ reading is “Covenant” (1981). Here Thomas presents a God who “suffers in us” but also consumes humankind in His suffering. *Between Here and Now*, Macmillan, 1981, p. 82; CP, p. 375.

⁴³CLP, p. 170.

⁴⁴Ricoeur drew on Barth’s concept of a “broken theology” and the final conquest of evil by the crucified Christ. In this view, evil has already been overcome but God has chosen to withhold the “full manifestation of its elimination”. Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, trans. John Bowden, Continuum, 2007, pp. 59-61.

⁴⁵*Laboratories*, 5; CP, p. 267.

⁴⁶CLP, p. 252.

⁴⁷“The Absence”, *Frequencies*, p. 48; CP, p. 361.

⁴⁸“Earth”, *Tares*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961, p. 46.

⁴⁹Since Augustine viewed evil as the absence of good, it always involved a deficiency of some positive quality. To understand it was “like trying to see darkness or to hear silence.” Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin, 1984, pp. 479-80 (12:7).

⁵⁰“Geriatric”, CLP, p. 213.

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Fritz Lang's *M*: The Crime that Dared Not Speak Its Name

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Abstract

Fritz Lang's masterpiece, *M* (1931), a worshipped icon in 20th century film canon, evaded articulating the murderer's crime of *Lustmord*¹, female child molestation, rape and murder. It shifted the moral compass to a comfortable debate about collective hysteria, the public's psyche, failed matriarchal supervision, capital punishment, and the inability of the State and police to protect its citizens. The film's murderer, played by Peter Lorre, became a sympathetic pleading victim, possessed by an uncontrollable 'voice.' The child victims were reduced to photos, their victimization unspoken. The question remains: why did Lang hide the greater evil and construct a moral centre that encouraged the viewer to cheer or condemn the hysterical mob?

Lorre's role was modelled after serial murderer Peter Kürten, whom the Weimar public of 1931 knew intimately because of lurid press coverage of his sex crimes and trial. Unlike Lang's fictional character, Kürten claimed he had no conscience for avenging himself on society for the wrongs he had suffered in prison. Why did Lang choose a Jewish actor who was podgy, effeminate, and visibly non-German to play the role of monstrous perpetrator of crimes that the screenplay never mentioned? Years later, the Nazis twisted Lorre's confession and attempt to exonerate himself into an anti-Semitic indictment of all Jews as arch-criminals, a source of fatal contamination that must be eliminated before infecting the general population. The greatest irony was the Nazi lie that all Jews reflected the characteristics of actual serial killers (none of whom were in fact Jews) whose murders the press had documented in detail. In light of the film's refusal to state clearly "the most heinous crime of all," and to acknowledge the antisemitic atmosphere of Weimar Germany, this paper calls for an examination of *M*'s vaunted place from a new perspective.

Key Words: Fritz Lang, *M*, child molestation, murder, Peter Lorre, Nazi propaganda

1. The most important German language film of all time

Fritz Lang's masterpiece, *M* (1931), remains a well-known fixture in the 20th century film canon. In 1995, German critics and scholars voted it the most important German film of all time. While much has been written about the film and Lang, current literature insists that this film helps us understand the Weimar Republic's historical milieu. Yet most commentary ignores

articulating the film's twin evils: the crime committed by a sex murderer of female children and the film's implicit antisemitic stereotyping.²

2. The Historical Setting

An attraction to the evils of horror and violence³ drew the ordinary German public's attention during the late teens and 1920s to the infamous crimes committed by four notorious serial killers, who themselves may have absorbed the *zeitgeist* of reactionary modernist texts without having read them. Newspapers both catered to the morbid attraction to these crimes while also spreading panic as the criminals remained at large, enjoying their evil transgressions by mocking the inability of police to catch them. The perpetrators conducted seemingly random sexual murderous rampages, two of them specifically against children. The connection between Weimar culture and popular fascination with these crimes may be one explanation as to why recent German scholarship has shown a keen interest in these transgressions. But one also wonders why, in contrast, German academia shies away from investigating more closely the German public's seeming indifference to rising antisemitism during this same period.⁴ Perhaps sexual murder has held a special fascination because it solidifies an already nearly universal social consensus about the taboo represented by this transgression while antisemitism provokes social division.

The actor Peter Lorre's role was allegedly modelled after the four German serial/sexual murderers, Wilhelm Karl Grossmann, Karl Denke, Friedrich Haarmann, and Peter Kürten. The German public of 1931 knew Kürten intimately because of sensational press coverage of his sex crimes and trial. Fritz Lang and Thea Harbou, husband and wife, wrote the screenplay for *M*, featuring a character they called Beckert and he became the iconic criminal upon whom the public, like the 'public' in the film, wanted vengeance. But if we examine the comparison between the real killers and the character Lang and Harbou created, there is a serious disjoint. The film commits its own transgression by not defining the crime other than identifying Beckert as "child killer," not the sexual predator of female children. It is well known that Weimar Germany had gained a reputation for pushing the limits of what was morally acceptable for public consumption, yet Lang and von Harbou did not articulate the lurid details the German public already knew about the real killers. The killers' trials had become tabloid bonanzas that spurred revulsion matched by incomprehension, yet the film describes these transgressions merely as homicides, leaving the sexual murder almost unspoken.

Grossman, a former butcher, was charged in 1921 with the murder and cannibalization of fourteen women, all prostitutes, whom he brought home, had sex with, murdered, cut up, and then sold the meat on the streets. Karl Denke, a devout churchgoer, committed some 30 murders over 20 years,

all associated with cannibalistic activities. Friedrich Haarmann achieved his dubious fame in 1924 for a series of 24 homosexual murders of young teen males, many of whom were runaways or prostitutes. His crimes were so horrible that German children often sang a ditty about Haarmann, the monster who killed children. Lang used it as the opening sequence in *M* substituting “Schwartzman” or The Black Man for Haarmann.

Just you wait ‘til it’s your time,
 Haarmann will come after you,
 With his chopper, oh so fine,
 He’ll make mincemeat out of you⁵

Contemporary critic Maria Tatar steers the viewer towards a psychoanalytical explanation of both Haarmann and Lang’s creation, Beckert. Tatar believes that writers, artists, and filmmakers between the two world wars displayed maniacs like Haarmann with unsettling sympathy and frequency.⁶ In *M*, Beckert is also a sympathetic character, but the real killer, Haarmann, never inspired pathos for his evil deeds and never apologized for his actions, about which he was fully cognizant. For example, one totally misguided rightwing commentator, hostile to the Weimar regime, called Haarmann part of a (homosexual) conspiracy headed by the Jews and the Jewish press, who were unleashing a contagious plague by protecting and promoting deviant sexuality and criminal behaviour with their ideology of social tolerance. This kind of antisemitic outburst was not foreign to Weimar society, but seems to reflect a real and troubling tenor of the time that should be further exposed for its own evil. Political criticism notwithstanding, this serial killer embodied an evil that the public universally understood for its deliberateness and thoroughly debased nature.

It was Peter Kürten, whom Lang and von Harbou used to create the murderer Beckert in *M*. Kürten confessed to killing 35 people almost all women and children. In 1931, as Lang’s film was being released, he pleaded guilty to 79 offenses, nine murders and seven attempted murders. Kürten told his legal examiners that he had sexually molested his victims, but that his primary motive was to “strike back at oppressive society,” and to seek revenge on mankind for his own prison experiences, while agitating the public and creating a state of turmoil.

To others, he confided that he wanted to become more notorious than Jack the Ripper. Lang and von Harbou ignored this angle and created instead a mentally ill character who had no control over his actions and in fact, could not even remember them. The pity was that the killer Beckert was nothing like Kürten, whose evil was tied directly to his craving for media celebrity. Kürten’s evil was compounded by his claim in court that he had

had no conscience for having avenged himself on society for the wrongs he had suffered in prison; Lang meant his filmic killer to evoke both pathos and to trigger arguments about the pros and cons of capital punishment. Lang had stated that he was interested in mass culture's fascination with crime,⁷ yet there was no mention of the heinous crime for which they were guilty, child sex murder.

3. Lang's Evil Character, Beckert

If we now look at Lang and von Harbou's evil character Beckert, a number of salient issues emerge. First, in his choice of actor, Lang ignored the physiognomy of the actual perpetrators. Both Haarmann and Kurten were ordinary looking Germans (see photos); that is, they could have passed on the street as one's next-door neighbour. Lang chose an actor who was not as ordinary looking a German as Kürten and Haarmann, and who, as Hungarian-born Laszlo Loewenstein, was podgy, effeminate, and visibly non-German. Antisemitic tropes of the time always concentrated on the Jew as "foreign" looking, and so Lang either consciously or unconsciously avoided what should have been a 'normal' looking German for the role. Was Lang trying to prove himself so patriotically German that he could not conceive of any number of ordinary looking Germans to play the role that he assigned to a foreigner? Why choose a little Jew? Lang maintained that Lorre's performance revealed the danger and hysteria lurking behind the indolent bourgeois façade...he embodied a society in the grip of self-destructive urges.⁸ Nevertheless, his choice of this Jewish foreigner to play a devil later proved convenient to the Nazis' own antisemitic propaganda. In the literature on Lang, no one ever asked him why he made his perpetrator as foreign as his German accent; the question is tantalizing but unanswerable. Lang wrote in May, 1931 shortly after the film appeared, that this was a film based on factual reports about homicide cases; its ultimate purpose was to educate and sound a warning from real events. He claimed that he was 'typifying' the killer; this allowed him to escape the more critical observation that the real killers were ordinary looking Germans. What also escaped critical attention then and later, was that they were deliberate and unrepentant about their foul deeds. Beckert, in contrast, was a tragic and pathetic repentant figure.⁹

To pursue this line of visual foreignness that equated Jews with evil, consider F.W. Murnau's hugely popular film, *Nosferatu* (1922). Tatar notes that the vampire was a foreigner from the East who very much had features that matched antisemitic images of Jews.¹⁰ Like the Jews, *Nosferatu* was an alien perpetrator and polluter of German blood. The real evil, of course, was to be found in those who made such vicious analogies.

Secondly, the film *M* never states that Beckert perpetrated the monstrous crimes of female child molestation, rape, and murder. There is

only one direct reference in the film to his sexual perversion when the handwriting expert scrutinizes the hand written letter that the perpetrator sent to the newspapers. As the graphologist dictates his report to his secretary, he claims the shape of the letters reveal a perverse sexuality. Janet Ward has been one of the few recent observers to specifically identify Beckert's crime as she describes him as the psychopathic consumer of *Schaufenster* (urban display window culture) and of little girls. Her thesis suggests an intimate relationship between the display window and sex crimes as she points to the visual codes of glass transparency and the consumer gaze that once signified Germany's success and solace, but in the wake of the World War, signified the collapse of the Weimar visual culture value system from within a killer's mind.

Another factor is Beckert's "confession" before the criminal underworld, whose surrogate function is that of the mother who wishes revenge. The moving outburst made Lorre famous as an actor, but in no way reflected the real evil of the unrepentant actual perpetrators. Lang and von Harbou took the easy way out as they created a character whose sociopathy is superseded by a psychological illness that the audience is encouraged to either forgive or reject. Here are the pathetic words that von Harbou wrote in constituting Beckert's "confession":

I want to escape...to escape from myself!. But it's impossible. I can't. I can't escape. I have to obey it. I have to run...run...streets...endless streets. I want to escape. I want to get away. And I am pursued by ghosts. Ghosts of mothers. And of those children...They never leave me. They are there, there, always, always. Always...except...when I do it...when I ...Then I can't remember anything...And afterwards I see those posters and I read what I've done...I read...and...and read...Did I do that? But I can't remember anything about it...But who will believe me? Who knows what it feels like to be me? How I'm forced to act...How I must...Don't want to...must. And then...a voice screams...I can't bear to hear it. I can't...I can't go on. Can't go on...Can't go on...Can't go on... I can't go on...¹¹

Lang's interest in psychology neither reflects the pathology of the real criminals nor articulates the true horror of child sexual murder. The film is as ambiguous as the *M* on Beckert's palm, which is half a Jewish star.¹²

4. **Antisemitism: A Not so hidden message?**

Lang called his film a reflection of the times and some of these negative elements can be identified in it. Even if one considers *M* as a simple murder mystery film, there was in the post World War I German universe and earlier, an obsession with blood as well as antisemitism. If one assumes that the real serial killers did not read in few of the decades' of work about Lang, few have tried to link the existing atmosphere as having influenced their reality. Tatar has noted how crime, contagion and containment need to be recognized for contributing to the Weimar environment. She makes the connection between flowing blood and antisemitism as she quotes elements of popular culture, like the fanatic Nazi songs about sharpening long knives to plunge into Jewish bodies. In another book, she developed the thesis that Grimm's Fairy Tales, well known and grotesque children's stories that most German children knew intimately, resonated in German culture and tradition, emphasizing grotesque and bloody deeds, as well as antisemitic stereotypes. As for their sometimes antisemitic content, one need only to refer to the Grimm's *The Jew Among Thorns*, in which an old Jew was forced to dance among thorns to the tune of a fiddle.¹³ The point of this digression is to note the underlying antisemitic tone in Weimar Germany against which to measure *M*'s influence.

Critics' first reactions to the film on May 11, 1931 were almost unanimously negative, perhaps because the premier followed just three weeks after the Kürten trial. Yet it did resonate strongly with the Nazi's propaganda chief, Josef Goebbels, who wrote in his notebook on May 21, 1931, "This evening watched Fritz Lang's *M* with Magda. Fantastic! Counters all that sentimental humanitarianism. For the death penalty! Well done. One day, Lang will be our director." Of course, when he found out that Lorre was a Jew, he announced curtly that he never wanted to see him again. He probably did not know at this time that Lang himself was half-Jewish, which under Nazi definitions made him a Jew by blood. In 1932, he and his wife, von Harbou, divorced. She became an ardent Nazi and thrived in the Third Reich. The Lorre character in *M* became a convenient addition to their virulent antisemitism even after they banned the film in 1935. Here is how the 1938 publication *West German Observer*, referred to Lorre's role as part of its call for genocide.

Let us look, if we can actually do it, into the soulless eyes of this child murderer Peter Lorre—and one can without a doubt identify the actor's role with the animal that he depicts: His screaming, "I cannot help it. I have in fact this damned thing in me! It is not my fault," is at the same time a Jewish confession, a self-revelation, which in fact begs for eradication. This Jewish begging must be answered.¹⁴

The most virulent of the Nazi's antisemitic film propaganda was a 1940 piece called *Der Ewige Jude* that remains the most egregious example of Nazi evil propaganda. It referred to Jews as the source of a plague, an illness that threatens the health of the Aryan peoples. Not only is its pernicious imagery equating Jews with rats and pestilence unforgettable, but also it replayed the confessional scene of Beckert in *M* with a voice over that identified him as 'The Jew Lorre' in the role of a child murderer. The narrator asserts, "According to the expression, 'not the murderer, but the murdered is guilty,' an attempt is made to reverse the normal sense of the law and to minimize and excuse the crime through the sympathetic portrayal of the criminal."¹⁵ As Lorre played out his climactic scene, the narration insisted that Jews were deserving victims who validated the deeds of the killer. This vitriol continued as the film represented Jews as corrupt, dirty, diseased and nomadic. It extended charges of criminal violence to Jews as murderers who it claimed operated surreptitiously with the same bloodthirsty brutality as sexual killers. The film's outrageous conclusion, again conflating blood with evil, asserted that Jewish ritual slaughter was connected to homicide, especially sexual murder.¹⁶ Of course, by this time the castigated Lorre, like Lang, was long gone from Nazi Germany, an émigré to the US, Hollywood, and fame in 1935.

Tatar's research demonstrates how the twin evils of criminality and antisemitism need closer investigation. Janet Ward recently sustained the observation that antisemitism was a prominent feature of German life before Hitler, yet the theme seems to be a no-go zone in contemporary scholarship about Weimar.

5. What Did Lang Want to Prove?

Finally, from a feminist perspective, when guilt is assigned in this film, it is the mothers of the victims who are guilty of not having taken sufficient care to watch over their children. The unforgettable last seconds of the film show that after the rule of law has brought 'justice' (which remains undefined, since the audience does not know if Beckert the killer is given the death sentence or sent to an institution), three grieving mothers in black are shown. One of them warns dolefully, "This will not bring the children back.... We too should keep a closer watch on our children."¹⁷ The tragic women are morally guilty for crimes they never committed and their poor lost children, last seen as photos earlier on, are no longer living faces for the audience. The crime of sexual murder is still unarticulated. With good reason would a feminist reading of the film condemn Lang for his very reduction of these victims to objects to satisfy mass culture's fascination with crime while ignoring the monstrosity of a sex killer of female children.¹⁸

Perhaps Janet Ward is correct to remind us of rightwing author Gertrud Baumer's belief in 1926 that the public in the Weimar era loved the crisis ridden as a kind of stimulation for the soul, as a way of commenting on antipathies to Weimar surface culture. We have tried to extend this further, to agree with Walter Benjamin's comment on the need for retrospective retrieval but to note that the blind devotion to Lang's *M* has more often forgotten that his choice of an actor and story went against the real serial rapist/killers of the era, New Objectivity notwithstanding. Further, *M* served to confirm a public's satisfaction with a large perspective of crime and violence endemic to the Weimar Republic while missing both the misogyny and entrenched antisemitism that were also endemic to Weimar, a blindness and evil that we have tried to demonstrate need deeper investigation as does the need for a fresh analysis of a film that has been worshipped for decades, but perhaps from more iconic, than serious sociopolitical and feminist optics.

Notes

¹ M. Tatar, *Lustmord, Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1995

² A. Kaes, *M*, BFI Publishing, London, 2001, p. 7. Kaes' analysis of the film is thorough, yet he seems to have ignored these dual themes almost entirely. See also T. Herzog's recent essay in N. Isenberg (ed), *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to the Classic Films of the Era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009. Herzog too is more interested in the cinematic elements of *M* than the political/sociological themes this essay explores.

³ Herf, J., *Reactionary Modernism: Technology Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, pp. 2-3, 12-15, 21.

⁴ Tatar's book remains the key work on this subject. Recent scholarship by K. Brückweh, *Mordlust: Serienmorde, Gewalt und Emotionen im 20 Jahrhundert* Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006 continues this investigation of four serial killers from four periods of the 20th century.

⁵ Tatar, p. 3.

⁶ Tatar, p.35.

⁷ Kaes, p. 29.

⁸ Kaes, p. 25.

⁹ F. Lang, 'My Film *M*: A Factual Report' *Die Filmwoche* (no.21, May 20, 1931)

¹⁰ Tatar, pp. 61-2.

¹¹ T. Von Harbou, *M: a Film / by Fritz Lang* (screenplay translated by Nicholas Garnham), Simon and Schuster, New York, 1968, pp. 104-105.

¹² T. Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, BFI Publishing, London, 2000, pp. 199; 198.

¹³ L. Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1978, p. 48. It was not surprising then that the study of folklore was raised to a special place of honour in the Third Reich.

¹⁴ *West German Observer*, 1938, p. 138

¹⁵ F. Hippler, *Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)* 1940 Deutsche Filmherstellungs- und -Verwertungs- GmbH, Berlin (DFG), 1940. "Der Jude Lorre in der Rolle eines Kindermörders. Nach dem Schlagwort: "Nicht der Mörder, sondern der Ermordete ist schuldig", wird versucht, das normale Rechtsempfinden zu verdrehen und durch mitleiderregende Darstellung des Verbrechers das Verbrechen zu beschönigen und zu entschuldigen." (English translation above by Dr. Karin Doerr) The late S. H. Moller's work on *The Eternal Jew* remains the most extensive investigation of this film to date.

¹⁶ F. Hippler, *Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)*

¹⁷ Lang, *M*

¹⁸ Kaes, p. 29.

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Hidden Images of Scorn in Kafka's Last Story

Karin Doerr

Abstract

This paper uncovers hidden images of scorn in Kafka's last work "Josephine the Singer or The Nation of the Mice," written and published in 1924. At the time, Europe was fraught with political conflict and nationalism, and society was not guided by restrictions to hate speech. Thus, Kafka experienced the free expression of antisemitism because he was a Jew. Contemporary scholars concur with Sander L. Gilman¹ that with his portrayal of mice (and other creatures), Kafka was speaking about the precarious situation of the Jews. If one illuminates his era, some of the impenetrable elements in his texts become comprehensible.

The title of his story features themes that traverse the entire text and converge in one major theme: the ubiquitous spectre of antisemitism or the "insoluble problem."² Kafka rendered, in near-literal images, Gentile society's negative perception of Jews as objects of disdain. The images reveal themselves as the then-current tropes of Jews likened to mice that were seen as contaminating Christian society and all areas of German culture. Allusions to the wicked claims of Richard Wagner are perceptible: "the Jew" becomes "insufferable" when he sings because he can only "mimic" (1850).

Kafka also gives us the "Jewish" perspective, the humanness and vulnerability of the depicted nation. The people in the story, including Josephine, are called "mice" but they do not demonstrate animal behaviour. In the background lies a history of danger, suffering, and death. In the foreground, particular attention is paid to music or whistling. The singer Josephine becomes a metaphor for Kafka, the Jewish German-language writer. Feminising the singer, and giving her feeble health adds to the antisemitic trope that the Jewish male was effeminate and of ill health. Finally, Josephine's disappearing parallels Kafka's own quiet exit from the German literal scene.

Key Words: Kafka, antisemitism, mice, nation, singer, Jew.

Franz Kafka's last work "Josephine the Singer or The Nation of the Mice"³ ("Josefine, die Sangerin oder Das Volk der Mause") was written a few months before his death in 1924. While his second-last story, "The Burrow," features an isolated mole-like creature, "Josephine" depicts a distinct community that interacts in an unusual fashion with a musical artist. Here, as

in most of Kafka's literary texts, the main character must contend with obstacles and worries.

Some passages in "Josephine the Singer" are humorous; others are serious or sinister.⁴ Theodor Adorno states that each sentence "signifies," yet will not permit interpretation.⁵ At times, Kafka's sources, literary or otherwise, are recognizable. But for the most part, one can speak only of "allusions."⁶ This is also the case with his "Josephine" story. If we consider that the guiding matrix in all of Kafka's works unites experience, identity, language, form, and socio-historical forces, a crucial subtext emerges. It is Kafka's situation as a Jewish German-language writer, terminally ill, and making his literary exit. This paper reads "mice" as "Jews," and the veiled images in the story are from within and without a Jewish perimeter. Before elaborating on these points, I wish to highlight an image that attracted Kafka's attention. It is that of a hunchback in a church in Italy in 1913.

In a postcard to Felice, Kafka wrote that on his visit to St. Anastasia,⁷ he saw "a life-sized marble dwarf who carries the holy-water font with a happy expression on his face" (my emphasis).⁸ In his 1915 recollection, however, he changes his description from "a life-sized marble dwarf who carries" to "a larger than life-size dwarf bowed down under" and translates this into "the quintessence of his own despair."⁹ Kafka, as a non-Christian, chose the deformed figure of the hunchback—he calls him "dwarf"—rather than Christ bearing the cross.¹⁰ With this, he subsumed the marginalized, perhaps victimized, as a visualized symbol of his own encumbrance.¹¹

Hanns Zischler, in his curious but informative book, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, links this identification to the troubles over Kafka's relationship with Felice; but the heavy burden may have well included darker socio-psychological issues that I shall discuss below. Zischler also mentions "Kafka's lasting interest in sculpture" because "in statues everything has come to rest and to the height of expressiveness, densely, compactly, and solidly." Kafka's interest in the visual arts, including film, hints at his awareness of the power of images. He vetoed illustrations of the insect in *Metamorphosis*,¹² such that the first edition of 1916 depicts only a human figure. However, later title pages and illustrations to his works demonstrate that graphic artists have felt challenged to produce visuals of the animals, hybrids or fantastical creatures in Kafka's works. His "Josephine" story has inspired theatric recreations with mouse imagery.¹³

Most graphic depictions reveal aspects of interpretation, as does the latest edition of Kafka's stories of 2007.¹⁴ Interpretation was also the issue at the 2003 exhibition in New York.¹⁵ Upon entering "The City of K: Franz Kafka and Prague," the viewers found themselves inside a darkened space, in simulated narrow streets, a claustrophobic office installation, and, yes, a man-sized burrow. All this showed the imagined phantasmagoria of the curators

and the difficulty or impossibility to capture Kafka's mind and his vision of the world.

We shall now turn to the hidden images of scorn in his last work. I shall focus on the four nouns in the double title. They comprise the features and themes that traverse the entire text,¹⁶ are interconnected, and resonate with Kafka's personal, professional, and social reality. The denotative meaning of the German word *Volk* is "people," "a people" or "nation," an "ethnic group," and sometimes "folk." *Volk*, in the early decades of the twentieth century and before, was influenced by German nationalism and usually connoted race. Hence, the underlying meaning was German Volk. If anti-Semites used *Volk* for Jews, it was usually with pejorative connotations, as in *Judenvolk*, Jewish "pack" or "rabble." What the German *Volk* meant for Jews in the realm of German culture was exclusion without entitlement to Germanness and rootedness, in spite of Jews having been a presence in German regions for centuries.¹⁷ Thus, the invisible thread that runs through Kafka's last narrative and that connects themes, language, and images can be discerned as the troubling discourse of Europe's antisemitism, which Hannah Arendt termed the "insoluble problem."¹⁸

In this post World War I atmosphere of increasing hostility, the rise of Jewish self-awareness comes as no surprise.¹⁹ Prominent Jewish figures, including Albert Einstein, came to assert that the Jews were "a nation."²⁰ It is in this sense that Kafka uses *Volk* in "Josephine." The genitive case "of mice" (*der Mäuse*) in the title rather than the compound *Mäusevolk* ("mouse people"), elevates the term, gives it formality, and underlines its positive meaning. "Mice" refers to the people of this distinct nation in his story, the Jews.²¹ We see allusions to the Jews from the *Shtetl* or in the ghetto, whose lives seem ordinary. But there are repeated references to the "imminently pressing danger"²² from the unnamed surrounding world. Even the many children are burdened by the serious reality of survival and cannot be kept "away from the struggle of existence,"²³ such that this nation "is used to suffering, gets no rest ... knows death well ..."²⁴ For these reasons, the people need to be "tenacious and ... strong in hope" (my emphasis)²⁵. In this way, the history of Jewish persecution echoes throughout Kafka's story.

Kafka's own situation as a Jew in Prague, no doubt, heightened his attentiveness to Jews subjected to discrimination and violence, both past and present. Earlier atrocities against Prague's Jews were recorded in the *Prague Chronicle* of 1615.²⁶ While scholars have amply demonstrated Kafka's preoccupation with personal problems, contemporary studies focus on his status as a non-Gentile writer. Prague, the city he lived in, although an important part of his life, it is rarely defined in his texts. Yet, we may assume that, since he paid close attention to sculptures in a faraway place like the church in Verona, he knew those right at his doorstep. Prague's omnipresent Christian reminders of Jewish otherness are visible in its many churches and

statues. For example, the seventeenth-century sculptures of St. Nicholas Church in Lesser Town are imposing figures, over twelve foot-high. Situated on both sides of the high altar, they depict striking scenes of St. Ignatius of Loyola "beating the heretic" and St. Francis Xavier "converting a heathen" (1765-66). But a closer look at the sculptural group reveals the chilling images of stabbing both the Jew—clearly depicted with stereotypical Jewish physiognomy—and his scriptures to the ground.²⁷ Hence, it is in line with the time-honoured graphic depiction of victory of Ecclesia over Synagoga. The cognitive effect on the viewer was well understood.

These wicked images were part of the unmentioned backdrop to actual antisemitic occurrences during Kafka's life, from open hostility to overall tacit discrimination. Gentiles in Prague and elsewhere persistently reminded him of his Jewishness. There are direct references to experienced antisemitism in his non-literary writings. For example, he wrote in 1917, "Yesterday [I was the] 'head inspector,' Today [I am] 'the Jew.'"²⁸ Referring to "Jew hatred" (*Judenhass*), Kafka contemplated, in a letter to Milena, that it would seem "self evident" to leave the place where one is "so hated." To do this, he said, "Zionism or national feeling" would not even be necessary.²⁹ Kafka's dilemma was being one of the "Central European Jews [who] were caught in a no-man's-land of identity crisis and not belonging."³⁰ Traditional Jewish life was not an option for him. Thus, "Josephine" may also contain the overarching image of an old Jewish community coming to its end.³¹ We can also draw a parallel to Kafka's own approaching death as a culturally assimilated Jewish writer.

Since Kafka very much wanted to be recognized as a man of German letters, the "model he strives for is a reading of his texts not as a Jewish writer with all the antisemitic taints ascribed to that category, but rather as a modern writer."³² But the anti-Semites of his time would immediately translate the image of a Jewish man, like Kafka's, into an image of someone who does not belong to the German and later the human community. In his "Josephine" story, Kafka presents an intersecting Gentile perspective by rendering in near-literal images negative perceptions of Jews.

The mice in his depicted nation can be traced to the anti-Semite's correlation of Jews to vermin, such as the turn of the century's rhetoric of "[g]olden rats and red mice."³³ To confront such antisemitic charges, Kafka "draws on ... [exactly these] images from which he wishes to distance himself."³⁴ Yet, he never uses the words "Jew," "vermin," or "anti-Semite," and with this, blocks easy interpretation. This equation of Jews as rats or mice was part of the general antisemitic rhetoric and came to the public screen in Nazi Germany's film *The Eternal Jew* in 1940. It can also be discerned in a film during Kafka's lifetime, Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922. In "Josephine," Kafka ironically fulfils the anti-Semite's insult with a literal portrayal of mice but at the same time, counters with his depiction of, not

vermin, but human-like mice. In other words, his mice, including Josephine, do not display mouse-like features. They are ordinary people and very human in the common, affectionate sense of the word.³⁵ Graphics of Josephine as a mouse would have strengthened the image of rodents rather than keeping the focus on her humanness. Nevertheless, some critics insist on seeing typical mouse behaviour in both Josephine and in Kafka's "nation of the mice."³⁶

Kafka, not writing in a literary vacuum, certainly knew the German "mouse kingdom" of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" ("*Nußknacker und Mausekönig*"), upon which Tchaikovsky based his famous ballet, *The Nutcracker*. This literary fairytale from 1816 was not considered part of the later antisemitic animal imagery. In contrast to Kafka's "mice," Hoffmann's "mouse people," portrayed with illustrations, are an enemy group and have many negative human characteristics.³⁷ Images of another well-known German folktale may be evoked with Josephine. It is the *The Pied Piper (Der Rattenfänger aus Hameln)* who, by means of his flute, freed the city of Hamelin of its rats and took also its youth. By contrast, Kafka's Josephine, with her whistling, brings the community together and: "[I]t liberates us ... for a short while [from the fetters of daily life]."³⁸ Speech is muted in whistling, yet it is song. The singing, human-like mouse superimposes the image of the Jew as rodent and yet powerful enemy.

With this solo performer, Kafka touches on another antisemitic canard, that the Jew in German music or literature is only a mimicking creature.³⁹ It was Richard Wagner who, in his infamous tractate, "The Jews in Music," declared Jews incapable of originality in all art forms of German *Kultur*.⁴⁰ He claimed that "the Jew" becomes "insufferable" when he sings.⁴¹ Kafka counters such vicious charges by showing that Josephine's community does not judge her singing based on her origins. They may have doubts about her art, criticize her performance, and dislike her behaviour, but she is always one of their own. In Kafka's last years, the awareness of being the scorned other caused perhaps his greatest anxiety. It was sharpened by contemporaries like Hans Blüher who asserted in his 1922 book *Secissio Judaica* that the separation of Jew and German was once and for all complete and visible.⁴² Due to his knowledge of society's scornful judgment of him, Kafka connects the "condemnation of Jewish mimicry ... [to] his own anxiety about his self-expression as a writer."⁴³ Whistling in "Josephine" has been interpreted as meaning "*mauscheln*," the "Jewish" way of speaking German in a peculiar manner.

The singing of a frail, female mouse in Kafka's last story can be viewed as the metaphor for his writing as a whole, and the fading chords would be the author's own literary and worldly exit. This diminishing whistling is the opposite of leaving with an elegant swan song, as the famous Johann Wolfgang von Goethe did. It resonates quietly with the creative breath of the writer exhaling or writing for the last time. Symbolically then, at

the end of this story, without fanfare and grand farewell, the artist or singer Josephine simply vanishes. This is no surprise, since it has been foreshadowed in the first paragraph.⁴⁴ But there is dignity in this seemingly sad end; the departure of this feeble and all too human mouse Josephine, alias Kafka the dying man, and Kafka the writer, and Kafka the Jew, is not without hope for redemption. Kafka writes his closing words, "Josephine, redeemed from her earthly toil, which in her opinion however lies in store to chosen ones, will joyfully become lost in the numberless crowd of the heroes of our nation" (J 19).

Remarkably then, in his fictional writings, Kafka succeeded in not being categorized as "Jewish." With that, he "accomplish[ed] what no Jewish writers had yet accomplished: to be acknowledged by the mainstream of German writing on their own terms."⁴⁵ In this way and perhaps with no small irony, he became the universal writer we know today. At the same time, the image of Kafka, "the Jew," has remained firmly a part of his creations, albeit deeply hidden and not without satire or humour. Only the subtext reveals the all encompassing Jewish "condition," the sorrow, his *Weltschmerz*, that are written into his work to the very end. Just as the hunchback bears the holy water forever, Kafka bore the burden of his despised identity all his life. The evil times, which he heralded, certainly proved his vision right.

To end on a humorous note, I wish to mention the 52-second sound recording that Kafka would most certainly have found funny because it takes the major theme in "Josephine" quite literally, namely a whistling mouse. Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis established in 2007 that the utterances of male mice are sometimes songs.⁴⁶

Notes

¹ S. L. Gilman, S. L. *Franz Kafka, The Jewish Patient*. Routledge, New York and London, 1995 and *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.

² H. Arendt, Introduction. *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin, Essays and Reflections*. H. Arendt (ed.). Schocken, New York, 1969.

³ F. Kafka, "Josephine the Singer or The Nation of the Mice," trans. K. Doerr, B. Galli and Gary Evans, afterword K. Doerr, Kentville, NS: Gaspereau Press, 2009

⁴ The narrative flows despite his trademark of long, complex sentences. Most translations have rendered Kafka's writing style as awkward or complicated, if mainly for the reason that it is deemed befitting Kafka. As is often noted, Kafka's inimitably unembellished language is concrete and, according to Hannah Arendt, "the purest German prose of the century." p. 31.

⁵ “Each sentence is literal, and each signifies.” See Th. Adorno, “Notes on Kafka,” in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (ed.), R. Tiedemann, trans. R. Livingstone and others, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2006, pp. 211- 212.

⁶ S. L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka, The Jewish Patient*, Routledge, New York and London, 1995). M. Anderson, in his insightful book, interprets this story as Kafka’s reaction to the antisemitic stances of Karl Kraus and Otto Weininger, as well as to the misogyny of the latter. See *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992. Bruce, too, demonstrates how Kafka was influenced by the discourse of his time. She sees in “Josephine” Jewish society coming to an end rather, than a new beginning, as would be the early Zionist view of a Jewish state. I. Bruce, “Jewish Education: Borderline and Counterdiscourses in Kafka,” in *Kafka, Zionism, and Beyond*, M. H. Gelber (ed.), Max Niemwyer, Tübingen, 2004, pp. 107-142.

⁷ The current church was begun in 1280, completed in 1400 and consecrated only in 1471.

⁸ My translation. ‘Franz Kafka. Postcard. Stamp: Verona, Sep. 20, 1913’, *Briefe an Felice, in Franz Kafka. Gesammelte Werke*, M. Brod (ed.), Schocken Books, New York, 1967, p. 466.

⁹ H. Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, trans. S. Gillespie, 1996; *Kafka geht ins Kino*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003, p. 28.

¹⁰ We may wonder why such figures were placed to greet those entering a church. It is said that the superstitious believe, touching the hump of a hunchback brings good luck. Other source mention that the evil personified in the hunchback is contained in this permanent position in the church.

¹¹ Zischler speaks of the “paradoxical lifelikeness of the happy dwarf [that] casts a sudden light on his [Kafka’s] own burden and the limits of what he is able to bear.” p. 98.

¹² F. Kafka, Letter to publisher Kurt Wolff Prague, Oct 25, 1915. See *Briefe und Tagebücher 1915*, Elibrary, Austria.

¹³ For example, the play *Josephine, the Mouse Singer*, M. McClure, New Directions Pub. Corp., New York, 1980.

¹⁴ See *Metamorphosis & Other Stories*, Trans. M. Hofmann, Penguin Books, New York, 2007.

¹⁵ “The City of K: Franz Kafka and Prague,” Exhibition, Jewish Museum, New York, Apr. 11, 2002 – Jan. 05, 2003. The intent was stated as follows: “With Kafka we descend into the depths of Prague and thus into the environs of the writer’s imagination and psyche” [my emphasis].

¹⁶ Kafka is said to have insisted on adding a second this title. Quoted in Robertson, p. 275.

¹⁷ Blüher and others demanded, "No Jew should be allowed from now on to say about himself: 'we [sic] Germans.'" ("Es darf keinem Juden mehr erlaubt sein, von sich zu sagen: ,wir Deutschen'; man soll ihm stets und unter allen Umständen zu verstehen geben, daß man weiß, wer er ist."). H. Blüher, *Secissio Judaica*, Der weisse Ritter-Verlag, Berlin, 1922, p. 42.

¹⁸ Arendt, p. 31.

¹⁹ When Th. Herzl exclaimed earlier, "We are a people, one people" ("Wir sind ein Volk, Ein Volk"), it was the Zionists' urgent desire for Jewish statehood, German cultural assimilation notwithstanding. *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*, 1896; repr. Otto Zeller, Osnabrück, 1968, p. 11.

²⁰ "Only when we have the courage to regard ourselves as a nation, only when we respect ourselves, can we win the respect of others." See A. Einstein in Simcha Epstein, "Einstein on Antisemitism: Highlights from 1920, 1933, and 1938," in *Antisemitism International: An Annual Research Journal of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism*, R. S. Wistrich (ed.) Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, 2006, pp. 80-93.

²¹ He also uses "tribe" (Stamm)—a Jewish self-descriptive term used already in the 19th century.

²² Kafka, 2007, p. 11

²³ Kafka, 2007, p. 10

²⁴ Kafka, 2007, p. 8

²⁵ Kafka, 2007, p. 11

²⁶ These lines tell of common Christian aggression: "What shall I say and how shall I speak? / How shall I compose words? / For I am an object of scorn to every passerby, / Submitting to blow after blow." A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, c. 1615, Abraham David (ed), trans. L. J. Weinberger with D. Ordan, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1993. It has, as an appendix, a list of calamities that befell the Jews of Prague.

²⁷ For images with description of St. Nicholas Church see <http://www.expat.cz/prague/czech/churches/stnicholaschurchinlessertown/>

²⁸ "Gestern Oberinspektor. Heute 'der Jude.'" Entry of 11 December 1917 in his third Notebook Das Dritte Oktavheft, F. Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, Max Brod (ed.) S. Fischer: Schocken Books, New York:, 1953, p. 93

²⁹ Kafka-Buch, p. 102.

³⁰ R. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, p. 23.

³¹ Kafka scholar I. Bruce sees "Josephine" and the entire story as playing on the German colloquial expression, "to be on one's last legs or to gasp" ("auf

dem letzten Loch pfeifen,” literally, “to whistle through the last hole [of a wind instrument]” Bruce, p. 138. In this way, both literal and metaphorical meanings allude to the theme of whistling in the text.

³² S. L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p. 146. Further references to this work under Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers*.

³³ Gilman cites the arch-antisemite Wilhelm Marr. Gilman, *The Jewish Patient*, p. 32.

³⁴ Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers*, 146.

³⁵ For example, Josephine: “Finally, she gives in with inexplicable tears, but as she feebly, with an obvious last effort, wants to begin singing, her arms not outstretched as usual, but hanging down lifelessly at her side ...”, Kafka, 2007, p. 19.

³⁶ E. E. Sattler, “Narrative Stance in Kafka's Josephine,” in *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 77, Sept. 1977, pp. 410-418. Sattler insists that the narrator “is obviously a mouse,” p. 413.

³⁷ They are gluttonous, warlike, mean, and revengeful. As individual mice, they are all fat, ugly, and disgusting.

³⁸ Kafka, 2007, p. 12

³⁹ There is a crude comparative colloquialism in German that suggests that a whistling female be killed as one would kill a hen who attempts to crow. (“Mädchen, die pfeifen und Hennen, die kräh'n, den soll man beizeiten den Hals herumdreh'n”).

⁴⁰ The exceptional Jewish talents in musical composing and performance of both men and women tragically contradicted the antisemites' allegations with the outstanding musical creations in the concentration camp Theresienstadt.

⁴¹ Therefore, the narrator ruminates ironically, “We are after all quite unmusical ...” (“die Musik ist die Sprache der Leidenschaft. Steigert der Jude seine Sprechweise, in der er sich uns nur mit lächerlich wirkender Leidenschaftlichkeit, nie aber mit sympathisch berührender Leidenschaft zu erkennen gebe kann, gar zum Gesang, so wird er uns damit geradewegs unausstehlich.“) R. Wagner, „Das Judentum in der Musik,“ in *Schrifttum für den Musikunterricht*, H. Lebede (ed.), 1850; Ehlermann, Dresden, 1943, p. 118.

⁴² (“Antisemit ist, wer sagt, daß der Jude Jude ist.“) Blüher, p. 38.

⁴³ Gilman, *Jewish Patient*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ “With her passing, music will—and who knows for how long—disappear from our life, Kafka, 2007, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Gilman, *Jewish Patient*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ T. Holy and Z. Guo, "Ultrasonic Songs in Male Mice." *Public Library of Science Biology*, Nov. 1, 2005. This study is currently available at <http://www.plos.org/press/plbi-03-12-holy.pdf>

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And What's on the Menu Today? Greed and Gluttony in Sato's *Naked Blood*

Colette Balmain

Abstract

Taken to its extreme, cannibal cinema can be interpreted as an engagement with excess, the very nature of which transgresses the injunctions against gluttony, lust, and greed - three of the original Deadly Sins or Capital Vices. While much has been written on the figure of the zombie as an embodiment of consumerism, little has been said about the cannibal. Yet as pure excess and appetite, the cannibal is capitalism in its most ferocious form. In Sato's *Naked Blood*, excess is no longer figured as the Other, but as constitutive as the Self. Here shocking scenes of auto-cannibalism can be interpreted as a critique of capitalism and consumerism taken to its very extreme. Like the coming into consciousness of Romero's zombies in *Land of the Dead*, the excessive nature of uncontrolled appetite[s] in *Naked Blood*, explodes what McRoy calls "social codes that inform its [the body] socially prescribed shape and meaning." Here capitalism is equivalent to the theological concept of damnation, and as such there is little surprise that the imagery of *Naked Blood* is reminiscent of the many Japanese cinematic imaginings of Hell, perhaps most ferociously rendered in Nobuo Nakagawa's *Hell (Jigoki)*.

Key Words: Cannibalism, consumerism, capitalism, excess, greed, gluttony, pride, *wétiko*, *wasi'chu*

1. Introduction

The 1990s was a time of economic decline in Japan after the so-called Economic Bubble of the 1970s and 1980s. According to Lohr, the 1990s "is a stretch of stagnation known as Japan's lost decade."¹ It is not surprising therefore that *Naked Blood* should overtly critique consumerism, or indeed by association the West. It needs to be remembered that Japan's experience of modernity was very much one foisted on the nation as a result of its defeat in World War II and the subsequent Allied Occupation. As I have mapped out extensively elsewhere, the relational self which provided the foundations for Japan's socio-political structure was displaced by the ideology of the individual through the so-called democratisation of Japan.² This democratisation relied on the shattering of a system of beliefs at the centre of which was the Emperor as descendant of the Gods, which had given meaning to the Japanese for hundreds of years. The individual was anathema

to a society based upon a series of obligations, duties, and a strong sense of spirituality or *wa* which connected man to nature. Root argues that:

As I understand it, the cannibal is able to live and grow where there is a void - which is to say, an absence of a particular element (or cluster of elements) that is necessary to the cohesion and balance of the whole. This is true of individuals as well as societies.³

This paper examines the use of [auto]cannibalism as a metaphor for late capitalism using Deborah Root's discussion of consumerism as cannibalism in *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, & the Commodification of Difference*. Following Root, this paper utilises the Lakotan (Native American) terms *wasi'chu* ("fat-eater") and *wétiko* ("cannibal psychosis") to express the excessive nature of consumerist desires. As Root argues: "Both *wasi'chu* and *wétiko* emphasize consumption, which exists at the heart of Western culture, and both traditions characterize consumption in literal and concrete terms."⁴

2. Cannibalism as/and Consumerism

In *Naked Blood*, a young scientist, Eiji (Sadao Abe), develops a drug called "My Son", which is meant to create happiness in the consumer. He adds the drug to a contraceptive, which is being trialed by his mother, Yuki Kure (Masumi Nakao), on three young women. However, instead of creating happiness, it triggers off uncontrollable appetites in two of the test subjects and a murderous fury in the third. While with the first two test subjects these appetites are turned inward towards the self, in the third, destructive impulses are displaced onto the Other. At the end of the film, the only character left alive is Rika Mikami (Misa Aika) - the only one of the women to have a name - and her young son - conceived during a session of deadly passion with Eiji - who is also called Eiji (Seiya Hiramatsu). And it is an apocalyptic landscape that the mother and child inhabit, devoid of all life, with the exception of the cactus which functions as a meta-signifier for the breakdown between man and nature, and a phallic signifier devoid of materiality. It is this depiction of apocalypse and the images of bodily torture that call to mind Japanese films about *Hell*. While *Naked Blood* could be loosely categorised as a science fiction film in that its message of science experimentation leading to the end of the world is a major trope of the genre, McRoy argues that the most appropriate definition of the film is as an example of "body horror."⁵ Thematically and visually, *Naked Blood* is an explicit critique of late capitalism and consumer identities.

This anti-consumer and anti-capitalist aesthetic is displayed both within the cold mise-en-scene and the ferocious appetites of the three women

to whom “My Son” has been given. Indeed, it is significant that two of the women have no names, and instead are inscribed as pure expressions of the end stage of consumerism as epitomised by the existence of gluttony, lust and greed, in which the self is turned into the ultimate commodity - the first woman is obsessed with her appearance while the second woman is obsessed with eating. While the first woman turns her body into a human pincushion, the second woman, unable to satisfy her gluttonous appetite, turns to auto-cannibalism, eating her own body in stages which are graphically visualised. And while traditionally cannibalism⁶ has been theorised as a desire to transgress the boundaries between Self and Other - most often in a post-colonial context - here auto-cannibalism⁷ suggests that these distinctions no longer exist. Both women can be seen as examples of what MacCannell terms “cannibal narcissism.” He writes, “It is not merely that everything is a mirror image of the self; everything, including other human beings, is the self.”⁸ Here, mass consumption is equivalent to self-consumption, and “auto-cannibalism is the material signifier of excess consumption.”⁹

3. Alienation and *wétiko* psychosis

Naked Blood depicts a society of alienation both thematically and visually. Either the characters do not have relationships with others or relationships are situated as fractured and fragmented. This is most vividly depicted by Rika Mikami (Misa Aika), who suffers from insomnia, and whose only meaningful relationship is with a cactus: the only living thing that she is able to connect with. The other two women are self-absorbed, constructing their identities through the multiple acts of consumption. As Root argues: “*Wétiko* psychosis flourishes in a climate of isolation, where people are unable or unwilling to help one another, when they cannot imagine anything outside of the box in which they find themselves all alone.”¹⁰ This alienation is mapped out in the clinically cold *mise-en-scène* and the fragmentation of the frame into disparate spaces, which mirrors the disconnection of the main characters. On two occasions, we see Eiji and his mother, Yuki, eating. On both occasions, the disconnection between the two is visually signified by division of the pro-filmic space: a chair blocks the camera’s view of the couple. In addition, frequent shots of Rika in her apartment and seen from a point of view from behind the cactus, the only living thing with which she can communicate. And desire itself is mediated through the use of film as documentary within the film: Eiji keeps a video diary of the affect of his drug on the three women and Yuki’s husband only exists as a video memory which disintegrates as he disappears both from the past and the present. Root writes about the relationship of consumption and coldness in *wétiko* mythology:

In the old stories the *wétiko* monsters always come from the far north and possess hearts of ice. This association of consumption with coldness initially seemed curious to me, as I imagined gluttony to be driven by heat – in other words, by a kind of lust. But Nietzsche reminds us that “the coolest of monsters” is the state, which endlessly feeds off lies and death.¹¹

While the cold muted colours of the cinematic palate contain an implicit critique of the capitalist state, the visual excess of the two women's consumerist desires connotes what Kilgour sees as “the modern world of isolated consumers driven by rapacious egos.”¹² The scene of the women's self-destruction takes place towards the end of the film. Sato cuts between the first woman carefully piercing her body with a variety of objects and the second who, while making tempura, batters her own hand before eagerly demolishing her tempura fingers. The use of editing her along with the sounds of pleasure that come from the women as they turn their bodies into the ultimate commodity for consumption highlights the substitutability of the women for each other. The fact that neither of the women has a name also functions to signal the fact that the women are to be understood as metaphors for the capitalist condition. The *wétiko* monster or cannibal signifies pure excess and consumption out of control. Kilgour stresses the relationship between cannibalism and sexual desire: “The language of love is stuffed with metaphors of eating, devouring a loved one - a sweetie - which identity eating and sexual intercourse.”¹³

This link between consumerism, commodification and cannibalism is made clear in the scene of the gluttonous women's self or auto-cannibalism. The order in which the gluttonous woman consumes herself seems pertinent: The labia, followed by the nipple, and finally, when she sees her reflection in the knife, her eye. As such, this repeats the pivotal moment when Japan opening itself up to the West in 1853, saw itself reflected back through the Other's gaze.¹⁴ As Allison points out:

In order to gain face as a modern nation, in other words, Japan inscribed shame where it had not been located before: onto body parts and bodily functions regard as natural by Japanese traditions.¹⁵

In addition this scene also alludes to a case of real-life cannibalism that took place in 1981. Issei Sagawa, one-time cannibal cum restaurant critic and media celebrity, was obsessed with the thought of eating a woman. After an aborted attempt to eat his German Professor while at Wako University in Tokyo, Sagawa consummated these desires while studying in France.

Befriended by a young woman, Renee Hartvelt, Sagawa returned the favour by shooting her and then consuming parts of her body over several days.¹⁶ These events are recounted in his semi-autobiographical book, *In the Fog*, which sold over 200,000 copies in Japan. He writes:

Finally I cut off her private parts. When I touch the pubic hair it has a very bad smell. I bite her clit, but it won't come off, it just stretches. So I throw it in the frying pan and pop it in my mouth. I chew very carefully and swallow it. It is so sweet.¹⁷

McRoy argues that the scene of the women's auto-cannibalisation of her sexuality - she eats her labia, followed by a nipple and finishes with an eye - represents an overt challenge to Japanese censorship regulations:

By blatantly displaying that which cannot be shown (human genitalia) through a removal of the 'obscene' object from its traditional context, Sato simultaneously shocks his audience and reveals some of the logics at work in contemporary Japanese culture.¹⁸

At the same time, this scene can be interpreted as an explicit critique and commentary on consumer and celebrity culture in which a self-confessed cannibal can become a media star - he has written a newspaper column; appeared on cooking shows; drawn explicit pornographic manga and in 1994 "held a one-man seminar entitled 'Sagawa's Worlds' in which he discussed his culinary preferences and aired a video predictably entitled *The Desire to be Eaten*."¹⁹ That Sato is deliberately evoking images of the real life cannibal²⁰ in *Naked Blood* is solidified by the fact that Sagawa has a cameo in his earlier pink film, *The Bedroom (Uwakizuma: Chijokuzeme)*. In 'Consumerism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism,' Bartolovich argues that "preoccupation with cannibals [...] is one of the morbid symptoms of capitalist appetite in crisis."²¹ The cannibal, she writes, is deployed to signify "a new and uncertain relation to men to commodities."²² This scene of auto-cannibalism is not, however, the only use of the metaphor of the cannibal as excessive appetite in the film. In a hallucinatory later scene, we see Yuki's dead husband pushing his way into Yuki's disembowelled body. The scene ends as his hands come out of Yuki's womb, closing up the incision.

While "My Son" triggers self-destructive appetites in the two women, in Rika, destructive impulses are turned towards the Other - both in terms of other people, but more generally in terms of Society as the Lacanian Big Other itself. During the climatic sex scene between Rika and Eiji, we see flashbacks of Rika killing the other women including Yuki - as seen through

the camera lens of Eiji - which are intercut with the surreal image of Rika and Eiji making love, while floating through the air, watched over by the sightless eyes of the cactus. Rika's originary trauma, the onset of her menses (which has caused both her insomnia and over sensitivity to the sounds of living things), is repeated as we see Rika covered with blood as she kills the women. As is typical in science fiction films which take as their theme the mad scientist, Eiji sacrifices himself and his invention in order to pay for his sins against humanity: he willingly submits to Rika's razor, spilling his life as he spills his seed, creating new life. However, this self-sacrifice is in vain, as in the future, we see Rika and her son, also called Eiji, framed by a desolate landscape with nothing living on it but the omnipresent cactus. We learn that Rika's mission is the complete destruction of the 'Other' and indeed that 'My Son' has not been destroyed and Eiji's sacrifice was in vain.

4. Conclusion

As Montaigne knew [...] if the cannibal represents the forces that threaten the cherished values of a society, it can also be used satirically to attack despised values and expose hypocrisy.²³

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, one of the predominant trends in Japanese horror film was techno-horror, with films such as *Ring*,²⁴ *Pulse*,²⁵ and *Suicide Circle*.²⁶ Such films, as in the case of *Naked Blood*, construct a society of alienation and disconnection and inscribe the probability of a dystopian future. In this paper, I have argued that this alienation and disconnection finds its most profound metaphor in [auto]cannibalism as seen in *Naked Blood*. Cannibalism is often linked to consumerism in popular culture. This is clearly shown in films as disparate as Lenzi's notorious *Cannibal Ferox*²⁷ and *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*.²⁸ In Fincher's *Se7en*,²⁹ which loosely takes the seven deadly sins as motivation for its serial killer, the gluttonous victim is forced to eat spaghetti until he chokes to death. There can be little doubt that *Naked Blood* is situated as an overt criticism of Japan's censorship regulations, and constraining of the national body, as McRoy argues. Kilgour also points out the figure of the cannibal is often used as a form for attacking hypocrisy. Gluttony, lust, and greed - sins of excess - are signified by the cannibal or *wétiko* monster. However, sin is here is figured as political rather than personal. It is capitalism itself, which is corrupted and diseased. Root points out that Forbes uses *wétiko* psychosis as "technical medico-spiritual term for a particular approach to the world. This disease is able to cross populations to produce certain kinds of recognizable effects in the people who have contracted it."³⁰ In *The Evil of Dracula*,³¹ Dracula is shown coming to Japan from the West in the 1600s and in a paper given last year, I argued that: "Dracula's whiteness [...] is utilised to codify

cultural anxieties over Westernisation.”³² In *Naked Blood*, the final words of Rika that she is going ‘West’ can be interpreted as signifying that this disease - *wétiko* psychosis - is being exported back to the West. I suggested to begin with that there are similarities with the iconography in *Naked Blood* and Japanese cinematic visions of hell; however, what is suggested by *Naked Blood* is that hell is not another realm, but rather other people.

Notes

¹ S. Lohr, ‘From Japan’s Slump in 1990s, Lessons for U.S’ in *The New York Times*, 2nd February 2008, viewed 7th March 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/09/business/worldbusiness/09japan.html>>

² C. Balmain, *An Introduction to the Japanese Horror Film*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2008.

³ D. Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, & the Commodification of Difference*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1996, p. 17.

⁴ Root, p. 11.

⁵ J. McRoy, *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*, Rodopi, Amsterdam & New York, 2007, p. 50.

⁶ D. Korn, M. Radice & C. Hawes point out that cannibalism “is a relatively new word, introduced into the English language by Christopher Columbus., who first used it in his journal of 23 November 1492.” *Cannibal: The History of the People-Eaters*, Channel 4 Books, Basingstoke & Oxford, 2001, p. 11.

⁷ Auto-cannibalism has been theorised as an example of extreme body modification or scarification.

⁸ D. MacCannell, ‘Cannibalism Today.’ *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers*, Routledge, New York, 1992, p. 57.

⁹ ‘THE ELECTRONIC DISTURBANCE’, *Autonome Media*, nda, viewed 7th March 2008, <<http://www.spunk.org/texts/pubs/autonomd/sp000913.txt>>

¹⁰ Root, p. 198.

¹¹ Root, p. 11.

¹² M. Kilgour, ‘The function of cannibalism at the present time,’ in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, F. Baker, P. Hulme & M. Iversen (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 241.

¹³ Kilgour, p. 245.

¹⁴ The significant of the gluttonous woman’s gaze came from discussions with Dr Phil Fitzsimmons and Dr Charles Nuckolls.

¹⁵ A. Allison, ‘Cutting the Fringes: Pubic Hair at the Margins of Japanese Censorship Laws’ in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, A. Hildebeitel & B. D. Miller (eds), University of New York Press, New York State, p. 197.

¹⁶ Sagawa was arrested and committed to Henri Collin Psychiatric Ward in Villejuif. In 1984, Sagawa was extradited to Japan and institutionalised at the Matsuzawa Psychiatric Hospital, Tokyo. Just one year later, Sagawa was released even though doctors at both hospitals had agreed that Sagawa was unlikely to be cured. It is believed that Sagawa's father, Akira, an extremely powerful Japanese businessman, head of Kurita Water Industries, paid for his son's release (see Diehl & Donnelly, pp. 177-191).

¹⁷ Sagawa in D. Diehl and M. P. Donnelly, *Eat Thy Neighbour: A History of Cannibalism*, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2006, p. 183.

¹⁸ McRoy, p. 57.

¹⁹ Diehl & Donnelly, pp. 189-190.

²⁰ Rumours of cannibalism in East Asian history cannot be quantified; however, during World War II, it has been said that Japanese soldiers feasted on the bodies of their enemies.

²¹ C. Bartolovich, 'Consumerism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism,' in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, F. Baker, P. Hulme & M. Iversen (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.234.

²² Bartolovich, p. 236.

²³ Kilgour, p. 243.

²⁴ *Ringu*, Hideo Nakata, Japan, 1998.

²⁵ *Kairo*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan, 2001.

²⁶ *Jisatsu saakuru*, Sion Sono, Japan, 2002.

²⁷ Umberto Lenzi, Italy, 1981.

²⁸ Peter Greenaway, France/UK, 1989.

²⁹ David Fincher, USA, 1995.

³⁰ Root, p. 11.

³¹ *Chi o suu bara*, Michio Yamamoto, Japan, 1974.

³² C. Balmain, 'It's Alive: Disorderly and dangerous hair in Japanese Horror Cinema,' Conference Paper. *Perspectives on Evil* 2008, 2008.

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Gaiman's *Coraline*: Teaching Children The Meaning of Evil, Post-9/11

Nanette Norris

Abstract

Stephen King, the master of evil in fiction, has admitted that there is a link between modern developments in horror stories and the events of World War II, events that surpassed any fictional horror that could be plucked from the imagination. The location where horror could occur was driven inward, into the mind, into the soul of the individual, into the familiar - and all this on a human scale. In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, the face of evil has come home: the "Other Mother," a mirror image of the 'real' mother, is found *in the home*, thus destroying the sanctity of the home and of the familiar. Young Coraline must recognize the alien for what she is, and must defeat her evil. The real-life parallel is 9/11 and the events subsequent to it. 9/11 was an attack on home soil, with ordinary people the victims. The non-specific sense of being surrounded by evil, which the War on Terrorism reflects, echoes what social analyst George Gerbner calls 'Mean World Syndrome': one perceives the world to be a meaner place than it really is, which corrodes the essence of society and results in alienated, suspicious, anti-social beings. Fear operates as a subtle evil. We now have layers of evil: the evil of the ever-increasing fear bred of visual violence and Mean World Syndrome, ratified, apparently, in the intimate invasion of 9/11, and what has been perceived to be the subsequent manipulation of these fearful impulses into support for the military outreach of the West in Afghanistan and Iraq. But was it a manipulation for an end, or were we simply applying the Coraline remedy? This paper discusses the representation of evil in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* vis-à-vis a post-9/11 world. Coraline fearlessly struggles with and defeats the evil 'other' with which she is confronted by never letting go of an essential value: the worth of the individual. Ultimately, she must not bury her fear: she must face it.

Key Words: Neil Gaiman, Coraline, War on Terrorism, WOT, 9/11, horror genre, mean world syndrome, western liberty, national defense, evil.

*Teach your children well;
Their parent's hell will slowly go by –
Feed them on your dreams;
The one they pick's the one you'll go by*
Crosby Stills Nash and Young

When Hamlet says, "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so,"¹ he is taking a moral dilemma into a spiritual arena, as he is wrestling with the Christian - and, in his case, Catholic - concept of the existence of an eternal soul which can be denied entry into heaven. We recognize that he is facing the problem of the existence of evil, and that he is wrestling with the Christian sense that, indeed, just as some things are good, some things are bad. The question, for Hamlet and for us, is whether or not we should act when something bad happens.

The words he speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come from *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius: "nothing is either bad or good which can happen equally to the bad man and the good."² Roman Emperor and harsh persecutor of Christians, this stoic philosopher was closer to our present-day secular sense of a world in which the only evil is the horror which one man perpetrates upon another, and thus Marcus Aurelius adjured us to be *good* during our short sojourn on earth.

Perhaps this is why horror has become an important genre as the West becomes increasingly secular: we still need to come to terms with how we are going to react when bad things happen to good people. Do we shrug; do we deny the bad occurrence? Do we refuse to react on the grounds that bad things happen to good people for no particular reason? Or do we collectively agree that *this* or *that* deserves the avenging sword of the righteous warrior? At what point is something *horrible* enough for action?

Stephen King, the master of evil in fiction, has admitted that there is a link between modern developments in horror stories and the events of World War II, events that surpassed any fictional horror that could be plucked from the imagination. The location where horror could occur was driven inward, into the mind, into the soul of the individual, into the familiar - and all this on a human scale.³

So, when the genres of horror and of children's literature overlap, it behoves us to take notice. Children's literature offers a sense of the culture of the time and place, because we want to enculturate our children into our standards and our beliefs so that they can

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The Torch; be yours to hold it high⁴

This was true in 2002, when Neil Gaiman published a children's book entitled *Coraline*, that seemed to speak to the heart of a question which the West in general, and the U.S. in particular, asks itself about its relationship to the rest of the world. Since then, this particular book has been turned into both a graphic novel and a movie, and its dissemination has been broad, whatever its influence. *Coraline* speaks to our sense of a world at War

on Terror - our sense of whom and what comprises 'the enemy', our sense of individual strength and weakness, our concepts of personal and political boundaries, as well as our religious beliefs and responsibilities. *Coraline* expresses the acculturation of children to a sense of the triumph of the (new) Western ideology.

The first thing we notice in *Coraline* is that the foe, the enemy, has come home in such a way as to defy definition and location: it is the 'other mother,' a mirror image of the 'real' mother and found *in the home*, thus destroying the sanctity of the home. This one detail says volumes about the world in which we live - a world in which peace is sharply juxtaposed with the ever-changing face of war, and the personal has become political in ways we could only glimpse before.

Nowadays, the war is not in some distant and unknown arena, but in the living room. It is no longer faced only by professional soldiers, but by all citizens. Territory is of less import than beliefs and values. Perhaps this has always been true: those who have fought and died have helped to preserve our way of life - not just the physical land on which we build our houses, but the businesses we run and the thoughts we discuss. It has become time to take ownership of what this really means. Our heritage includes an understanding that there are - and perhaps will always be - people who want to attack us, to take control of our destiny, to destroy the things for which our forefathers fought. That is the foe. The face of this foe may change, as in Orwell's *1984*, but there is always a foe.

World War I and World War II had the advantage that at least you knew with whom you were at war - the enemy was identifiable; the target was straightforward; the path of resistance was clear; the motivation was obvious, as were the stakes involved. The propaganda that supported these wars was open and tangible - a message or presentation that served an agenda. Propaganda strategies were coupled with propagandistic messages in a fairly readily identifiable fashion. PSYOP techniques had been in continuing development since the Boer War, and yet sinister advancement of embedded propaganda did not occur until the German propaganda of World War II, and even then there was nothing on the home front to equal it.

Then came 9/11.

Who does not remember exactly where he or she was when the planes went into the Trade Tower? How many of you saw the second plane, live, on television? And the image that was repeated and is ingrained in our psyches? Allow me to repeat it for you here.



9/11 Twin Towers

This is an attack on home soil: ordinary people are the victims, and ordinary people are the soldiers in this new battle. The people in the WTC were targeted simply because they lived and worked in America. Their spatial location was the (outward) marker of a psychological location, and it is here that the 'new' war resides.

The difference with previous wars is that there is nothing specific to fight. There is an evil, and there are people who perpetrate it, who can be identified to some extent in the person of Osama bin Laden, or in a group like Al Qaeda, but on the whole the foe is amorphous, vague, and non-specific.

This non-specific sense of the enemy echoes what 'Cultivation Theory' analyst George Gerbner calls 'Mean World Syndrome.'⁵ Based upon the results of a 30-year 'Cultural Indicators' study, he argues that television - and especially television violence - has long-term effects that are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. Seeing violence, he contends, makes one feel like a victim, and makes one perceive the world to be a meaner place than it really is.

Gerbner asks, "What kind of a society is this? It is a society of lonely, alienated, suspicious, anti-social beings. It corrodes the very essence of society and in my opinion totally unnecessarily." And if our sense of the

world as a mean place has been corroborated by over 30 years of violent television watching, as well as the ever-increasing visual violence of news media, certainly the tragic reality of the 'Attack on America' has solidified this perception.

This attack spawned the ubiquitous War on Terrorism, the waging of which draws upon attitudes, behaviours, and reactions that have been identified as developing in our culture over the past 30 years at least. Consequently, when we see the image of the plane crashing into the tower, we remember the day of the attack, and we remember the fear we felt at that time - fear of the unknown, fear of the enemy, and fear for ourselves as victims of violence. Our experience of 9/11 exists for us as a complex of remembered emotions, controlled by a portion of the body called the amygdala.

The amygdala is the collection of nuclei found in the anterior portions of the temporal lobes in the brains of primates and it is involved with the specific memory of the emotion of fear. Whereas feelings are the products of the conscious mind, emotions are distinct patterns of behaviours of neurons. After a frightful experience, one can remember the logical reasons for the experience (for instance, the time and place), but one will also 'feel' the memory, and one's body will react as though reliving the experience. This differs distinctly from a conscious feeling of fear. The memory of fear is conditioned fear, quite separate from the conscious analytical signal of the cortex, and it seems that the amygdala exerts a greater influence on the cortex than vice versa: once an emotion has been turned on, it is difficult for the cortex to turn it off.⁶

Our experience of 9/11 is controlled by the amygdala rather than the cortex, and is a conditioned response rather than a reasoned one. To see the all-too familiar images, images that are connected in our memories with sounds of chaos and pain occurring on the home front, and with concepts of heroism by fellow citizens, is to feel once more the fearful emotions of that time.

Terror is an effective method of group organization. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, "It can freeze people in place, stripping them of will and keeping them bound to an authority or a way of life."⁷ Terror can be used to oppose dissolution. In this sense, whether the process is deliberate or not, we have been acculturated as a group through alienation, anti-social fear, and terror. The terror is from without, as in the 9/11 attacks, but it is also from within, from our worldview, our cultural stance, our fears.

What I have spoken of so far are the events of the real world, the adult world. How does one go about communicating the essence of these events to a child, and how could one evoke a similar reaction from a child? Essentially, home has been threatened by an unfathomable enemy and somehow we must distinguish ourselves from this enemy, distinguish

between good (which is us) and evil (which is them), and restore balance. That is how we feel as a nation and as a society, and this is the reality for which we will prepare our children, in part through story. *Coraline* presents this threat to the home and suggests that there are religious and moral components to the battle.

The social fabric of Western society receives the greatest approbation from less liberal cultures. The way the family functions, the distribution of responsibility and work between the individuals, the upbringing of the children – these are the essential ‘home’ issues with which we grapple and which bring criticism upon us from other cultures which, although they may engage in human rights violations, nonetheless claim a moral superiority over the West.

The institution of marriage is in trouble with a dissolution rate of over 50%. This translates into many issues of dysfunction – single parent families, latchkey kids, a cycle of poverty for women and children. Associated issues include childcare, women and work, gender parity at home and in the workplace, and individual freedom. The way in which the home functions directly affects and relates to the way in which our culture functions, and thus the personal is political.

Coraline's family is the quintessential Western liberal one, albeit nuclear. She has a tremendous amount of freedom for a little girl. Her parents both work, which means they do not have much time for her although they are both at home. Her mother sums it up: “I don't really mind what you do ... as long as you don't make a mess.”⁸ “Leave me alone to work,” her father says.⁹ This kind of benign neglect is characteristic of many families today, and it is a small step, a slight suspension of disbelief, which allows us to hear Coraline say, “I haven't seen either of them since yesterday. I'm on my own. I think I've probably become a single child family.”¹⁰

One's reaction to horror depends in part upon one's acclimatization to a state of fear. Some would say that *Coraline* is not all that frightening, but I contend that the tone is so ordinary, the experience so in tune with the attitudes of tweens, the family set up so familiar, the characters so bumbling, that the dysfunction stands out in stark contrast and is all the more frightening. It strikes at the heart of children's vulnerability and their need for security in the home.

Steven Marans, in *Listening to Fear*, contends that the needs of children are quite similar to those of adults.

In the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001, we have come much closer as a nation to understanding traumatic experience. As the unanticipated, massive, and violent loss of life breached our most basic sense of safety, security,

and control, we were left numb and disbelieving, vulnerable to the fears that all of us share.¹¹

The lure in the world-behind-the-door is that Coraline finds two 'other' parents who are interested in her, and who provide her with more interesting circumstances - "one big happy family."¹² But she is not deceived. When she refuses to comply she is threatened with every horror a young child can imagine - psychological and physical abuse - terror - that is intended to cower her and render her obedient to the 'other mother.'

Here is where the true horror of this story resides. This young girl must contend with a child's worst nightmare. Everything that is most familiar to her alters in a sinister manner:

The carpet beneath her feet was the same carpet they had in her flat. The wallpaper was the same wallpaper they had. The picture hanging in the hall was the same that they had hanging in their hallway at home.

She knew where she was: she was in her own home. She hadn't left.

She shook her head, confused.

She stared at the picture hanging on the wall: no, it wasn't exactly the same. The picture they had in their own hallway showed a boy in old-fashioned clothes staring at some bubbles. But now the expression on his face was different - he was looking at the bubbles as if he was planning to do something very nasty indeed to them.¹³

That the issue is one of perspective is driven home by a single detail: if she is to stay in the other world, as the other mother and father cajole her to do, she must submit to receiving button eyes - to allowing her sight to be removed, and having fake eyes put in place. Coraline refuses and the terrorism begins.

First of all, her mother and father are kidnapped and confined behind a mirror upon which they scrawl, backwards, HELP US. She reports them missing to the local constabulary, and is not taken seriously. She returns to the other world to find her parents and is "pushed into the dim space behind the mirror"¹⁴ and left in the darkness to 'learn manners', a space "the size of a broom closet: tall enough to stand in or to sit in, not wide or deep enough to lie down in."¹⁵

In this closet she finds the 'faint shapes' of three children who were captured earlier and who advise her, "She will take your life and all you are and all you care'st for, and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog. She'll take your joy. And one day you'll awake and your heart and your soul

will have gone. A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten."¹⁶

Coraline then enters into a formidable 'game' against the 'other mother' in which she must win her freedom - and that of her parents and the three children - by finding her parents, and finding the souls of the children. She is faced with a world that is gray and colourless; she is faced with a theatre that is dark, derelict, full of cobwebs, bats, and rotten wood; she must contend with a "creature in the sac [that] seemed horribly unformed and unfinished,"¹⁷ and a mildewed basement that harbours a 'thing', "white, and huge, and swollen."¹⁸ These are the greatest fears of nightmares: the fog, the emptiness, the evil mother, the confinement in a dark cupboard, dismemberment, and the carry-over from the nightmare world to the real world.

Even having found the souls and her parents, she must still fight to get out of the grip of the evil, to get everyone home safely, away from the power that could not create, but could only "transform, and twist, and change."¹⁹ Back home, she is forced to admit, "It isn't over"²⁰ as "her mouth dropped open in horror and she stepped out of the way as the thing clicked and scuttled past her and out of the house, running crablike on its too-many tapping, clicking, scurrying feet ... It was the other mother's right hand. It wanted the black key."²¹

Horror is seen as a most radical genre, pushing the boundaries of experience and reality, and alternately, paradoxically, it can be a conservative genre, maintaining the status quo or worse. Horror that promotes the 'Mean World Syndrome' as *Coraline* surely does, must be seen as conservative, as promoting a view of the world which maintains rigid boundaries of thought and behaviour, out of fear of the unknown and the alien. However, given the very real events of the world, given 9/11 and its aftermath, a more liberal view may be irresponsible, and our legacy to our children must include some sense of how to deal with these realities.

The link between Coraline's terror-filled experience and that of the War on Terror is established through the operation of fear - fear which is associated with a subtle evil that exists as a parody of the right-thinking which is portrayed as our way of thinking, our way of life. The other mother says, "we love the sinner and we hate the sin,"²² (90), thus establishing a religious dimension to the battle. Coraline is, and we are, on the side of righteousness, as she has the tool with which to find the souls, and the wit with which to rescue them. She is the freedom fighter, as the West now sees itself as being.

The speech that the late President John F. Kennedy never had the opportunity to give in Dallas, Texas, speaks of the 'virtues of freedom' and the 'evils of tyranny'. The text talks about "our successful defence of freedom [being] due not to the words we used, but to the strength we stood ready to

use on behalf of the principles we stand ready to defend." It says that "we in this country, in this generation are, - by destiny rather than by choice - the watchmen on the walls of world freedom." The enemy then was identified as the Communists; we have new enemies now, but the program remains the same: watchmen on the walls of world freedom.²³

On his inaugural day, former President Bush vowed, "to spread freedom to 'the darkest corners of the world.' ... 'The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.'"²⁴ The liberty of Western ideology is seen as being linked with, dependent upon, not merely the liberty of other lands, but the spread of Western ideology to those 'darkest corners'. The 'other land', like the 'other mother', cannot be allowed the 'liberty' of altering us, changing us, painlessly infiltrating into our lives and stealing our 'souls' and "all you care'st for". When the foe comes into the home, it is time to fight the foe.

With 9/11, the enemy came home. The fight became visible, embodied in the need to rescue the souls who are in bondage in 'wrong thinking' in other lands. But it is equally a struggle here at home, against the infiltration into the home, into the values which define us – that in spite of the lassitude of the family structure, the inconclusiveness of community ties, the social fabric which raises concern and argument, we nonetheless abide by a single and definable set of values which distinguish us. Both President Bush and Neil Gaiman have defined this set of values as those of loyalty and humanity, in that we would sacrifice ourselves selflessly for our family and for others, and that we believe in the ultimate goodness of all living things, and in the essential fitness of a world in which right action takes precedence over coercion, however attractive or alluring the alternate.

President Obama's vision is the same. In his inaugural address, along with extending the hand of peace and of friendship across the globe, he warned, "We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defence, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you."²⁵

It would be a mistake to think that this president intends to commit his country to radically new action. He has issued an executive order that removes the ability of a president to circumvent U.S. laws by simply declaring war;²⁶ he has ordered the closure of the Guantanamo Bay Prison; and he has ordered the CIA to close, "as expeditiously as possible,"²⁷ any secret detention facilities overseas. However, as Marc Imbeault points out, "unalloyed idealism can no more lead effectively to victory than can cynical realism. What is essential is the ability to manipulate both and to maintain a sense of proportion."²⁸

The debate concerning the importance of and the advisability of torture as a necessary counter-terrorist measure has begun in earnest in the

United States. The cost of torture is high, and thousands of people must be tortured in order to extract a very small amount of valid information; however, torture is an effective way of terrorizing a population and keeping it in check for political reasons. No leader of a great country can afford to totally overlook the benefits where they are applicable, should they be applicable. Why would we think such a leader would? Obama can issue executive orders that appear to do so, while submerging the reality that it would not be politically expedient or safe to ignore.

Coraline suggests that our enculturation into seeing the world as a mean place in which we are constantly and always potential victims is not ending any time soon. We are conditioned through our culture, through our memorialisation of war, through portrayals of violence on television and in the media, to see the world in this way.

This begs the question that, if this is how we see the world, why do we not then *become* victims? The feelings that we share are what Steven Marans calls 'bedrock fears' - "of losing our lives or the lives of those we love and upon whom we depend, of losing the love of others and the love of ourselves, of damage to our bodies and impairment of functioning, of losing control of our urges, feelings, and rational thought, and of losing the order and structure in our worlds" - fears that "we try to keep as far away from conscious thought as we possibly can."²⁹ And herein lies the paradox: our instinct is to bury these fears when what we need to do is face them.

C.G. Jung identified two layers of unconscious contents of the mind - the superficial *personal* and the deeper *collective*. He considered that "the contents of the personal unconscious are chiefly the *feeling-toned complexes*."³⁰ Experiences, which are negotiated by the amygdala, would certainly seem to fit in this category and even though we might like to bury them deeply, it appears they might nonetheless be the most accessible contents of the unconscious psyche. The wonder of psychic existence is that only that which is capable of consciousness can be perceived. Jung contends that consciousness and perception of psychic existence are the means of controlling those influences. In other words, although we may want to bury our fear, it is best to face it. In this way, we can resist being manipulated and being victims, frozen in fear: we can become empowered. Coraline had a magic stone, through which she could 'see' the souls that were in danger of being lost. Failing that, Carl Jung has speculated that we resist manipulation by outside forces through knowledge: if we are conscious of the danger, we are empowered to resist and fight.

The process of critical awareness, of challenging premise, of interrogating the text of social being, is inherent in the nature of democracy: it is our tool, our magic stone, against the forces which would subsume us. The right to interrogate, the right to know, is precisely what generations of people have fought and died for - call it the central value of democracy. We

seem destined, in the 21st century, to fight so that others, too, can have this right.

Notes

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¹³ Gaiman, p. 27.

¹⁴ Gaiman, pp. 79-80.

¹⁵ Gaiman, p. 81.

¹⁶ Gaiman, p. 86.

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²¹ Gaiman, p. 147.

²² Gaiman, p. 90.

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More Than Mateship? Queer Desire In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

Ann-Marie Cook

Abstract

This paper explores the queer dynamics of mateship in Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel and Peter Weir's 1975 film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Drawing upon the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I show how narrative development and Lindsay's use of language work to eroticise the bond between the two main male characters, and thus pose a challenge to the traditional formulation of mateship along asexual/homophobic lines. I then show how Peter Weir's adaptation unqueers its source material and downplays the relationship between the men in order to focus upon the mysterious disappearance of schoolgirls during a day trip to Hanging Rock. Finally, I situate the treatment of same-sex desire in these two texts in relation to prevailing attitudes toward homosexuality in Australian society during the 1960s and 1970s, when the novel and film were released.

Key Words: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Joan Lindsay, Peter Weir, mateship, queer desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Australian cinema, Australian literature, literary adaptation.

This paper is part of a larger project aimed at investigating how representations of same-sex desire in films and novels about Australia's past operate in relation to hetero-normative discourses circulating within contemporary national culture. The focal point for my analysis is the treatment of mateship in Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel and Peter Weir's 1975 film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.¹ Both texts feature the relationship between Michael Fitzhubert, a young English aristocrat newly arrived in colonial Australia, and Albert Crundall, the Fitzhubert family's coachman. But where Lindsay embraces the queer possibilities of their bond, Weir eschews any hint of homoeroticism by framing their mateship in strictly hetero-normative terms. In order to demonstrate why this change is significant, I will examine the concepts of mateship and queer desire, identify the queer aspects of Lindsay's novel, evaluate Weir's modifications, and situate both texts in relation to the homophobic discourses circulating in Australian society during the 1960s and 1970s.

1. The Slippery Slope Between Mateship and Queer Desire

Mateship emerged during Australia's colonial period as a deep and enduring bond between men who survived in the abject conditions of penal servitude and the Outback by living according to a code of cooperation, egalitarianism, and companionship. If sexual intercourse between men was acknowledged at all (and in most cases it was not), it was portrayed as a form of situational homosexuality triggered by the absence of women rather than a manifestation of genuine romantic desire. The writings of Alexander Harris and Robert Hughes exemplify this traditional understanding of homosocial bonds between mates in asexual and/or homophobic terms.² But such perspectives were challenged by Russel Ward, whose reflections on sodomy and the spiritual connections among men in bush culture inspired a new strand of scholarship bolstered by the work of Garry Wotherspoon, Dennis Altman, John Rickard, Clive Moore, Lisa Featherstone and others who have attempted to make sense of the homoerotic and homosexual dynamics of mateship.³ This is not to suggest that mateship was always queer. But as a culturally sanctioned bond that enabled men to interact closely with one another, it is not inconceivable that mateship also provided a space in which the deep spiritual bond between convicts, bushmen, or ordinary blokes *could* be transformed into something more physically intimate, despite laws against buggery and gross indecency.

Even in cases where there is no evidence of actual intercourse, it is still possible to see some bonds between mates as manifestations of queer desire if we accept Alexander Doty's assertion that 'queer' encapsulates a variety of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and desires that deviate in varying degrees from social norms that privilege heterosexual, procreation-orientated sexual relations.⁴ Interpreting the relationship between Michael and Albert in this way constitutes a queer reading of the text in which I seek to lay bare what Doty describes as the "expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception."⁵ The challenge posed by this sort of reading lies with the negotiation of boundaries between manifest content (what's written on the page) and latent content (layers of implied meaning that may or may not be consistent with what has been stated overtly) in order to uncover the traces of queer desire in what otherwise appears to be a 'straight' text. Thus, my observations on the novel and film represent a form of analytical rebellion in which I read against the hetero-normative grain to foreground the same-sex desires and relationships that are otherwise obscured in the text.

Interpreting representations of mateship during the Victorian period is a slightly tricky affair because both men and women tended to bond with members of the same sex with a level of intensity that subsequent generations would associate with sexual intimacy between married couples. One reason for this change in perception is that, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes,

society's understanding of sexuality is culturally and historically constructed: "[S]exuality, like ideology, depends on the mutual redefinition and occlusion of synchronic and diachronic formulations...What *counts* as the sexual is...variable and itself political."⁶ She explains that, with the emergence of homosexuality as a specific psychological category in western culture, sharper divisions were socially constructed between the "fundamentally nonerotic bond" of male friendship that was valorised and the "deviant...preeminantly erotic bond" of homosexuality that was demonised.⁷ The result is what she describes as a disruption to the continuum that once existed between social and sexual relationships.⁸ With the policing regimes of science and law working in concert to pathologise and criminalise same-sex desire, the treatment of homosocial desire in English literature underwent a recalibration in which male coupling was supplanted by a triangular relationship involving a woman with whom one or both men could fall in love.⁹ Triangulation didn't eliminate the queerness of male interaction because, as Rene Girard observes, "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved."¹⁰ The woman in such triangles becomes an object of exchange between the two men as they channel through her their mutual desire for each other. This "traffic in women" reduces women to what Gayle Rubin describes as "exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men."¹¹ Thus, female characters in triangulations can function as objects of exchange that *facilitate*, rather than negate, the articulation of male homoerotic desire. I now want to consider how this dynamic informs the relationship between characters in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

2. Queer Mateship: Lindsay's Novel

Before I turn to the treatment of mateship specifically, a brief plot synopsis is in order. On Valentine's Day in 1900, four schoolgirls and a teacher from Appleyard College disappear without a trace during a day trip to Hanging Rock. Michael and Albert are the last people to see them alive and this fact, combined with Michael's obsession with the singular beauty of one of the girls, Miranda, leads him to mount his own rescue effort. Despite his misgivings, Albert accompanies Michael on a journey back to the rock. When Michael falls ill, Albert rescues him and subsequently follows his friend's trail markers to save Irma, the lone survivor of the schoolgirls' ill-fated expedition. As Irma recovers, Michael's aunt makes an unsuccessful attempt to play matchmaker. Shortly thereafter, Michael leaves for Queensland and Albert subsequently joins him. Meanwhile, the tragic suicide of a bullied student and the failure of authorities to find the missing girls cause parents to withdraw their daughters from the school. Realising that she is professionally ruined, Mrs. Appleyard commits suicide by throwing herself

from the precipice of Hanging Rock. There are obvious queer implications for the film's treatment of same-sex schoolgirl crushes, but I want to focus on the queer dynamics of the relationship between Albert and Michael because this seems to me to be an overlooked facet of their mateship.

The male bond at the centre of the novel departs from the traditional conception of mateship as a relationship between social equals, but the cross-class connection between Michael and Albert embodies in every other way the virtues of egalitarianism, mutual respect, loyalty, self-sacrifice and concern for one's mate as the traditional definition prescribes. At face value, their relationship is inscribed within a heterosexual discourse constructed around their mutual fascination with the schoolgirls at the rock.¹² Albert crudely wolf-whistles at the girls and declares that all sheilas are alike.¹³ Michael is transfixed by Miranda's beauty and chastises Albert for his vulgarity. His obsession with attractive females is so great that he tells a police officer that he saw three girls ascend the rock only to correct himself and confess that he simply forgot the fourth girl in the group because she was so plain.¹⁴ This inability to take note of a woman unless she's beautiful is as offensive to the opposite sex as Albert's view that women are all the same and smacks of the misogyny that Miriam Dixson regards as implicit in mateship.¹⁵ Later, Albert tries to avoid any interaction with Irma¹⁶ while Michael's attitude toward her is cloaked in ambiguity. Images of the girls occupy his dreams and daytime reveries and he appears to be going through the motions of courtship with Irma.¹⁷ But he abruptly abandons her, leaving behind only a bluntly written farewell note: "I won't be seeing you to say good-bye. It's rotten luck but I'm sure you'll understand."¹⁸ This rejection of heterosexual romance in favour of a male-dominated bush lifestyle with Albert at his side is significant on two levels. Most obviously, it raises questions about whether there is more to their relationship than platonic mateship. Perhaps even more significantly, the choice made by the men to forgo courtships with women in order to spend time together suggests that their mutual affinity is rooted in genuine desire and, thus, should not be dismissed as a function of the situational homosexuality that can flourish in sexually segregated spaces.

Michael and Albert's interactions invite a queer reading, particularly when they are read as episodes in a male adventure romance. As Ian Henderson observes of this narrative form, "Male protagonists forego their normal lives, entering into queer relationships in the field of death...before being either restored to heterosexual domesticity...or sublimed into the realm of myth".¹⁹ He explains that, "queerness lies not in ineptly handled repressed desire...but in the very notion - an elusive one - of a passion between men which is neither necessarily sexual nor necessarily sex-free."²⁰ Such "indefinite and/or variable behaviours" in which "sex acts are beside the point" are, in Henderson's words, "fundamentally queer."²¹ Hanging Rock is

clearly figured as the 'field of death' because it is a dangerous space in which clocks stop, animals behave erratically and people mysteriously disappear or suffer strange afflictions for which they cannot account. The rock literally brings the two men together as they initiate their fellowship through conversations on the day of the picnic and the rescue mission provides an opportunity for the two men to demonstrate their mutual devotion to one another. Their bond is one in which sex is beside the point, though there are signs that it is underpinned by a quasi-romantic quality thanks to the erotically charged language employed by Lindsay.

With his rugged, no-nonsense brand of masculinity Albert embodies the virtues of the archetypal bushman, but his macho façade is ultimately undermined by his sentimental attachment to Michael. In a reversal of the rescue fantasy, in which the man rescues the female object of his desire, Albert rescues Michael after dreaming of "the voice of Michael...calling him for help from regions always inaccessible".²² He visits Michael's sickbed every day, even going so far as to "stroke the limp blue-veined hand on the coverlet.... There was nothing rough about young Crundall at this moment."²³ When Michael finally awakens, his declaration that he wants "only Albert"²⁴ initiates a reunion in which Lindsay draws the reader's attention to the fact that the men are attuned to the most intimate aspects of one another.

At last Albert was here beside him, smelling of Capstan cigarettes and fresh hay and settling himself into the bedside chair...The room was so quiet that Albert could hear Mike's heavy breathing as he lay with his face turned to the wall.²⁵

When this stillness is disrupted by talk of Irma's rescue, Albert leaves with what Lindsay describes as "a heavy heart."²⁶ A straight reading would suggest that this reaction is a function of concern for his mate's health, but a queer reading identifies it as a manifestation of fear that Irma could undermine their bond.

Of course, such a fear proves to be unfounded because Irma's character facilitates the development of Michael and Albert's relationship through the dynamics of triangulation outlined by Sedgwick. The rescue provides an acceptable channel through which the men can express their feelings for one another, while the money that Irma's father gives Albert in recognition of his bravery enables him to accept Michael's invitation to join him on a cattle station in Queensland. Irma therefore represents the symbolic currency through which the male couple is constituted and the literal currency that secures their union. But unlike the texts studied by Sedgwick, *Picnic* resolves the erotic triangle in favour of the male couple and thereby disrupts hetero-normative conventions. The queerness of this bond, therefore,

hinges on both the indefinite erotic dimension of their relationship as well as their survival as a couple at the end of the narrative.

It may be tempting to interpret Michael's apparent obsession with the schoolgirls as evidence of his heterosexual desires. Even if such desires are present, they are mitigated by the intensity of his bond with Albert. While gazing at Albert, Michael becomes conscious "for the first time since his illness...of a faint stirring of pleasure in his surroundings."²⁷ The homoerotic gaze can be seen to operate in another scene where Michael visits Albert's quarters in the stable and finds his mate

lying naked on his bed reading the racing tips in the *Hawklet* by the light of a candle whose wavering flames sent ripples of light across his powerful chest, tufted with coarse black hair. Dragons and mermaids writhed and wriggled with every movement of the muscular arm".²⁸

Lindsay's writing becomes the literary equivalent of a cinematic close up as she draws the reader's attention to the erotic signifiers of the setting: darkness, the hot temperature and Albert's nakedness - especially his powerful, hairy chest and rippling muscles. In a companion scene that suggests domestic bliss rather than raw eroticism, Michael returns to the Fitzhubert estate after a brief time away and opts to stay in Albert's room because he "thought there was an air of welcome, even of comfort, unknown in his aunt's drawing-room."²⁹ Michael comments that if Albert had been a married man, he'd be "what the women's magazines call a Home Maker."³⁰ The conversation about settling down leads to Michael to ponder his true feelings for his mate:

Mike glanced affectionately at the brick red features, more honest in the flickering candlelight than the faces of many of his Cambridge friends... 'Why not take a holiday and come up North with me?'³¹

The invitation follows a light-hearted reference to Albert as a home maker, and the ease with which they move from talking about domestic life to going to Queensland together could be read to imply the existence of a queer relationship that is pursued instead of and in opposition to the social norms that would have them marry women and start families. Their relationship can, therefore, be seen to hover in the indefinite and variable continuum of male homosocial desire in a way that confounds homophobic conceptualisations of mateship. What the future holds for Michael and Albert is not exactly clear, though it seems quite removed from either heterosexual domesticity or sublime myth. Indeed, Lindsay portrays their union as the most normal and

unremarkable development in a novel that is otherwise concerned with strikingly *unusual* occurrences. In this way, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* offers a new twist on the narrative conventions associated with the male adventure romance. While readers may not be convinced that Michael and Albert's relationship is akin to a gay romance, it seems clear that the tenderness, physicality and exclusivity of their bond is completely at odds with the homophobic notions of mateship that held sway in the late 20th century. It is for this reason that I regard Lindsay's novel as a particularly transgressive text.

3. **Unqueering Mateship: Weir's Adaptation**

By contrast, I would situate Peter Weir's adaptation as a regressive text that strips Michael and Albert's relationship of its queerness and integrates into the narrative only those aspects of their relationship that pertain to the rescue of the schoolgirls. As in the novel, they bond over their shared voyeuristic interests in watching the girls ascend the rock. Michael's rescue plan provides an opportunity to demonstrate their genuine regard for one another in a way that dispenses with the class conventions that would normally govern their interactions. But in the absence of scenes from the novel that shed light on the potency of their bond, it comes across as just another unremarkable instance of traditional, platonic mateship.

Weir introduces several significant changes that operate to un queer Lindsay's treatment of mateship. The erotically charged scenes where Michael sees Albert lying naked on his bed, where Albert keeps vigil at his sick mate's bedside and where they talk about domestic life are omitted entirely. In their place, the filmmaker invents dream sequences that establish Michael's obsession with Miranda. He even revises the sickbed sequence to suggest Michael's desire for Irma by having him visit her room before going for a walk by the pond, where the sight of an elegant swan triggers a reverie in which Miranda appears. The film glosses over his rather callous rejection of Irma just as it denies viewers the closure that comes with the novel's revelation that the two men go to Queensland together. In fact, the film just leaves men hanging (pun intended) in narrative limbo after the rescue as the emphasis shifts back to events at Appleyard College. Weir's adaptation is a tightly constructed psychological thriller that is as compelling as it is baffling. But he accomplishes this by eliminating scenes that portray the relationship between Michael and Albert as an enduring, queer bond.

4. ***Picnic* and the Politics of Sexuality**

Both the film and the novel circulated during a cultural moment in which the legal and social status of homosexuality was undergoing a transformation. Groups such as CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution) and Gay Activists Alliance raised the public profile of gays and

lesbians. Following the 1957 report by the Wolfenden Committee, which advised that consensual homosexual acts conducted in private should no longer be prosecuted, South Australia initiated a trend toward decriminalisation in 1972 with the Australian Capital Territory following suit in 1976.³² Nonetheless, Joseph Chetcuti describes the 1960s and 1970s as a period in which

homosexuals were barely tolerated. Denied a public identity and prohibited from soliciting for sex or flaunting their sexuality, homosexuals were relegated to the private sphere....[P]roblems have persisted as we came to recognise the depth of hostility and society's entrenched bigotry against us.³³

This bigotry was manifested in the backlash against any sort of public signifiers of homosexuality. Same-sex solicitation in public continued to be prosecuted.³⁴ Men and women whose appearance and mannerisms failed to conform to gender norms were subject to discrimination in the workplace. Gay teachers faced dismissal or reassignment on the grounds that those who advocate or participate in homosexual activities should not have contact with schoolchildren.³⁵ Public morality regulated the bedroom through assistance schemes and employment benefits that discriminated in favour of those who were or had been married.³⁶ Although legal reforms gradually extended legal protection to gays and lesbians, Chetcuti concludes that, "this accommodation by the law may have further entrenched those institutions, such as the family, which had been the source of oppression for homosexuals."³⁷

What is significant here is that at the same time that *Picnic* returns to an era in which close, same-sex relationships (that may or may not have had a physical component to them) were accepted as a normal part of human relations, police, religious groups and other representatives of the Establishment worked in tandem to persecute gays and lesbians whose sexual preferences and public activism posed a threat to the dominant hetero-normative paradigm. But where Joan Lindsay's novel embraces the queer, fluid relationship between the sexual and the social, Peter Weir's film disrupts the social/sexual continuum by rejecting any hint of queerness in the mateship of Michael and Albert. The tragic irony at the heart of this study in adaptation is that Weir undermines the transgressiveness of Lindsay's text at the very moment when grass roots movements and legislative reforms were making progress in the fight against the tyranny of hetero-normativity. Of course, it would be presumptuous (and probably erroneous) to conclude that the novel was intended as a critique of homophobia, or that Weir's adaptation *intentionally* unqueered discourses of mateship. But what we can say is that

these divergent interpretations parallel the ambivalence that characterised Australian attitudes toward homosexuality during the 1960s and 1970s.

Notes

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¹ J Lindsay, *Picnic At Hanging Rock*, Vintage Books, London, 1998 and *Picnic At Hanging Rock* and P Weir (dir.), DVD, Criterion Collection, New York, 1998.

² See A Harris, rev. C M H Clark, *Settlers and Convicts: Or Recollections of Sixteen Years' Labour in the Australian Backwoods*, rev. ed., Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992 and R Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Vintage Books, New York, 1988. Harris makes no reference to sexuality but Hughes concedes the possibility of situational homosexuality.

³ See for instance G Wotherspoon, 'Moonlight and...Romance? The Death-Cell Letters of Captain Moonlight and Some of their Implications'. *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 78, 1992, pp. 76-91; C Moore, 'The Frontier Makes Strange Bed Fellows: Masculinity, Mateship and Homosexuality in Colonial Queensland', in *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III*, G Wotherspoon (ed.), University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 1996, pp. 17-44; D Altman, 'The Myth of Mateship'. *Meanjin*, vol. 46, no. 2, June 1987, pp. 163-72; J Rickard, 'Sentimental Blokes'. *Meanjin*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2007, pp. 38-46; Lisa Featherstone, 'Sex and *The Australian Legend*: Masculinity and the White Man's Body'. *Journal of Australian Colonial Identity*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2008, pp. 73-92.

⁴ A Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 3.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ EK Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985, p. 15.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 3. She also notes that the existence of the continuum between homosexual and homosocial relations among women magnifies the absence of one for men.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

¹² Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁵ See M Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia—1788 to 1975*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 1976, p. 77.

¹⁶ Lindsay, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-9.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁹ I Henderson, 'The Ethics of Fellowship in Two Antipodean War Films: *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003)'. *Australian Humanities Review*, January 2005, viewed on 20 September 2008, <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Jan-2005/henderson.html>>.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 155.

³² Similar legislation would subsequently come to Victoria in 1980, the Northern Territory in 1983, New South Wales in 1984, Australia in 1989, Queensland in 1990 and Tasmania in 1997.

³³ J Chetcuti, 'The Moving Boundaries: Sources of Human Rights for Homosexuals: Legislatures, Domestic Courts and International Law', in *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III*, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-70.

³⁴ J Chetcuti, 'Continuing Legal Discrimination in Australia Against Homosexual Men: From the Personal to the Political, From the Private to the Public', in *Gay Perspectives II: More Essays in Australian Gay Culture*, R Aldrich (ed.), University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 1993, pp. 329-30.

³⁵ Chetcuti, *op. cit.* p. 340 and M Cowan and T Reeves, 'The "Gay Rights Movement" and the Decriminalisation Debate in South Australia, 1973-1975', in *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives IV: Studies in Australian Culture*, R Aldrich and G Wotherspoon (eds), University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 1998, p. 165.

³⁶ Chetcuti, *op. cit.* p. 337-9.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 344-5.

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Mass Violence, Polygyny, and the Logic of Sacrifice

Charles W. Nuckolls

Abstract:

In 1857, immigrants en route from Arkansas to California were attacked at place called "Mountain Meadows" in southern Utah. Approximately 120 men, women, and children died. At first the perpetrators were said to be mostly Paiute Indians, but the evidence now available strongly implicates white Mormon militiamen from nearby towns. Why would such men, who were, by all accounts, decent and law-abiding, commit one of the worst massacres in the history of the American West? Some suggest the militiamen thought the immigrants were guilty of various misdeeds, from theft and poisoning to the murder of Mormonism's prophet, Joseph Smith, in 1844. This chapter proposes that the victims of the massacre were chosen, not because they were considered guilty, but because they were known to be innocent. Only the sacrifice of innocent victims, as Rene Girard suggests, can adequately repair a social system at risk from internal violence. Mormon culture was in the midst of such a crisis, and the massacre, especially of women and children, served to restore integration and solidarity to the group.

Key Words: Violence, sacrifice, Rene Girard, Mormonism, Mountain Meadows

In September 1857, a wagon train of 140 individuals – known as the Fancher Party after one of its leaders, Alexander Fancher -- travelled from Arkansas through Utah on its way to California. At a place called Mountain Meadows, in southern Utah, the wagons were attacked by rifle shots from the surrounding hills. The Fancher Party defended itself by circling the wagons, wheels chained together, and digging shallow trenches to serve as rifle pits. Seven immigrants were killed during the first few minutes and were buried within the encirclement. Sixteen more were wounded. The attack continued for five days, during which time the besieged immigrants ran low on food and water. It appears that most, if not all, the attackers were white Mormons, and that some wore face paint to make it appear they were Native Americans.

On Friday, September 11th, two Mormon militiamen approached the Fancher party with a white flag and were soon followed by Indian agent and militia officer John D. Lee. Lee told the battle-weary emigrants that he had negotiated a truce with the Paiutes, and that he and his fellow militiamen would escort the survivors to safety under Mormon protection. The emigrants, however, would have to agree to give up their arms. Otherwise,

Lee explained, the Indians would attack again. The emigrants accepted this, and were led out of their fortifications. At an arranged signal, the Mormon militia men turned and executed the men of the Fancher Party, and then, in company with an unknown (but probably small) number of Paiute allies, attacked and killed the women and children. Eighteen of the children – too young, it was thought, to remember anything – were spared, and taken in by Mormon families in a nearby town. Seventeen were later reclaimed by the U.S. Army and returned to relatives, while one (a girl) was not returned and lived out her life among the Mormons.

The Mountain Meadows Massacre is said to be the worst mass murder of white people in the history of the American West. The fact that it was done at the direction of white Mormons, and largely by them, has made it notorious, but also inexplicable. Why would Mormon pioneers who were, by all accounts, decent and law-abiding citizens, participate in a mass slaughter, killing 120 innocent people, many of them women and children? Over the years, there have been many attempts to explain the events of September 1857. One used to hold that the perpetrators were mostly Paiute Indians, not white Mormons, and this was the view officially enshrined in Utah textbooks. Another view was, and still is, that the emigrants somehow brought the calamity on themselves, by “provoking” members of the Mormon community as they traversed the state. Mormons had settled in Utah in 1847, just after the United States defeated Mexico, and in the next ten years had enjoyed almost complete isolation in which to develop a theocratic territory under the leadership of their prophet, Brigham Young. By 1857, however, President James Buchanan was increasingly alarmed by reports that Brigham Young planned to create his own independent nation, and fearing session, he dispatched an army under the command of General Sidney Albert Johnston to put down the Mormon insurrection. Mormons in Utah interpreted the army’s advance on Utah as another in the long series of government-sponsored efforts to eradicate them because of their peculiar beliefs and kinship practices. The Arkansas wagon train entered Utah just ahead of Johnston’s army, and unknowingly triggered a defensive response on the part of people preparing for a war of self-preservation.¹

Still another explanation, still current, is that Fancher Party consisted partly of people from Missouri, the state whose governor had issued an “extermination” order against the Mormons only twenty years before when a Mormon colony had been established near the city of Independence. Some said the emigrants had spoken favourably of the extermination order. It was even alleged that some members of the wagon train had been among those who had murdered Mormonism’s founder and first prophet, Joseph Smith, in 1844. The massacre, then, could be understood vengeance for past wrongs against all Mormons or their leaders in the past.

Most of these “explanations” have been in circulation for the century and half since the massacre took place. What is the current state of the history on this question? In the last few years, two theories have been put forth. Will Bagley asserts that Brigham Young had ordered the attack on the wagon train in order to convey to Washington that Mormons would defend their territory against incursion from the East.² The authors of the 2008 history, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, question the validity of this theory, and relate the event to the response of local leaders in southern Utah to the perception that they were under attack. Walker, Turley, and Leonard find no evidence for a conspiracy that reached to the top of the Mormon ecclesiastical hierarchy.³ (The president of the church, Brigham Young, is not found to be complicit in planning or organizing the attack, but in the cover-up that followed.) On one point, however, both accounts agree: the role of Paiute Indians in the massacre has been exaggerated, and white men, not Indians, were the main organizers and perpetrators of the killings.

Among the perpetrators who in later years admitted to the killings no one argued that the women and children were murdered because they were guilty of some misdoing. The only “reasonable” argument put forward was that they posed a threat to the killers should the details of the massacre ever come to light. There is reason for accepting the logic of this account; after all, children under the age of 8 were not killed, presumably because they were too young to be considered credible witnesses. But several of the women and older children were not simply killed, as their husbands and fathers were, with a single shot to the back of the head. They were bludgeoned and hacked to death with a savagery that might require a different explanation.

Details of this kind were not available until recently. In 1999, the monument at the Mountain Meadows site was being renovated by the site’s current owner, the Mormon Church. A backhoe accidentally unearthed a chamber filled with bones, and these were later examined forensically by the anthropologist Shannon Novak at the University of Utah. Until then, there simply was no forensic analysis of the massacre, because none of the remains had ever been exhumed. Novak had about a month to perform her analysis before the governor of the state required that the bones be re-interred. The month was long enough, however, to reveal that the men had in fact been killed execution style, while the women and children (a small sample, to be sure) appear to be beaten to death. According to Novak:

Bludgeoning was evident in six of the reconstructed heads; one old adult female, two young adult males, and three children. The children’s head had extensive crushing, indicating blows that were delivered with great force.⁴

Although the militiamen denied killing children, two of the killers, William Stewart and George Adair, allegedly bragged about such murders. Stewart claimed he held “the d----ed Gentile babies by the heels and cracked their skulls over the wagon tire,” while Adair attempted to “imitate the pitiful, crushing sounds.”⁵

According to Girard, wherever group differences grow weak or threaten to disappear, violence erupts. The attenuation of differences can bring to mind the dissolution of regulations pertaining to the individual’s proper place in society. The eclipse of differences is apparent in the assimilation of Mormon’s within ten years of their settlement in Utah. They were becoming more and more like the economically stratified society they had left behind. Prosperity itself had something to do with it, and there was – and still is – a powerful current in Mormon thought that emphasizes the unique dangers of affluence. Sensible to the risk of assimilation, Mormon leaders inaugurated the “Reformation,” a period of strident calls to renew the faith and exhibit fresh commitment to the ideals of Mormonism.⁶

Girard does not consider the importance of kinship practices in constructing group differences. Yet the issue looms especially large in the history of early Mormonism. In 1852, Church leaders explicitly endorsed the practice of polygyny – before then, and for at least ten years, it had been practiced semi-secretly -- and faithful men were encouraged to take multiple wives. Many did. But the rate of acceptance was not particularly high, and by 1856, Church leaders were alarmed at the number of men and women who disavowed the practice of plural marriage. The danger here was in losing one of the most, if not the most distinctive social practice Mormonism maintained. If Mormons adopted Victorian monogamy as their standard, then the reason for their persecution in Missouri and Illinois – indeed, a principle reason for their exodus to the West in 1847 – would diminish in the same proportion. This constituted what Girard called a “sacrificial crisis” that threatened to un-do a primary ingredient in maintaining Mormon social solidarity. Distinction, therefore, needed to be maintained. And so it is not surprising that the 1856 Reformation developed with explicit calls from on high to embrace the doctrine of plural marriage.

The erasure of distinctions, Girard says, carries considerable risk. It can result in the eruption of violence within a community. There are reasons to think this process had begun. In 1856 and 1857, there were a number of killings in Utah, mostly of men suspected of disaffection from the community. Some were apparently preparing to leave for California. Although few in number, the murders appear to have sent shockwaves through the Mormon community.⁷ The message was clear: disloyalty to the group could be met with violence. There were other transgressions, too, that met with violent reaction. More than one report exists of men being castrated

as a form of punishment. The Mormon Reformation had begun to consume its own.

The sudden appearance of outsiders, like the Fancher wagon train, might have been seized upon as an opportunity to restore solidarity to the group by re-asserting distinctiveness vis-à-vis the others. It is necessary, of course, to construct “the other” as utterly and irredeemably different. And this is what happened: some of the Mormon perpetrators later claimed that the men they killed were mostly murderers themselves, having participated in the depredations against the Mormons when they were in Missouri. The women, they said, were mostly diseased prostitutes and deserved annihilation. What of the children? Some claimed that the children of wanton women, inflected with syphilis, were themselves the carriers of disease, and therefore (by implication) threats to the small and isolated Utah settlers.⁸

There is surely no better way to indicate the importance of maintaining differences than to murder the people defined as completely different from oneself. Mass murder is a perfect ritual of difference making. It separates the in-group from the out-group in the most dramatic way possible, by making the former into the living and the latter into the dead. The in-group knows who it is now, because, simply put, they are able to walk away. But the question still remains: what kind of victims are the best victims for returning a sacrificial order to balance?

Victims who deserve death function poorly to achieve this end, since it is always possible to explain their demise in relation to their own unsavoury natures. Innocent victims perform much better. Simply killing all the men of the wagon train, or waiting for the group as whole to die of thirst and starvation, would not have accomplished this. As Girard argues, innocent victims must have their innocence confirmed in an act of killing so obviously undeserved that it leaves no explanation other than that it is a sacrifice on behalf of a group. A sacrifice of this kind – so pure and perfect – insures that its benefits will be great enough to restore solidarity to the group. It is true, however, that the most innocent members of the wagon train – children under the age of eight – were spared, and this would argue against the sacrificial theory of violence. After all, if the best victims are the most innocent, then surely babies should have served best in this role. No babies, however, were killed.

The fact that young children were not killed argues against the view that the killings of women and other children were carried out by Paiutes. Indian raiders typically killed everyone, especially the young, since children grow up and seek vengeance for their relatives. This suggests that the killings of older children were organized by the Mormon militiamen, not the Indians. Mormons believe that individuals only reach the age of accountability at eight. It would therefore be consistent with their beliefs that younger children should not be killed. The second point is related. “Accountability” means

something more than just blameless. It could also mean “worthy” or “prepared” or “of age.” The death of someone unaccountable in this sense might mean that the sacrifice literally does not “count.” In other words, one wants a victim who is innocent (thus young) but not too young to count as an appropriate sacrifice. To be sure, this is a stretch. But the ethnographic record supports the observation that in general the youngest children are not preferred – no more so, in fact, than elderly men in the 80’s. There is something approaching cross-cultural agreement on the point that older children and adolescents prior to marriage make the best sacrifices to the gods, the ancestors, or whatever.

There is a second possibility, this one connected with kinship. The Mormon Reformation of 1856 featured repeated calls from the pulpit to embrace the principle of plural marriage. One thing we know from the cross-cultural record is that there is a correlation between polygyny and violence. The reasons are fairly easy to explain. It has been argued that humans are naturally polygynous, and throughout evolutionary history some men have always had multiple mates.⁹ The mathematical consequence of polygyny is most obvious in societies that sanction and practice (simultaneous) polygynous marriage, such as many African tribes and Muslim societies in the Middle East. If every married man has four wives, for example, it means that, given a 50-50 sex ratio, three-quarters of men are left mateless.

Now if men only practice serial polygyny and do not acquire multiple mates simultaneously, then it means that there are an equal number of available women as available men. However, given men’s preference for younger women and women’s preference for older men, most of the now available women are older women who have been married and divorced and have had some children, while most of the available men are young men yet to have their reproductive opportunities (if they are lucky).¹⁰ They do not make good matches for each other. In polygynous societies (either simultaneous or serial), most women get their reproductive opportunities and have children (if followed by a divorce in the case of serial polygyny), while many men are left out of their reproductive opportunities altogether for life and spend their lives mateless. The more polygynous the society, the more young men face the distinct possibility of ending their lives as complete reproductive losers.

This bleak prospect, created by polygyny, makes men competitive and aggressive, because they must compete fiercely with each other not to be left out of the reproductive game altogether and to win mates. This is why, some anthropologists argue, men in every human society are more violent and aggressive than women (just as males of most other species are more violent and aggressive than females).¹¹ Further, the more polygynous the society, the more aggressive and violent the men become.¹² What distinguishes Islam, for example, from other major world religions

(Christianity and Judaism) is that it sanctions polygyny, and polygyny increases competitive pressure on men, especially young men of low status, who are most likely to be left without reproductive opportunities when older men of higher status marry polygynously. Polygyny therefore increases the likelihood that young men resort to violent means to gain access to mates because they have little to lose and much to gain by doing so, compared to men who already have wives.¹³

It could be argued that direct competition with older males for access to women would have been ruled out by the political-ecclesiastical structure of Mormon society in Utah. Older men occupied positions of leadership and authority, and obedience to them was considered essential for salvation. This probably tended to temper the open display of inter-generational aggressiveness. In the absence of direct competition, therefore, what did younger men do? Here, again, the mechanism suggested by Girard come in handy. The hypothesis is that the victims of the massacre were surrogates which served “to conceal” the true source of the killers’ violent impulses. The Reformation of 1856 unleashed powerful forces, intensifying the pressure to conform and at the same time making conformity increasingly costly, especially to young men.

Violence that becomes reciprocal, killing building on killing can be described as a vicious circle. As Girard point out, “once a community enters the circle, it is unable to extricate itself . . . As long as a working capital of accumulated hatred and suspicion exists at the center of the community, it will continue to increase no matter what men do.”¹⁴ To escape from the circle it is necessary to remove from the scene all those forms of violence that tend to become self-propagating and to spawn new, imitative forms. The selection of a surrogate victim is one way to solve the problem. The victims at Mountain Meadows served a key purpose, by receiving the violence that Mormon society itself had generated in the course of its Reformation.

Notes

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⁴ Novak, S., *House of Mourning*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 2006, p.168.

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⁷ Stenhouse, T. *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, Kessinger Publications, 2006.

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¹² M. Daly, and M. Wilson, 'Evolutionary social psychology and family homicide,' *Science* 242, 1988, pp. 519-524.

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The Seeds of Evil: Dorian Gray's First Two Decisions

Vera B. Profit

Abstract

In *The Heart of Man*, Erich Fromm delineates the key elements of the decision-making process. Theoretical and personalized knowledge of good and evil, acknowledgement of one's characteristic distortions of reality, as well as the consequences of the intended act, are all essential components. When the choice is made, the actual alternatives among which the individual may choose must also be considered. In brief, what constitutes the balance of forces acting upon and within the individual at the moment of decision?

Particularly when something goes awry, Erich Fromm suggests that we usually look "at the *last* decision in a chain of events, and not at the first or second ones." Perhaps we should follow his suggestion and ask: where did this trajectory begin?

Between the ages of twenty and thirty-eight years old, Wilde's Dorian Gray makes several major decisions and innumerable secondary ones. His trajectory towards evil can be traced with considerable accuracy, as he comes to epitomize someone who repeatedly chooses the wrong. But rather than look at only his final devastating decisions, this presentation will in fact investigate his first and second choices: his wish to remain young forever and have his portrait bear the burden of his sins as well as his dismissal of Sibyl Vane. Both of these moments carry within them the unmistakable seeds of his eventual fall from grace.

Some are: his rejection of reality/ his desire to remain as he is, an unsubmitted will, overweening self-absorption, inordinate attachment to his appearance, focus on receiving, rather than giving, scapegoating, and depersonalization of others.

After this problematical beginning, Dorian was still free to choose otherwise. However, the verifiable tendencies revealed at this juncture evolve into a habit and become harder to break. In the final analysis, he does not and ultimately cannot extricate himself from the pattern initiated long ago.

Key Words: Decision making, early signs of evil behavior, an unsubmitted will, victimisation, depersonalization of others.

In his *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Erich Fromm delineates those elements, which play a fundamental role in the decision-making process. He distinguishes between abstract or general

knowledge and the internalized awareness of good and evil. The latter “means that the person makes that which he learns his own, by experiencing it, experimenting with himself, observing others and, eventually, gaining a conviction [. . .].”¹ Though pivotal, formulating a conviction does not suffice in order to make cogent decisions. One must be aware of one’s tendencies, one’s characteristic thought processes, in other words, of our usual rationalizations, “which hide the unconscious forces.”² But even recognition of the subconscious motives proves inadequate. The attempt must be made to envision the probable consequences of our actions.³

Theoretical and personalized knowledge of good and evil, acknowledgement of one’s characteristic distortions of reality as well as the consequences of the intended act are all essential components in decision-making. Other factors remain to be included in the equation: just when the choice is made and the actual alternatives among which the individual may choose. In other words, what constitutes the balance of forces acting upon and within the individual at the moment of decision?

Particularly when something goes awry, Erich Fromm suggests that we usually look “at the *last* decision in a chain of events, and not at the first or second ones.”⁴ Perhaps we should follow his suggestion and ask: where did this trajectory begin? Were there any early signs of this disastrous outcome? At an earlier stage, could anything have been done differently to avert it?

In the almost two decades, between the ages of twenty and thirty-eight, Oscar Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* makes several major decisions and innumerable secondary ones. His trajectory towards evil can be traced with considerable accuracy, as he comes to epitomize someone who knowingly chooses the wrong over and over again. But rather than look at only his final devastating decisions, this paper will in fact investigate his first and second choices: his wish to remain young forever and have his portrait bear the burden of his sins as well as his dismissal of Sibyl Vane. Both these moments carry within them the unmistakable seeds of his eventual and irreversible fall from grace.

Dorian’s relentless progression begins, as it generally does, innocuously enough. At the height of the summer, the celebrated British artist, Basil Hallward, completes his full-length portrait of a young nobleman. Dorian Gray was an individual “of extraordinary personal beauty.”⁵ And Hallward’s rendering does indeed capture perfectly the lad’s “finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth’s passionate purity.”⁶ How could anything possibly go wrong on such a glorious summer day when the splendour of nature seems to echo the splendour of the human form?

At last Hallward signs the canvas and Dorian leaves the platform

upon which he has been posing. Completely enraptured at seeing his likeness - "as if he had recognized himself for the first time,"⁷ Dorian says nothing for the longest while. His eventual outburst, however, reveals that Lord Henry Wotton's praise of youth and his utter repudiation of the aging process found a receptive ear.

How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day in June.... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that - for that - I would give everything!⁸

Emphasizing his intent, Dorian concludes: "Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that."⁹ Lest this wish be attributed merely to the dabbling of an idle mind, he reinforces his desire. Mighty is the young man's displeasure, as he lashes out at the picture's creator:

I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!¹⁰

This fervent wish in all its earnest impetuosity constitutes Dorian Gray's first major decision. How can he be faulted for desiring eternal youth? Who among us would not wish to remain young forever? Why should such a choice be considered singularly ill advised? For any number of reasons.

One. Dorian completely forgets that to be alive is to change, to grow, to alter and be altered. By its very definition, life is never static. It cannot be so and still be life. To be forever still is to be alive no longer, is to be numbered amongst the dead. Movement, spontaneity, unpredictability, in the physical, the spiritual, in every realm, these are the stuff of life.

In rejecting this most fundamental of principles, Dorian sets his pronounced willfulness in opposition to reality. All healthy, all sane adults, "submit themselves one way or another to something higher than themselves [. . .]."¹¹ Or as Scott Peck rephrases it even more transparently: "They believe in what is true rather than what they would like to be true."¹² In the confrontation between reality and Dorian's will, it is reality which must be set aside - even if forcibly. The wise remember that to ignore reality is to do so at their peril.

Elaborating upon the relationship between life, change, and their

significance for normal individuals, Erich Fromm postulates: “The person who fully loves life is attracted by the process of life and growth in all spheres.”¹³ In order to emphasize that transitions are part and parcel of this inexorable process, Fromm continues:

He prefers to construct rather than retain. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new to the security of finding confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty. His approach to life is functional rather than mechanical [. . .]. He wants to mould and to influence by love, reason, and by his example; not by force, by cutting things apart, by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things. He enjoys life and all its manifestations [. . .].”¹⁴

Particularly in light of these last two statements, how revealing it is that a thing - a portrait - occasions Dorian’s resolution and that his wish begins with the words: “How sad it is!”¹⁵ To state the obvious, it should also be noted, that he forms an attachment not only to an inanimate object, to a picture, but to a picture of himself, a mirror image, as it were.

Leaning over that untouched pool in the hopes of slacking his thirst, the comely and scornful lad sees his reflection and falls in love with himself.

“Enchanted by the charms which were his own.
Himself the worshipped and the worshipper,
He sought himself and was pursued, wooed, fired
By his own heat of love. Again, again
He tried to kiss the image in the well [. . .].”¹⁶

Tiresias had foretold this turn of events in his enigmatic prophecy and Nemesis had hastened its fulfilment in hearing a rejected suitor’s curse.¹⁷

Two. Even if one argues that Dorian admits the inevitability of life’s inherent changes, he is nevertheless thoroughly reluctant to assume their manifestations. He would prefer that those signs of developing maturity, of choices made, of eventual aging, be borne by the picture, not by himself; let something out there bear those burdens, not be at one with him. Though he does acknowledge that ethical choices should be made, he doesn’t wish the inevitable signs of life’s progression to show, to leave their traces. Or as he theorizes: “The life that was to make his soul would mar his body.”¹⁸ In other words, Dorian fails to assume the proper degree of ownership, of responsibility, and in doing so asks something else to assume these perceived burdens that perceived negativity. Given these suppositions, he must of necessity create a scapegoat. Erich Neumann summarizes the issues

succinctly: “Der Schatten, der mit den Werten im Widerspruch steht, kann nicht als negativer Teil der eigenen Struktur akzeptiert werden und wird projiziert, das heißt nach außen verlegt und als ein Außen erfahren.”¹⁹

Dorian locates a scapegoat ever so quickly. In an effort to project his alleged burdens elsewhere, the young man assails as well as blames both painter and painting. Having internalized Henry Wotton’s values, Dorian questions Basil Hallward’s friendship and accuses him of disloyalty: “How long will you like me? I know, now, that when one loses one’s good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything.”²⁰ And logically enough he blames his current frame of mind upon the portrait itself. “Your picture has taught me that.”²¹ Although even Dorian concedes that it was their mutual friend, Henry Wotton, who engendered those thoughts. “Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.”²² In his misguided desperation, Dorian extends the range of those incurring his disfavour and his jealousy and includes not only Basil Hallward, but everything retaining its comeliness forever.

Three. The crux of the wish centres only on the person of Dorian Gray. In the course of the nine lines encapsulating the wish, quoted earlier, the first person pronoun occurs no fewer than nine times and its variants, i.e., *my* and *me*, an additional three. If narcissism can be defined as “excessive self-absorption” and the subsequent lack of attachment to the world outside the self,²³ then indeed Dorian exhibits one of the cardinal symptoms of the burgeoning narcissist. Wilde had already foreshadowed that exclusive focus upon the self in placing Gray’s portrait in “the centre of the room.”²⁴ Even before the young aesthete entered Hallward’s studio that fateful day, Henry Wotton comments upon Dorian’s striking good looks in dubbing him “a Narcissus.”²⁵ Wotton could not have selected a more appropriate name. As is well known, Narcissus rejected the advances of all those attracted to him, even the faithful Echo, and consequently Nemesis condemns him to love only himself; she overhears the plea of one scorned. “O may he love himself alone,” he cried “And yet fail in that great love.”²⁶

Four. At the risk of once again stating the obvious, it should be remembered that Dorian Gray desires not only to hold onto something, but above all else to retain his appearance, to exercise whatever the extent of the power at his disposal in doing so. The aesthetic consideration moves to the forefront of his motivations. Much, much later in the novel, he will acknowledge to Henry Wotton the crucial link forged at this early moment between aestheticism and action: “I can’t bear the idea of my soul being hideous.”²⁷ An observation of Scott Peck’s, regarding the nature of evil people should be recalled: “The words ‘image,’ ‘appearance,’ and ‘outwardly’ are crucial to understanding the morality of the evil. While they seem to lack any motivation to *be* good, they intensely desire to appear

good.”²⁸ I should hasten to add that Dorian is not evil at this point, but in throwing his weight so to speak on the side of appearance, he establishes the groundwork for future ill-considered choices.

Five. In formulating his wish Dorian emphasizes not what he gives, but what he hopes to receive. He doesn't wish to do anything, to exercise his talents in the creation of something useful or beautiful or in any way life enhancing.²⁹ In partial ignorance and in total denial of the realities of Dorian's misspent life, Lord Henry Wotton praises the thirty-eight year old's indolence, his impotence, so aptly in the novel's last pages.

“I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets.”³⁰

Dorian Gray becomes enchanted with his portrait and in doing so exhibits at least five characteristics of an inappropriate choice: rejection of reality/ his desire to remain as he is, the total reluctance to assume the appropriate outward signs of the choices made (both can be understood as evidence of an unsubmitted will), overweening self-absorption, inordinate attachment to his appearance, focus on receiving, rather than giving. Within these manifestations, examples of scapegoating and victimization could invariably also be noted.

A month after the first,³¹ Dorian Gray makes his second major decision. He terminates his relationship with Sibyl Vane. She is but seventeen³² and he not quite twenty-one,³³ when after a courtship of mere weeks,³⁴ they become engaged.³⁵ Infatuated with her and yet convinced that he loves the actress; Dorian invites both Henry and Basil to attend one of her performances. Passionate about him and assuming their attraction to be reciprocal, Sibyl casts off her role of Shakespeare's Juliet and performs badly. Why, she reasons, should she act as though she were in love, when in fact she is in love?³⁶

Her fiancé's reaction to the theatrical debacle is as instantaneous as it is ruthless. At the outset of their final encounter, Sibyl not only radiates unadulterated joy, but also attempts to explain the motivations for her poor performance at some length; nevertheless Dorian counters her repeated overtures with one devastating volley after another. Amongst a host of insults, he includes: “You have killed my love [. . .].”³⁷ In total disregard of Sybil's momentary inability to comprehend his altered behaviour, Dorian starts to leave and makes his way to the greenroom door, while continuing his tirade.

“Yes,” he cried, “you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don’t even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away.”³⁸

Lest Sibyl misconstrue his change of heart even a fraction of a second longer, he persists.

You are shallow and stupid. My God! How mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of you. I will never mention your name. You don’t know what you were to me, once [. . .]. Oh, I can’t bear to think of it! I wish I had never laid eyes upon you! You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art, you are nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face.³⁹

Finally she understands, begins pleading with him, tries to negotiate and, while sobbing, reaches for him. “She wept silently, and made no answer, but crept nearer.”⁴⁰ At last, he acknowledges her unmistakable anguish and yet he will not be moved. “He turns on his heel and leaves the room. In a few moments he was out of the theatre.”⁴¹

An analysis of his verbal exchange with Sibyl may help us interpret the inappropriateness of Dorian’s actions. As is characteristic of those who scapegoat, he places the entire blame for his change of heart onto Sibyl. “You have killed my love.”⁴² “You have spoiled the romance of my life.”⁴³ Although love relationships thrive on both giving and receiving, even if they don’t always succeed, those who love others strive to place their beloved’s need either before or alongside their own. Harry Stack Sullivan reflects upon this particular aspect of a love relationship: “When the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as is one’s own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists.”⁴⁴ By contrast, Dorian readily admits that he was attracted to Sibyl, because of all she was able to do for him. “I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets [. . .].”⁴⁵ And when he mentions something he might have done for her, his avowal quickly

deteriorates into a benefit accruing to him: "I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshiped you, and you would have borne my name."⁴⁶ As in Dorian's earlier decision, both scapegoating and self-absorption become apparent, as does the fact that he believes his ego, his self-image, have been compromised. To exacerbate the situation, his closest friends witnessed that denigration, that failure. He fears that in their eyes his appearance has been diminished. Perhaps, he reasons, both Henry and Basil now question his judgment. His attacks upon Sibyl stand in direct proportion to his bruised ego. "Failure wounds our pride, and it is the wounded animal who is vicious."⁴⁷

Even if the details of Dorian's repudiation of Sibyl are eventually lost to the vagaries of memory, some aspects more than likely remain imprinted on the mind forever: its vehemence, its cruelty. Though at her age Sibyl may understandably mistake infatuation for love, in either case Dorian's incessant verbal blows strike a most vulnerable target. His rejection of her is so complete that recovery would at least in the immediate future prove exceedingly difficult. But before she has the opportunity to begin the work of restoring her equilibrium, she commits suicide.⁴⁸ Though the reader cannot witness her state of mind just before she takes her life and can therefore not ascertain clearly how much responsibility she bears for the decision, that Dorian contributed to her untimely demise requires no further emphasis. From this point forward, Sibyl Vane heads the lengthy list of all those, whom Dorian will affect adversely.

Victimization presumes that the victimizer separates him/herself psychologically from the victim and no longer identifies with the other. As Dorian ceases to consider himself attached to Sibyl, he distances himself emotionally and feels he can attack, can debase her at will. He no longer regards her as a human being like himself and in depersonalizing her signals simultaneously his detachment and his superiority. Scott Peck phrases this observation more bluntly. "One manifestation of our narcissism is that we are far more likely to kill that which is different from us than that which resembles us."⁴⁹ As already stated, Sibyl weeps uncontrollably as Dorian stands above her and she tentatively inches towards him. "She crouched on the floor like a wounded thing, and Dorian Gray, with his beautiful eyes, looked down at her, and his chiselled lips curled in exquisite disdain."⁵⁰ Peck indicates more than once in his landmark treatise - *People of the Lie* - that at times it is difficult to gauge how much or if indeed the evil suffer. One observation cannot be denied, however. "They cause suffering."⁵¹

Obviously engagements between seventeen and twenty year olds should not in every instance lead to marriage. Dorian has every right to break off the formal arrangement, if he so chose. It is the manner in which he severs the relationship, the verbal humiliation of his fiancée in the face of her obvious anguish, which is inexcusable.

Wilde shares that viewpoint, for in the fulfilment of Dorian's wish, the portrait begins to bear the burdens of his sin. There is no mistake.

As he was turning the handle of the door, his eyes fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward had painted of him. He started back as if in surprise [. . .]. Finally he came back, went over to the picture and examined it. In the dim arrested light that struggled through the cream-colored silk blinds, the face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth.⁵²

To the five negative characteristics of Dorian's first decision can now be added irrefutable evidence of scapegoating, victimization and the depersonalization of others.

After this problematic beginning, Dorian could have changed course; he was still free to choose otherwise. But as a matter of fact, he does not. The verifiable tendencies revealed at this juncture evolve into a habit and become, if not impossible, harder and harder to break. In the final analysis, he does not and ultimately cannot extricate himself from the pattern initiated so long ago.

Notes

¹ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, New York: Harper, 1987, 133.

² *Ibid.*, 133.

³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Isobel Murray, ed., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹ [Morgan] Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, New York: Simon, 1983, 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³ Fromm, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ Wilde, 25.

- ¹⁶ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Horace Gregory, trs., New York: Viking, 1958, 98.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹⁸ Wilde, 25.
- ¹⁹ Erich Neumann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Neue Ethik*, Zürich: Rascher, 1949, 36.
- ²⁰ Wilde, 26.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²³ Peck, 77, 80; Fromm, 63-65.
- ²⁴ Wilde, 1.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ²⁶ Ovid, 97.
- ²⁷ Wilde, 96.
- ²⁸ Peck, 75.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.
- ³⁰ Wilde, 217.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 66, 69.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 10, 33.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 86-87.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁴⁴ Harry Stack Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry: The First William Alanson White Memorial Lectures*, 1940: Washington, D.C.: The William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation, 1947, 20.
- ⁴⁵ Wilde, 86, 87.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁴⁷ Peck, 226.
- ⁴⁸ Wilde, 97.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 89,90.

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Preventing the Emergence of Evil in the 'New Eugenics'

Jinnie M. Garrett

Abstract

The eugenics movement of the early 20th century resulted in an ultimate evil: the Holocaust. Recent developments in molecular genetics have the potential to allow us to alter the human genome. The power of this technology to fundamentally alter 'human' identity has resulted in critics calling it the 'new eugenics'. Thus the question arises "Who bears responsibility for ensuring that human genetics in the early 21st century does not result in evil?" Analysis of the mechanisms of regulation of science reveals that monitoring developments in science is highly contentious. The specialized education of scientists usually excludes consideration of the history or philosophy of science, resulting in scientists poorly prepared to engage in ethical debates. Thus, in order to monitor science for potentially negative social implications, we need input from scholars who undertake a critical analysis of advances in science. Unfortunately, scientists have not accepted criticism or regulation from 'outside' science well. Critiques of science have led to strong responses from the science community ('Science Wars') where scientists vigorously defend their turf and perceive concern about outcomes as inhibiting scientific progress. I will discuss the role of scientists, science education and STS scholars in oversight of the new eugenics.

Key Words: Eugenics, genetic engineering, Human Genome Project, science education, Science & Technology Studies (STS), the Holocaust, elitism.

There may be many definitions of evil but genocide, the murder of innocents on a massive scale, is surely evil. In the Western world, the systematic slaughter of millions of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps has been recognized as a supreme example of manifest evil.¹

Many important questions emerge in the analysis of such evil events: "How could this have happened?" and "How can we prevent such a thing ever happening again?" One can postulate that particular individuals are evil and commit evil acts, but a massive collective action like genocide requires the involvement of more people than are generally assumed to be inherently evil. Thus, in order to get a large group action like genocide, there needs to be ways of making what to external observers will appear evil seem logical, or even necessary, to the group. A potent mechanism that has allowed people to cause such suffering operates on the classification of their

victims as 'other,' to deny the humanity of those to be eliminated. In some societies and historical moments, definition of the 'other' can be based on ethnic group or religious affiliation. However, in modern secular society, scientific evidence is a powerful tool in persuading people of fundamental differences between groups since scientific knowledge has gained authority as objective truth.

One would hope that a study designed to determine the scientific 'difference' between people(s) would be objective and evidence based, not subject to the social prejudices of the time, and that it thus would not provide justification for discriminatory practices. Unfortunately, there are examples to the contrary throughout history, and biology has a disturbing record of providing 'proof' that the social structures in place at a particular moment are 'natural' and thus justified. Scientists and physicians, in the past, exaggerated difference between the sexes, and between races in humans, to justify the dominant position of white men in society. Stephen J. Gould gives us an excellent example in his eloquent account of the work of eminent Parisian physician Paul Broca who 'proved' that women and people of African descent are inferior to men from Western Europe through the (incorrect) measurement of skulls and brains, and thus provided a 'scientific' basis for the prevailing sexism and racism.² Eugenicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries misused genetics by applying the simple principles of inheritance, discovered by Mendel in his studies on peas, to complex human traits (e.g. 'pauperism') that have, at best, dubious scientific basis.³ They were also students of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and believed that, once humans are classified as having heritable traits that are desirable or undesirable, human evolution could be controlled by selecting which humans reproduce. Meaning 'well-born,' eugenics has come to mean the self-directed evolution of humans.⁴

Early proponents of eugenics wished to cure the social problems (crime, prostitution, and so on) arising from the 'unfit' by reducing the number of undesirables, believing that 'unfitness' was an inherent property of the individual, not the result of the society and environment in which the person resides. In the United States, eugenic doctrines, adopted vigorously by the political and medical establishments, gave rise to the enactment of laws to curtail the civil liberties of individuals deemed 'unfit'. Laws, which restricted civil rights like freedom of movement (immigration, institutionalization), reproduction (forced sterilization), education, and marriage, were introduced and enforced in many states through the early decades of the twentieth century.⁵ Then in Germany, Hitler and his Nazi party enthusiastically embraced the teachings of the American Eugenics Society, initially using them to justify the 'humane killing' of the mentally and physically disabled in the years preceding World War II. This then led to the systematic slaughter

of groups deemed 'unfit' by the Nazis (Jews, Romany gypsies, homosexuals) in the Holocaust.

There has been a recent resurgence of interest in eugenics because developments in molecular genetics, notably the completion of the Human Genome Project (HGP), have expanded the potential for practicing eugenics through molecular technologies.⁶ Since the formal completion of HGP in 2003, technologies for the rapid analysis of an individual's genome have been expanding exponentially and the \$1000/genome (complete sequence of the 3 billion base pairs of a person's DNA) is probably no more than 5 years away. Thus, in developed countries where sophisticated health care is available, we can expect within a decade the capacity to routinely sequence the complete genome of a newborn (or embryo). This will allow us to determine its predisposition to various inherited disorders and traits.⁷ Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that this knowledge could affect the person's future in ways, which are both positive (preventative medicine) and negative (genetic discrimination).

Beyond determination of the genetic profile of the new individual, technologies that allow the manipulation/ enhancement of the genome of pre-implantation embryos will become available. Our potential to alter the genome of both somatic cells and germ cells through gene therapy is advancing rapidly, and modification of a person's phenotype through genetic manipulation is being developed.⁸ Visions of the 'not-too-distant' future, when genetic testing and modification become readily available and accepted in society, have been explored in popular media. Vivid portrayals of a society divided into classes based on who has been 'genetically improved' are given in the movie *GATACCA*⁹ and the popular book *Remaking Eden*.¹⁰ The names chosen for the resulting classes, Valid/Invalid or Degenerate in *GATACCA* and GenRich /Naturals in *Remaking Eden*, clearly show the value placed on genetic engineering in these imagined societies. Many observers of this 'new eugenics' have raised serious concerns about the potential misuse of molecular biology to provide us with yet another (powerful and scientific!) mechanism for classifying and subdividing people.¹¹

For example, independent scholar Bill McKibben has argued that we should exercise caution and be satisfied with the direct medical applications of using genetic therapies to treat disease and not allow further developments into human 'improvement.'

If germ-line genetic engineering ever starts, it will accelerate endlessly and unstopably into the future, as individuals make the calculation that they have no choice but to equip their kids for the world that is being made. Once the game is underway, there won't be moral decisions,

only strategic ones. If the technology is going to be stopped, it will have to happen now, before it's quite begun.¹²

The eugenics of a hundred years ago resulted in great evil and has been thoroughly discredited as a misapplication of scientific principles to perceived social problems. My goal in this paper is not to debate whether the new eugenics will lead to a similar result. Rather I accept that this novel mechanism for classifying people based on their genome, once in the control of the most powerful groups in society, has *the potential to lead to evil consequences*. My concern is how to prevent the emergence of evil as a result of the new eugenics. I argue that any monolithic vision of knowledge is dangerous especially when the topic under study has substantial social capital (racism, elitism) and that the intellectual checks and balances that arise from multiple disciplinary viewpoints are our best defense against the emergence of evil. Furthermore, I believe that it is most important that scientists, as respected 'experts' in this discussion, be cognizant of the potential fallibility of science and of social applications of their work.

If novel applications of bioscience are to be regulated then either the scientists themselves must recognize potential danger in the work they are undertaking and self-regulate or 'science observers' (other scholars, science journalists, the public) must be sufficiently current with the technology to fully understand its direction and implications. I will first consider the various mechanisms by which the social consequences of molecular biosciences might be overseen.

Is it possible, or likely, that scientists would assume that responsibility for regulation of the use of the technologies they are developing? It is certainly not true that scientists are irresponsible, madly pursuing the latest innovations with no regard for safety and society. Biologists, developing recombinant DNA or cell-based technologies, were sufficiently concerned with the possible results of their endeavors that they developed their own voluntary restrictions. The Asilomar conference of 1975¹³ was called in response to a proposal to engineer a recombinant DNA molecule containing viral genes. At that time people were legitimately concerned with the safety and containment of these new molecules and devised a set of safety guidelines, which were adopted by government agencies and gradually relaxed as our familiarity with the technologies increased.¹⁴ Similarly concerned scientists have advocated the regulation of human reproductive cloning. While this method has been applied with some success to numerous mammalian species since the dramatic introduction of 'Dolly', the first cloned sheep, in 1997, most respected scientists and physicians (including Dolly's creator Ian Wilmut) have spoken out publicly against attempting this method on humans.¹⁵ Human reproductive cloning has been banned in most countries and is subject to a UN declaration¹⁶

intended to prevent its development in countries without regulations in force. When a complete ban is not appropriate, regulations are enacted by government agencies to control particular controversial technologies and scientists are usually heavily involved in the development of safety guidelines. Somatic gene therapy¹⁷ for specific diseases has been used in human trials with limited success and significant safety concerns. It has been under a moratorium since the death of a trial subject, Jesse Gelsinger.¹⁸ These examples show that scientists can be instrumental in regulating a technology when a significant number of them recognize the potential for undesirable consequences. Ironically one of the strongest motivations for self-regulation is the potential for loss of control to external agencies. It is not the potential danger of a particular technology, but rather the fear of interference by those outside their community, that prompts scientists into establishing guidelines.

Beyond recognizing potential problems in the applications of their discipline, it is also necessary scientists accept that the actual science they are currently engaged in *may* itself be wrong ('bad science'). Unfortunately, the construction of a modern education in any scientific discipline emphasizes an extraordinary amount of content which severely limits the access to interdisciplinary criticism that most aspiring scientists can engage in. Living in a world of science where mistakes of the past have been erased, and the limits of today's knowledge are obscured by the certainty of scientific objectivity, it is not surprising that most scientists have unjustified confidence in their worldview.

In order for scientists to be effective critics of the direction their discipline is taking it is important for them to recognize that, at any historical moment, the facts and theories they accept may be misguided or wrong. The Eugenics Movement of the early twentieth century is an important object lesson. Perhaps the most frightening, and least well-known, aspect of its history is how mainstreamed and well supported the science of eugenics was in the foremost universities of the United States. For example, Professor E.H. Hooton at Harvard University told his undergraduates:

The solution to the crime problem is the extirpation of the physically, mentally and morally unfit or (if that seems too harsh) their complete segregation in a socially aseptic environment.¹⁹

All current genetics texts contain accounts of the achievements of important historical figures like Mendel, Watson and Crick. The fact that all their accomplishments are still deemed to be correct, and are still part of the current worldview, is the justification of their inclusion in the story. However, only very recently (~10 years) have accounts of eugenics appeared

in a few textbooks, and then only as sidebars to the main content without analysis of how important and misguided this branch of biology was. That leading geneticists like Charles Davenport²⁰ (Director of the Eugenics Records Office, CSHL, Member National Academy of Sciences) believed that 10% of the population²¹ of the United States were 'socially inadequate biological varieties' and were in some aspects unfit or sub-human, is a fact that is virtually ignored by current genetics texts. The result of this highly unequal treatment of science movements, where the history of research ideas that turn out to be incorrect are strongly suppressed, gives students the false impression of the infallibility of scientific method and evidence.²²

At an even more fundamental level, scientists also lack education about methods of producing knowledge, in particular the philosophy of science. Science is a branch of knowledge obtained, we are taught, through the application of scientific method where hypotheses or theories are tested by experimentation and rejected when not substantiated by results. The 'correctness' of scientific knowledge is seldom questioned and, as Ruth Hubbard points out, scientists tend to inflate the value of scientific evidence.

The way we make scientific facts, *by reductionist methodology*, and build them into coherent theories and descriptions sets limits to the kinds of things we come to understand about nature. Scientists do not usually acknowledge these limits, nor do most other people. And the overestimation of science as a way to know, hence of the extent of the knowledge we can gain through science, has led us to undervalue other kinds of knowledge.²³

As long as we have a vigorous scientific establishment controlling the educational program for future generations of scientists, the system is self-perpetuating. As Sandra Harding reflects:

There are few aspects of the "best" science educations that enable anyone to grasp how nature-as-an-object-of-knowledge is always cultural. These elite science educations rarely expose students to systematic analyses of the social origins, traditions, meanings, practices, institutions, technologies, uses and consequences of the natural sciences that ensure the fully historical character of the results of scientific research.²⁴

Thus, while it is vitally important that practicing scientists and physicians are broadly educated in the history, sociology and philosophy of

their discipline so that they can appreciate the potential for abuse of 'scientific' evidence, it is not likely the situation will change. So, who else might engage in critical analysis of scientific developments? The most likely candidates are ethicists and science studies scholars but, while both groups have been involved in discussions of regulation of biotechnology, they have both been limited in their effectiveness.

Specific to our concerns about the potential misapplication of the new eugenics, when the HGP was being imagined and first funded, 3-5% of the total HGP budget was allocated to the consideration of ethical, legal and social implications (ELSI) of the project. Primarily from this funding, a new field of bioethics has emerged which is primarily concerned with issues surrounding the application of medical technologies (end of life, human subjects experimentation, gene therapy). However, as Francis Fukuyama points out in his 2002 book *Our Posthuman Future*:

This (ELSI funding) can be regarded as a commendable concern for the ethical dimensions of scientific research, or else a kind of protection money the scientists have to pay to keep the true ethicists off their backs. In any discussion of cloning, stem cell research, germ-line engineering, and the like, it is usually the professional bioethicist who can be relied on to take the most permissive position of anyone in the room.²⁵

So, because bioethicists depend on the goodwill of the scientists they work with, they tend not to be really critical. Bioethicists work within narrow ethical frameworks, which interface well with the scientists' reductionist methodologies. The resulting analyses still exclude large portions of human experience.²⁶

As I have argued, neither practicing scientists nor bioethicists really critique the fundamentals of the scientific program/ endeavor. Scholars that do are classified in a discipline called Science & Technology Studies (STS) where sociologists, philosophers and historians study and analyze science as a human practice and can offer a very different perspective on the workings of science to that of the 'scientific worldview'.²⁷ The right of others (non-scientists) to critique the practices of science is not always well received by working scientists, as they claim that non scientists do not/ cannot fully understand the workings of science. For example, the work of philosophers, like Sandra Harding, who present a feminist critique of the principle of objectivity and claim that even paradigmatic physics is not exempt from this critique,²⁸ is rejected and even deeply resented by most scientists. That is, if they are aware of its existence. Similarly, sociologists who have studied science and offered their interpretations on the science enterprise have often

encountered the wrath of practicing scientists. Indeed, a major academic dispute (The Science Wars) on who gets to 'define science' has raged over several decades. However, better understanding between practitioners of the different disciplines seems to be developing²⁹ although scientists remain concerned that science studies serve to undermine the legitimacy and authority of science. As Trevor Pinch relates, most scientists are well aware of the ambiguities of their discipline, of the inconsistencies in their data and will discuss them internally but they maintain the façade of certainty when dealing with those outside the close research community.

The problem is that scientists have surrounded their enterprise with an aura of certainty. While scientists might be prepared to admit *in private* or to each other that science is human, involves skill, and contains uncertainties and that the idea of simple decisive experiments shooting down rogue theories is at best mythical or at worst a useful fiction for teaching purposes, *in public* they, by and large, maintain the view that science is about certainty.³⁰ (italics in original)

There is a strong tendency for scientists to isolate themselves in their projects and not engage with other scholars: a 'two cultures' scenario.³¹ It has frequently been the case that scientists are often almost shunned by trying to work on interdisciplinary projects that are critical of science in any way³². Many working scientists adopt a very binary position: you are either with us or against us,³³ which makes developing new scholarship at the interface a very risky enterprise professionally. The overarching problem then remains. Scientists remain isolated in their intellectual community: too busy with their experiments to learn the history of their enterprise, too engaged in their paradigm to understand its limits, too arrogant and powerful to recognize the intellectual elitism they are practicing.

The twenty-first century has been called the 'Age of Biology'³⁴ and one thing is clear: that the rapid progress being made in human molecular genetics, fuelled by the promise of individualized medicine, is resulting in the development of commercialized technologies that could be used to determine the genetic makeup of an existing or future human. With these advances in molecular genetics comes the potential for the creation of new mechanism for classifying people based on their genome, and thus the potential for new forms of discrimination or classification of individuals/groups in society.

In order to understand the issues raised in the new eugenics, scientists must engage with the critiques of their discipline in general and of the new technologies in particular. Then they must honestly disclose the benefits and potential dangers without concern for loss of position or privilege.

In order for other scholars and the public to participate successfully in discussion about the regulation of innovative technologies that have the potential to profoundly affect their lives and the lives of subsequent generations - as the new eugenics does - they need to have a sense of the scope and the limits of what is known and being proposed. As Nobelist Roald Hoffman observes, "A world admiring and yet suspicious of science needs an intelligent way to talk about what we know and how that knowledge is gained."³⁵ The most important conclusion from the lessons of the past is that all groups involved in the conversation, all groups potentially affected by the scientific developments, should be well informed about, and open-minded to, alternative viewpoints. It is when dogmatic adherence to particular view, when 'scientific evidence' can be used to underwrite a particular social agenda of dominance that the potential for evil emerges.

Notes

¹E O Carlson, *The Unfit: The History of a Bad Idea*, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor, NY, 2001, p. 328.

²S J Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Norton, New York, 1996 p. 103.

³One can argue, for example, that substance abuse has a genetic component and that substance abuse is linked to poverty.

⁴J D Watson, *DNA: The Secret of Life*, Knopf, New York, 2004, p. 19.

⁵<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>; see also Carlson, p. 199.

⁶A lot of the popular rhetoric around these technologies is very eugenic as in 'making better babies.' Even the book outlining the early discoveries in molecular genetics was called *The Eighth Day of Creation*, H. F. Judson, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1979.

⁷The heritability of, and thus the accuracy of testing for, traits varies greatly. Some mutant forms of genes absolutely ensure that the person carrying that mutation will be affected with disease (e.g. Huntington's Disease mutation). Other mutations are linked to increased lifetime risk, e.g. *BRCA1* mutation carriers have a greatly elevated risk of breast or ovarian cancer. Other associations between a particular version of a gene and a trait can be much more variable and dependent on environmental factors.

⁸Mario Capecchi's artificial chromosome work in mice; *DNA: Pandora's Box*, series producer David Dugan, Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2003.

⁹*GATTACA*, directed by Andrew Nichol, Columbia Pictures, 1997.

¹⁰L Silver, *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World*, Harper Collins, New York, 1997.

¹¹Serious concerns arising from new types of biological determinism are outlined in T Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics*, Routledge, New York, 2003; F Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2002; and P Kitcher, 'Utopian Eugenics and Social Inequality' in *Controlling Our Destinies*, P. Sloan, ed, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2000.

¹²B McKibben, *Enough*, Times Books, New York, 2003, p. 35.

¹³Watson, p. 97.

¹⁴J D Watson and J Tooze, *The DNA Story: A Documentary History of Gene Cloning*, Freeman & Company, San Fransisco, 1981.

¹⁵R Jaenisch and I Wilmut, 'Don't Clone Humans!', *Science*, vol. 291, March 2001, p. 2552.

¹⁶UNESCO ban on Human Reproductive cloning

¹⁷Introduction of 'foreign' genes into the body cells of a patient in order to treat an inherited disease.

¹⁸L L McCabe and E R B McCabe, *DNA: Promise and Peril*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008, p 246.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 16.

²⁰E O Carlson, 'The Eugenic World of Charles Benedict Davenport,' in *Davenport's Dream: 21st Century Reflections on Hereditary and Eugenics*, J A Witkowski and J R Inglis, eds., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor, 2008,

²¹Note how Jim Watson's also considers that about 10% are stupid and would benefit from genetic engineering to become more intelligent - *DNA: Pandora's Box*, series producer, David Dugan, Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2003.

²²I informally survey my undergraduate genetics students every year to find out how many are aware of the US eugenics laws - in my experience <5% U.S. students realize eugenics was practiced in America, all know about The Holocaust.

²³S Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1991, p. 236.

²⁴S Harding, 'Eurocentric Scientific Illiteracy - A Challenge for the World Community' in *The "Racial" Economy of Science*, S. Harding, ed., Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993, p.1.

²⁵This phenomenon is a common one and is known as regulatory 'capture,' whereby the group that is supposed to be overseeing the activities of an industry becomes an agent for the industry. This happens for many reasons, including the dependence of the regulators on the regulatees for money and information. In addition, there are the career incentives that most bioethicists face. Scientists do not usually have to worry about winning the respect of

bioethicists, particularly if they are Nobel Prize winners in molecular biology or physiology. On the other hand, ethicists face an uphill struggle winning the respect of scientists they must deal with, and are hardly likely to do so if they tell them they are morally wrong or if they depart significantly from the materialist worldview that the scientists hold dear. Fukuyama, p204.

²⁶See the critique of human cloning given by L. Kass, 'The Wisdom of Repugnance', *New Republic*, vol. 216, June 1997, pp. 17-26.

²⁷For example, Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch characterized science as a craft, a form of expertise similar to other skilled trades like woodworking, where a long apprenticeship is required to master the skills of the practice.

H Collins & T Pinch, *The Golem: What Everyone should know about Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

²⁸S Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1986, p. 43.

²⁹J A Labinger and H Collins, eds, *The One Culture: A Conversation about Science*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001.

³⁰T Pinch, 'Does Science Studies Undermine Science?' in *ibid* p. 21.

³¹C P Snow, *The Two Cultures*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1993.

³²E Fox Keller, *Science and its Critics*, *Academe*, Sept.-Oct. 1995, p. 10.

³³This resembles the political rhetoric in the U.S. either for the war (patriotic and American) or against it (unpatriotic and un-American).

³⁴<http://www.iob.org/general.asp?section=news&article=AgeofBiology.xml>

³⁵R Hoffmann in review of *The One Culture*, J A Labinger and H Collins, eds.

Building Better People? Three Secular Arguments Against Germline Genetic Engineering

Katheryn Doran

Abstract:

If any position on genetic engineering invites the label “evil” it is the version espoused by James Watson. "If you really are stupid, I would call that a disease, ...People say it would be terrible if we made all girls pretty. I think it would be great." Many of the cases against Watson's view rely on a Western religious view of humanity's intrinsic value. Are there good secular arguments against germline genetic engineering? I propose three: 1. A Millian argument that germline genetic technology is likely to be paternalistically abused, and that the social costs of the pressure to have one's offspring conform to ever higher standards of intelligence, athletic prowess, attractiveness, etc. - a sort of genetic arms race - would be great; 2. An argument drawing from the disability rights movement that we should challenge the very idea that germline genetic engineering would be therapeutic and the view that what it offers is improvements and 3. An argument appealing to a moral ideal of personhood that human beings are not just a sum of our various biologically expressed traits. On this view, engineering individuals towards some uniform conception of excellence is depersonalizing, and inimical to our humanity. This frankly metaphysical view does not merely tolerate individual differences but welcomes them in all their blooming, buzzing confusion.

Key Words: Watson, McKibben, Genetic germline engineering, consequentialist, normal, disability rights, depersonalization.

Bill McKibben, in his wonderful 2003 book *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, takes obvious pleasure in lining up the wildly different political constituencies that coalesce to condemn various biomedical interventions such as cloning and germline genetic engineering.¹ Political conservatives, environmentalists, Marxists, the religiously conservative, feminists - including ardent feminist defenders of abortion rights - and more, agree with McKibben that there is something fundamentally wrong, socially and morally wrong, with cloning and germline genetic engineering, and also that we should do what we can to safeguard our humanity from the future as imagined by, as he calls them, technozealots.² Here is a wonderful summing up quote from him about the time-honored resistance to scientific advances:

Conservatives whimpered about the threat to order almost from the start - they knew Galileo was trouble, could sense the trajectory from him and his telescope to Nietzsche and the death of God. But radicals saw it just as clearly. Marx and Engels, of course, offered the single greatest description of [technology-driven capitalism] when they wrote in 1848 that: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. *All that is solid melts into air.*" (*Communist Manifesto*).³

One of McKibben's messages, then, is that it is not just what Americans used to call the Moral Majority who want to stem the technotide. Our broad, deep, and non-partisan resistance to techno-intervention is at least a telling *prima facie* vote against its morality.⁴

And yet...when you turn to McKibben's own sustained case against biomedical engineering you see that he relies heavily on an essentially Judeo-Christian notion of what humanity is, and should be, even though he waits until the last chapter of the book, the eponymous "Enough," to reveal fully his religious hand. Earlier in the book, he makes the case that genetic interventions threaten the meaning of a person's life, or the meaningfulness of it, but what he means by those deeply normative terms is also mysterious until the end of the book, and by treating them as commonsense primitives in these earlier sections he begs the central question against his opponents. It is not until that last chapter where he fleshes out the notions of meaning and meaningfulness that we see finally that they are shot through after all with religiosity: for McKibben, like Kant, what it is to be human has everything to do with the capacity to make moral choices out of respect for moral laws laid down in the ancient, if not eternal, world religious traditions.

So though McKibben's exuberant catalogue of the range of those who oppose genetic engineering suggests that he thinks the secular as well as the religious have grounds to oppose biomedical engineering, in the end his case against it relies on some basic Judeo-Christian metaphysics (about which I will say more later).

McKibben's ultimate reliance on a religious view of humanity's meaning led me to wonder about how closely the case against biomedical intervention in general, and germline genetic engineering in particular, is tied to a religious view of man or to a religious view of the meaning of human life.⁵ Surely some religious views of man and the meaning of life are sufficient to ground an anti-interventionist position: from the rhetoric condemning the *hubris* of tampering with our God-given natures to the milder appeal to the metaphysics of free will. But are they necessary? Can the

non-religious or even the irreligious among us make the case against such interventions without smuggling in some appeal to a spiritual view of what it is to be essentially human?

James Watson suggests not, in a typically colorful, to put it kindly, quote:

Evolution can be just damn cruel, and to say we've got a perfect genome and there's some sanctity? ... To try to give it any more meaning than it deserves in some quasi-mystical way is for Steven Spielberg or somebody like that. It's just plain aura, up in the sky - I mean, it's crap.⁶

I disagree with Watson, and I will argue in this paper that there are at least three good arguments against germline genetic engineering that rely not at all on the view that human life is sacred, or the view that our natures are God-given, or our essences are transcendent, in other words, on any of that quasi-mystical crap. (Of course there are many less anthropocentric religious traditions outside of the West that might make the case against genetic engineering without appealing to humanity's unique sanctity, but since my aim is to make the best secular case against it, those convergences of very different traditions are not relevant.)

Much of what I will argue about what is wrong with germline genetic engineering would apply to a wider class of biomedical interventions, including some versions of somatic genetic engineering, but I will leave those extrapolations for the audience to think about. And while I am arguing here against the use of germline genetic engineering to improve human intelligence, athletic prowess, attractiveness, musical talent, etc., at least some of my arguments about the moral wrongness of intervention might also apply to therapeutic intervention. But for the purposes of this paper I will be concerned only with what is wrong with using the technology for genetic improvement or enhancement. On my view the therapeutic and enhancement uses do not stand or fall together, but perhaps more to the point, as we consider the policies we should enact to govern these radical new technologies a critical re-examination of what counts as improvement of human lives is urgently needed. Finally, my position is that it would be morally wrong for parents to choose, or for doctors or scientists to do, the interventions in question, and quite possibly that the wrongness is of a magnitude that no-one should have the option of choosing them (though I have not yet decided whether the wrongness is great enough to warrant an anti-choice position).

I have never thought that morality depends in any way on God or a belief in God, or religion - that theists have a monopoly on morality - and by the same token, I see no reason that atheists can't have a rich moral

conception of good and bad – with evil of course at the extreme end of the spectrum of condemnation. And indeed as my colleague Jinnie Garrett asserted, genetic germline intervention has at least the potential to be used in evil ways. So I think we need to marshal as many arguments against pursuing that technology as we can, and they had better not have to rely on theist foundations, any more than arguments against, say, slavery and torture do. I reject that view that if God is dead everything is permitted.

The first argument consists of a two pronged consequentialist case against germline genetic engineering, owing much to John Stewart Mill's Utilitarianism.⁶ First, there is good reason to worry that germline genetic technology would be paternalistically abused, by appealing to a kinder, gentler - thinner, if you will - version Watson's position. Who wouldn't want to take measures to improve one's child's chances at having a good life? We do all sorts of things to insure the best outcome of a planned pregnancy, including changing our dietary and exercise habits, taking special vitamins, steering clear of otherwise acceptable pleasures like engaging in intense exercise, drinking alcohol, and of course, if at all possible, quitting smoking tobacco and pot. We might say that we want to provide our offspring with the best chance for a good life by giving her the best possible start to life. And if a correctable pre-natal problem is diagnosed many argue that it would be wrong not to take the steps necessary to have it corrected, unless those steps impose a significant, and some would say greater, burden on the mother or parents (or, some would add, on society). There is an enormous amount of room for disagreement about what measures would be morally required vs. those that are permissible, and those that are heroic, but for some problems, at least, there is probably a commonsense consensus about intervention, for example, somatic genetic engineering to prevent cystic fibrosis. So why not also take other steps to give your child a chance to be more intelligent, or more beautiful, or more agile?

There are at least three things wrong with this reasoning: first, wanting to give your child the best shot at a good life by doing what you can to make sure that he/she is born *healthy* is not the same thing, setting aside the rhetorical slide, as wanting to give your child best shot at, say, being the smartest, or most successful, or popular. Ensuring health is not the same thing as or even analogous to pushing intellectual enhancement. Is the line between intervention for health and intervention for enhancement blurred in some cases, for example, whether to intervene genetically to avoid mild Down Syndrome? Certainly! But it does not follow that there are not cases that fall clearly on the side of enhancement that cannot be justified. Moreover, even though admittedly the line between health and enhancement can be drawn only somewhat arbitrarily, given what is at stake, for reasons I will provide below the burden of proof falls much more heavily on those who

want to widen the category of health to include such cases than those who want to keep the category of health - and therapeutic intervention - narrow.

Second, and more controversially, I would argue against the assumption that being smarter or prettier or faster or stronger than one would otherwise have been is even itself necessarily a good thing for the individual. I have argued above that the practice of intervening to the ends of increasing intelligence, etc., will in all likelihood lead to bad consequences for families and societies and individuals collectively, but here I want even to challenge the view that the resulting differences would necessarily be good for the individuals who are subjected to them. Sure, it might be good for them to be smarter or faster or prettier, but would it necessarily be good for them? Would it not depend on how those changes are put to use, and how they affect the people who experience them? I would argue that they are, in other words, merely contingent goods, with an obvious debt to the Kantian view that the only thing that is good without qualification is an agent's moral good, and that everything else is good with qualification and merely contingently desirable.⁸ We may like to hang out with someone who is musically talented - or has great hair, for that matter! - but what we value about them without qualification, if we value them at all as opposed to liking them - is their goodness, or ideas, or values, or other things along those lines, and as far as I know, no genetic engineering technique has been invented that can target these capacities for improvement. The shift in the social message about what matters in persons would have bad consequences for all of us. I will say more below about the normatively suspect notion of "improvement" when I turn to the second secular argument.

Third, and finally (under the consequentialist umbrella), though some particular germline genetic engineering might bring about particular, local good consequences, for example, the elimination of cystic fibrosis, the collective social costs of the pressure to conform, and to have one's offspring conform, to ever higher standards of intelligence, athletic prowess, talent, attractiveness, and so on, would be great. Many of the "improvements" of the sort Watson advocates would undermine human happiness and social well-being by leading to an unhealthy perfectionism and depersonalization, leading to a sort of genetic arms race. In the United States at least the notorious difficulty of admission to competitive schools - including pre-schools for toddlers - has become so widely recognized that it now turns up regularly in *New Yorker* cartoons. Do we actually want to take exponentially more dramatic steps to increase the competition our children must engage in?

Argument number two: at least some segments of the disability rights movement (though itself full of lively debate about many core beliefs, mission, and political questions) challenge even the idea that genetic engineering - somatic or germline - is therapeutic, or that therapeutic intervention is usually a good thing, or that the changes would be

improvements even in many of the instances that most would take the good of intervention to be common sense. The central idea is this: that intervention is undertaken with a view towards moving the person closer towards what we consider to be normal, and the closer we can move someone towards the normal the better. But the conception of “normal” is not simply descriptive, it is conventionally constructed, in response to the sometimes imagined needs and desires of the person who we aim to “normalize,” or the needs and desires of their families, or of their larger social communities (and not always in that order). Moreover, our ideal of normal towards which we should aim to move people is no doubt still beholden to Enlightenment ideals of personhood in which (male) rationality reigns supreme.⁹ Most people agree that it would be morally desirable to prevent or correct life threatening conditions like Tay Sachs disease and cystic fibrosis, even by germline genetic alteration. But what about conditions at the other end of the continuum: what about the Deaf (which I am capitalizing in deference to the view that the Deaf constitute their own cultural group), for example?

1988 saw the birth of the vanguard of the disability rights movement when students at Gallaudet University, “the world leader in liberal education and career development for deaf and hard-of-hearing undergraduate students”¹⁰ in Washington DC staged an eight day strike to protest the appointment of yet another hearing president (the university had never had a deaf president), and formed the movement Deaf President Now (DPN).¹¹

Or what about those on the autistic spectrum, some of whom describe their group as “neurodiverse” and refer to the rest of humanity as “neurotypical”? As one autistic blogger explains ironically:

Neurotypical syndrome is a neurobiological disorder characterized by preoccupation with social concerns, delusions of superiority, and obsession with conformity. Neurotypical individuals often assume that their experience of the world is either the only one, or the only correct one. NTs find it difficult to be alone. NTs are often intolerant of seemingly minor differences in others. When in groups frequently insist upon the performance of dysfunctional, destructive, and even impossible rituals as a way of maintaining group identity. NTs find it difficult to communicate directly, and have a much higher incidence of lying as compared to persons on the autistic spectrum. NT is believed to be genetic in origin. Autopsies have shown the brain of the neurotypical is typically smaller than that of an autistic individual and may have overdeveloped areas related to social behavior. Tragically, as many as 9625 out of every 10,000 individuals may be neurotypical.¹²

The psychiatrist Kay Jamison also writes compellingly *In The Unquiet Mind* about the impossibility of prying apart her bi-polar illness from her creativity, which she values profoundly.¹³ In a multitude of such examples, the disability that germline genetic engineering would eradicate will take with it something that the person herself takes to be an essential part of who she is.

A letter writer to the *New York Times* writes in response to the philosopher Peter Singer's recent obituary of the disability rights activist Harriet McBryde Johnson,¹⁴ a wheel chair user:

...Singer tries to atone for his myriad sins by saying it is wrong to assume that "heavenly bliss requires you to be able to run and skip." But then why ask if people with disabilities adjust their expectations down? To even suggest that a person who uses a wheelchair may be satisfied with less than a person who ambulates on legs might be is more than degrading. Additionally, the title demonstrates The *Times's* discomfort: "Happy Nevertheless" suggests that people with disabilities have achieved a miracle by being happy despite their disabilities. Most people with disabilities would strongly disagree with that characterization of their lives. And finally, Harriet McBryde Johnson most certainly did not live a "disabled life." She was a person with a disability who lived a life of immense accomplishment. Language tells us what the writer thinks. The writer of that phrase does not think much about people with disabilities. Perhaps it is time for all people to rethink how they talk and think about people with disabilities. Nancy B. Alisberg, West Hartford, Conn.¹⁵

Many readers will at least privately respond to Nancy Alisberg, et.al., that though we should work for fully fair and enlightened treatment of people with disabilities, surely it would be a better thing not to be disabled in the first place, and if we could prevent disabilities in the first place we should.

As plausible as that line of reasoning may sound, many with disabilities would disagree, and I have introduced you to some of them. Some would say that while they are surely different from most people, the differences are not necessarily or altogether bad, others would reject the question of whether it would have been better to have had the disability corrected before they were born as a meaningless counterfactual, not unlike

questions that might be put to our own able bodied and minded selves: How do the questions: “Would it have been better if you had been born a male (asked of a female), or taller (asked of me), or more intelligent (asked of Sarah Palin), if your parents had had the choice to make that change?” strike you? Is that not sort of like asking about whether you would have been better off if someone else - someone better - had been born instead of you? Or: wouldn’t you rather you were not you? The answer is surely “No”, if this is an intelligible question at all. The disability rights view thus rejects the most basic normative presumptions underlying the concepts needed to make the case for intervention: “normal” “better,” “improvement,” “treatment,” etc. They agree with Alice Domurat Dreger, a medical historian who writes about conjoined twins and intersex, that we should change minds instead of bodies.¹⁶

My third argument posits a moral ideal of personhood, and a moral ideal of personal identity. On this view though human beings are biological creatures, we are not essentially so, and persons are not just a sum of their various biologically expressed traits. On this view engineering individuals towards more uniformity, even towards some conception of excellence, is inimical to our humanity, a humanity that is nevertheless very much a part of our time, place, and culture. I confess that it gets tricky to flesh out the third argument that germline genetic engineering is a path towards evil without resorting to at least quasi religious views about the value of humanity or human life (as those that do in McKibben’s treatment, in my view). But I think it can be done! I believe indeed that the challenge of spelling out what is morally wrong with radical genetic intervention is a particular application of the more general challenge of articulating a rich moral framework that manages to navigate between the poles of transcendent religious absolutism and mere practical expediency. To put the point more simply, even atheists - or at least some of us - have strong views about moral rightness and wrongness: we praise and blame with equal conviction and clarity, and work for social justice to frame laws and punish transgressors with equal passion as our theist brethren. As I said above theists do not have a monopoly on moral theory or practice, but what they do have a corner on are some important moral concepts (and the rhetoric surrounding them). At the top of the list, and again I am talking about the Judeo-Christian tradition, is the notion that human life is sacred, followed closely by the related notion that human life has unique dignity, and finally, the notion that human life is uniquely - yes! - meaningful. All of these notions ground the critical position that human life deserves *respect*, and companion rejection of genetic engineering as in some way fundamentally *disrespectful* of human life. (This is one of the reasons that many religious conservatives who condemn, say, stem cell research, have no moral qualms about any sort of experimentation on non-human animals: their species membership settles the question of their moral status:

namely, if they are not human they have none, no matter how intelligent they are, no matter how much DNA they share with us.) Certainly it would be an oddball atheist who talks about human life as sacred, but what about this notion of meaning? And how can I make the claim that dramatic genetic intervention is inimical to our humanity - as I want to! - without invoking the shadow concepts of sacredness? I turn to Nietzsche and his fellow existentialists for help here.¹⁷ Human life may be meaningful, but only if we take responsibility for making it so, and that is a highly Earthly, human, individual project. The person who slavishly follows convention, religious or otherwise, who thinks that the rules of morality are dictated by the divine, and that her job while on Earth is simply to obey someone or something else's commandments, lives a life without integrity; she has traded in the task of making her life meaningful for the comfort of the immutable. Bad faith! Self-deception! By the same token, what makes the project of constructing a meaningful life thrilling as well as terrifying is partly that the creation of our selves necessarily involves elements of uncertainty (compared, for example, to the fixed and knowable essence of a tree, to borrow Sartre's example from *Nausea*).¹⁸ We are by nature utterly distinct works in progress, at our best struggling mightily for self-knowledge and direction. Radical genetic engineering removes some of the authority of self-creation by increasing the scope of what is biologically fixed in us (increasing what about us is tree-like, if you will). Even as it would increase our capacities for intelligence, and so on, it would do so at the expense of what is fundamentally human about us: it would tamper with our individuality and individual freedom. And that, I submit, would be evil.

I have provided then sketches of three very different arguments against building better - "better" - people: the first appeals to collective human happiness and utility, the second highlights the injustice of ablist hierarchies, and the third rejects the view that the engineered changes would contribute to human flourishing. On all of them individual differences are not merely tolerated but celebrated in all their blooming, buzzing confusion.¹⁹

Notes

¹B. McKibben, *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, Holt Paperbacks, 2004.

² There is far less of a consensus about the morality of in vitro fertilization, somatic genetic engineering, and stem cell research.

³ McKibben, p. 44.

⁴ Cf. the related sentiment at the core of Leon Kass's well known essay "The Wisdom of Repugnance", *New Republic* Vol. 216 Issue 22 June 2, 1997.

⁵ The religious view McKibben relies on is Judeo-Christian. There are of

course many other far less anthropocentric world religions that would also be at odds with germline genetic engineering, but since my concern is to show that no religious foundation is needed to ground a robust case against it, the fact that there are other religious cases against it is not relevant here.

⁶ J. Watson, Symposium panel on Engineering the Human Germline, Los Angeles, 1998.

⁷ J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Filiquarian, 2007.

⁸ I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Prentice Hall, 1989.

⁹ G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, Routledge, 1993.

¹⁰ Gallaudet University Mission and Vision Statement, <<http://www.gallaudet.edu/mission.xml>>

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaf_President_Now.

¹² ISNT@autistics.org, last updated March 18, 2002.

¹³ K. Jamison, *The Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*, Vintage, 1997.

¹⁴ P. Singer, "Harriet McBryde Johnson", *New York Times Magazine*, December 28, 2008.

¹⁵ *New York Times Magazine*, Letters, January 4, 2009.

¹⁶ A. Dreger, *One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of Normal*, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 16.

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁸ J.P. Sartre, *Nausea*, New Directions, 2007.

¹⁹ W James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 242.

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Amoralism and the Role of Other-Directed Judgments

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Abstract

An amoralist is often invoked in philosophical discussions as a character whose existence might lend empirical support to various views in moral psychology, such as theories of moral motivation. Yet the notion of an amoralist requires greater elucidation if it is to do any philosophical work. In view of the inadequacies of several classical and contemporary approaches to the phenomenon of amoralism, I propose to conceive of an amoralist in terms of his unwillingness to pass a moral judgment on others. The moral point of view first manifests itself when a person makes a normative value judgment about the behaviour of another person in circumstances where the second person's actions bear no foreseeable effects on the well-being of the first person. It is argued that the propensity to evaluate the behaviour of others from a disinterested moral standpoint is (in part) what it means to 'have' morality. On the other hand, the refusal to evaluate another's actions, when such refusal is not explained by the fear to judge hastily, is indicative of the amoral condition of an individual. The latter thesis is defended against the objection that our tendency to judge others using moral categories is merely an outgrowth of a self-interested evolutionary mechanism.

Key Words: Amoralism, moral judgments, moral psychology, non-judgmentalism, value judgments, psychopath.

The amoral condition, i.e., a condition of a person who in some sense lacks morality, deserves much closer attention than it has hitherto received for at least two practical reasons. First, casual references to amoralists can frequently be found in philosophical literature where this type is usually invoked to supply the 'empirical' evidence to moral arguments, and yet, it is by no means obvious what lacking morality involves and which criteria we should use when identifying the amoral condition. If this important notion can be employed to do any theoretical work in moral philosophy that goes beyond its emotive meaning, we need to look for some reliable independent 'standard of amorality.' Secondly, the conceptual analysis and empirical study of amoral condition can reveal something essential about the nature of moral agency in general, such as the emotive and cognitive conditions underlying moral perception, moral motivation and moral reasoning. The empirical part of this task, however, would only be possible after the notion of amoralism has been sufficiently elucidated. We cannot begin studying

amoralists unless we first know who they are, how to identify them and where exactly to look for these characters. This paper will mainly concentrate on the first, 'theoretical' part of this problem.

The term 'amoralist', on traditional understanding, refers to a person with persistent indifference towards moral values, i.e., to a person who systematically fails to be motivated by moral consideration, and thus in some sense is *without* morality. The term, furthermore, connotes evil, wicked, psychopathic and antisocial personality.¹ In ordinary and professional parlance the qualification 'amoral' may be attached not only to individual agents but also to cultures, traditions, practices or even countries or cities.² Arguably though, the alleged amorality of these more abstract entities can be analyzed in terms of behaviour or beliefs of particular agents practicing the tradition or being part of the 'amoral' community.³ I shall limit my discussion then mainly to cases of individual amorality.

A moment of reflection would show that what initially seemed like a simple question, namely, "what does it mean to lack morality?" in fact admits of a variety of approaches with no straightforward indication which one of them captures the essence of amorality most fully. One may attempt to define the amoral state of an individual in terms of what a person believes or fails to believe about the ontological status of moral properties (e.g., Garner⁴); in terms of his underlying motives or maxims that determine his actions (e.g., Kant⁵), or else, in terms of explicit behaviour and emotive reactions (e.g., DSM IV). Without denying the value of *multidimensional* approach to amorality, I want explore an approach that identifies amoral condition by reference to *failure of evaluation*; more specifically, failure to evaluate the behaviour of *others* from the moral point of view in the circumstances where a moral judgment should be made – an attitude that is referred to by Robert Fullinwider as "promiscuous nonjudgmentalism"⁶ I suggest further that unwillingness to make an *external* (other-directed) evaluative pronouncement is a direct consequence of the reluctance to evaluate one's own conduct from the moral point of view, i.e., making an internal or self-directed judgment.

I want to look closer at a certain kind of moral failure which might shed light on one aspect essential to moral attitude: a repeating failure on the part of an individual to make other-directed moral judgments in *morally demanding* situations where a 'morally demanding' situation is initially understood as any situation requiring a specific moral posture.

An average morally concerned person does a lot of things *qua* moral agent. He tends to evaluate his own actions from point of view of moral rules; he puts restrictions on the kind of goals he may legitimately pursue depending on whether these goals are compatible with core moral values; he voices his moral approval or disapproval of others. The last feature is one of the most conspicuous marks of a morally concerned person, since judging others in many cases is a public action. It is also the crucial feature that

determines one's relation toward the world of morality. This by no means implies that explicit willingness and capacity on the part of some agent to judge others is a sure sign that the agent is 'within morality'. Willingness to pronounce a moral judgment is at best a necessary condition for being a morally concerned agent, but not a sufficient one. Ronald Milo for example, rightly observes that we must distinguish between saying, from the moral point of view, "X is wrong," and saying, "X is wrong from the moral point of view."⁷ There seems to be nothing contradictory in a scenario where someone reliably identifies the morally praiseworthy or blameworthy actions, and makes a number of genuinely moral judgments about others, without yet *adopting* the moral point of view himself. Thus, Milo writes:

Even the so called 'amoralist' – i.e., the person who is himself indifferent to matters of moral right and wrong – can make genuinely evaluative judgments about what is right or wrong. Indeed, if the 'amoralist' is a very subtle thinker, he might be called upon by those who are morally concerned to advise them about the moral propriety or impropriety of such things as abortion or 'reverse discrimination.' And if the 'amoralist' understands the criteria that define the moral point of view and understands the feelings and attitudes that make others concerned about whether their behaviour conforms to these criteria, then he may choose (perhaps for a fee) to advise them and hence engage in the process of moral evaluation.⁸

Milo's description suggests, and the common sense confirms, that the mastery of moral terminology and moral rules is not yet enough for being a moral agent. Yet, it will be argued, the principal refusal to assume an evaluative attitude toward others (with qualifications discussed below) is a definitive mark of amorality.

In Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*⁹ a character named Lord Henry Wotton, an otherwise exemplary gentleman, exhibits a peculiar attitude toward other people, an attitude that conspicuously lacks in moral dimension. On one occasion he expresses the viewpoint that guides his judgments and actions throughout the novel, in the following way:

I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take toward life. We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices. I never interfere with what charming people do. If a personality fascinates me, whatever mode of expression that personality selects is absolutely delightful to me.¹⁰

How should we understand such an attitude? Admittedly, one's flagrant refusal to apply moral categories while judging the actions of others can be attributed to two very different mindsets. First, it may be the case that Lord Wotton simply wants to avoid the reputation of a moralist in the pejorative application of this word, as referring to a person unduly concerned with the morals of others. In this case, his refusal to judge may be taken, among other things, as evidence of a praiseworthy scrupulousness when it comes to pronouncing a final judgment on a certain person, since we are rarely in a position to know all the details of the relevant circumstances and have only an indirect access to the motives underlying another's behaviour. Clear recognition of one's own epistemic deficiencies entails that we hardly ever have a sound basis for judgment, which, combined with the (moral) desire to avoid an unjust, hasty verdict, may effectively block one's natural tendency to publicly evaluate the behaviour of others from the moral point of view.

Yet, there is another, less charitable interpretation of Lord Wotton's nonjudgmental attitude, and the one which is perhaps more in line with Oscar Wilde's intentions. On this other reading, his neutral posture with respect to the moral status of other individuals that appear in the novel and their questionable actions is not a sign of a commendable open-mindedness, but should rather be attributed to a serious flaw in his own character. It is plainly, wrong, one might argue, no matter how tolerant one may be, to remain nonjudgmental, for example, with regards to Dorian Gray's irresponsible behaviour which eventually drove a young girl Sibyl Vane to suicide. Robert Fullinwider nicely summarizes the intuitive problem with this kind of attitude when he writes:

Nonjudgmentalism can reflect a thorough-going critical flabbiness. The nonjudgmentalist is unwilling or unable to apply any categories of assessment to the conduct of others. Such a promiscuous nonjudgmentalism that makes no distinction among people, or such an indiscriminate tolerance that makes no objection to anything, isn't humility and generosity in action; it is mindlessness.¹¹

Lord Wotton, then, clearly suffers from a "promiscuous nonjudgmentalism" in the sense described above. Fullinwider is quite right when he condemns this posture and yet he conflates the two explanatory options of this attitude which should be kept separately. A nonjudgmentalist who is *unwilling* to apply the categories of assessment to the conduct of others belongs to a different class and should be treated differently than a person who is *unable* to do so. In the latter scenario we have a case of moral *incompetence* (e.g., young children; mentally retarded persons), which in most contexts calls for the appropriate moral instruction rather than moral condemnation. If the term

'mindlessness' can nonetheless be applied to such cases, it should first be detached from any negative emotive connotations that it is laden with in the ordinary speech.

On the other hand, the unwillingness to pronounce a moral judgment, when the capacity is present and the reluctance in question is not explained by the fear to judge hastily and thus unjustly, is indicative of a serious flaw of character rather than some cognitive inadequacy. There are times when the outspoken moral judgment is not optional, but is called for by the very features of the situation. Failure to judge in such circumstances, then, is a moral failure, and, furthermore, the systematic re-occurrence of this failure shows a motivational structure and a value system of the individual, which can be conveniently captured by the term 'amoral.' We may safely assume then that Lord Wotton's nonjudgmentalism is not the result of moral incompetence at the level of moral concepts, or his ignorance of the appropriate moral rules. It must then be attributed to his conscious unwillingness to look at the world from the moral point of view, and, consequently, not just to his 'mindlessness' but to his *amorality*.

The emphasis on the willingness (or unwillingness) to make other-directed moral judgments needs to be further explained and justified. But a clarification is in order. I understand by the 'other-directed moral judgment' a normative judgment made from the moral point of view directed at persons other than oneself. The other-directed judgment is contrasted here with the self-directed evaluation - a normative judgment directed at one's own actions, intentions or stable dispositions. The distinction between these two types of judgments or beliefs is of some importance and does capture a real difference. This difference can be spelled out in the following way. First, we are typically better situated to access our own motives and intentions, as well as all the relevant circumstances of the action, and thus *a priori* are in a better position to properly evaluate our own behaviour from the point of view of morality as compared with our attempts to evaluate behaviour of others. Secondly, when the critical evaluation concerns one's own actions or overall lifestyle, there are better chances that the appropriate judgment will have behavioural consequences for the person who is both the subject and the object of the moral judgment. To be sure, our critical remarks or moral admonitions aimed at other people may sometimes trigger a behavioural change as well, but in the cases of successful moral criticism the efficaciousness of a judgment is not entirely under our control.¹² Finally, and most importantly, making a sincere moral judgment about oneself (especially a negative one: e.g., "It was wrong for me to do X") requires a certain mental posture - it requires a degree of alienation from one's own interests, desires and preferences, and a capacity to look at oneself from a disinterested, objective perspective. This is never the case when the object of moral criticism is another person. The other person's desires and preferences are not

ours; hence there is no comparable difficulty in morally condemning the actions stemming from those desires and preferences.

It appears then that while self-directed moral judgments might be potentially more accurate and efficient, they are in some sense *harder to make*. A stable disposition to judge one's own choices from the moral point of view signifies a level of moral and intellectual development that goes beyond the mere capacity to voice a moral disapproval about what other people do or fail to do. This common observation prompted a number of scholars to conclude that the other-directed moral judgments are primary from the evolutionary and developmental standpoints, and appear historically prior to the sincere moral appraisals directed at oneself. Edward Westermarck, for example, argued that self-directed moral evaluations are circuitously reached only "through a prior critique upon our fellow-men."¹³ On his analysis, moral self-criticism is essentially a *reflected* capacity – it appears as a further derivation from our natural disposition to pass judgments on others.

If our account is correct, the capacity for other-directed evaluative judgment may exist without the capacity for self-directed moral judgment (e.g., in a child), but not vice versa. Thus a person capable of evaluating his own actions from the point of view of morality is always also capable of making similar judgments about the actions of others, even if he is perhaps more likely to be mistaken (due to ignorance of intentions, circumstances, etc.) in his estimation of the moral status of other people's choices.

I want to suggest further that having a capacity and willingness to make a self-directed moral judgment is at the core of having *morality*.¹⁴ Since a capacity for self-directed judgment implies the capacity for other-directed moral judgment as well, it must follow that a morally concerned person, on occasion, would evaluate the behaviour of others from the moral point of view, voicing either condemnation or approval of their actions. By contraposition, the conspicuous lack of disposition on the part of a mature individual to judge others is indicative of the corresponding lack with regard to the self-directed judgments, and, by extension, signifies the amoral status of that person.

The special importance of self-directed moral judgments for the moral realm has been noted both by philosophers and social scientists. Early on Darwin considered the moral sense to be primarily a faculty of *self-regarding* moral appraisal (i.e., the moral conscience) and claimed that it is "of all the differences between man and the lower animals ... by far the most important."¹⁵ The appearance of the capacity for self-evaluation signifies a major breakthrough in the moral development of a person. This specific capacity can be further seen as a precondition for any other aspect of moral performance and moral evaluation. On the most plausible accounts of the nature of morality as an emergent social phenomenon, it consists of a system

of restrictive rules, limiting the natural freedom of an individual in light of a certain common good. Moreover, the system of restrictive rules does not become a system of *moral* rules unless its requirements are internalized, freely respected by the majority, and are not externally forced upon an individual.¹⁶ Voluntary self-restraint in accordance with some recognized moral prohibition, especially when no threat of sanctions is present, is a distinctive mark of a mature moral agent. But such self-restraint requires that an individual first evaluates his actual or potential behaviour from the third-person perspective, i.e., it requires a well-developed capacity for self-regarding judgments. The impersonal, general moral rule becomes action guiding only when an individual applies it to his own situation, and reformulates it, so to speak, with a first person singular pronoun at the start of the sentence. At this point his, for example, benevolent actions become qualitatively different from the actions of, say, an animal that was trained by punishments and rewards to be nice to strangers.

The capacity for self-regarding judgments is thus at the core of moral development. This capacity does not exhaust all that morality requires (various other cognitive and emotive capacities are perhaps equally indispensable), but it constitutes one of the necessary conditions for being a moral agent. Furthermore, as we noted, the presence of critical attitude aimed at oneself *eo ipso* implies the capacity for other-directed moral judgment.

On the other hand, a persistent nonjudgmentalist (where nonjudgmentalism is not explained by one's fear to judge hastily) betrays his deficiency with respect to his capacity for self-directed judgments as well. If a person is not capable or willing to apply the stable evaluative criteria to others, he is likewise not capable or not willing to apply these behavioural standards to himself. We have seen above that the distinction between 'unwillingness' and 'incapacity' in this context corresponds to the distinction between amorality and moral incompetence or other non-blameworthy cognitive deficiency. A nonjudgmentalist of Lord Wotton's type is a paradigm example of someone who is quite capable of viewing the world from the point of view of moral values, but conscientiously refuses to do so. He lacks an *interest* that the world should be a certain way, i.e., he is in important sense content with the way the world is. As he puts it: "*whatever* mode of expression [charming] personality selects is absolutely delightful to me." But since the world constantly changes, the value structure of a nonjudgmentalist must be flexible enough to fit the world every time it presents itself differently. Like many psychopathic characters described in literature (both fictional and descriptive psychiatric case studies), he lacks what a psychiatrist Richard Jenkins) calls "the inner conflict"¹⁷ – something that most of us experience when our immediate desires are tested by our higher ideals or expectations of society. In Lord Wotton's case the desire to enjoy the originality of expression of a 'charming' person finds no obstacles

in any normative aspects of his worldview, and hence prompts no evaluative judgment about this expression, no matter what its content. This is what Fullinwider captures by the term “critical flabbiness”, and what characterizes an amoral individual more than his immoral actions, or any subjective beliefs about morality. Immorality as a form of outward behaviour is a consequence of refusal to apply evaluative categories to one’s own dispositions, or intentions, which, in turn, is reflected in one’s nonjudgmental attitude toward others.

It remains now to defend the claim that one’s willingness to pass normative judgments on others is a distinctive feature of a morally concerned agent against a certain attempt to downplay the significance and, indeed, the uniqueness of this tendency. I shall address this objection in the last section of this article.

It is a common empirical observation that we take interest in the behaviour of other members of the community, and are often inclined to evaluate their behaviour in normative terms, i.e., approving or disapproving of their actions, even when such behaviour doesn’t affect us directly. This social phenomenon, however familiar, still requires an explanation. Debra Lieberman (2008) takes an evolutionary perspective on the question of the origin of our concern with the behaviour of others. She tries to determine whether this peculiar concern can be explained as contributing to one’s own ‘inclusive fitness’, and thus ultimately reduced to considerations of self-interest (on the assumption that our concern with our own well-being requires no special explanation).

Indeed, in many cases we worry about what others do for one of these two reasons: (1) the behaviour of others may have foreseeable positive effects for our own well-being; and (2) the behaviour of others may have foreseeable negative effects for our well-being. In both cases, our concern with the behaviour of others hardly needs any further discussion. But there yet remains a puzzling third case when we care about what others do in our social environment despite the fact that their actions carry no significant ‘fitness consequences’ for us (and we are also aware of this fact). We tend to evaluate the behaviour of, say, celebrities, and may sometimes be very passionate about our judgments, even though we may be reasonably sure that their misdeeds can have no possible effect on our lives. The same can be said about fictional characters, whose conduct we nonetheless take closely to heart. Moreover, judging the behaviour of others (regardless of their relative proximity to our own situation) from the point of view of moral normative system is at the centre of a specifically moral attitude toward the world. It is also noticed that diagnosed psychopaths are notorious in their utter indifference to actions of others if those actions have no direct bearing on their own well-being.¹⁸

Some have looked at this tendency to judge others as the evidence for the existence of special ‘moral faculty’ which enables us to evaluate our peers in an impartial manner, and which cannot be reduced to any selfish concern. But can this tendency be explained from the evolutionary perspective, Lieberman asks, and if so, what are the psychological mechanisms behind it?

According to Lieberman, there is no need to postulate a special ‘moral sense’, which prompts to evaluate the behaviour of others from a disinterested point of view. Rather, “the evaluation of some third-party behaviours may be performed by the same systems evaluating the costs and benefits of that act *on one’s own* inclusive fitness.”¹⁹ This thesis is then supported by conjectures based on quasi-historical data. Lieberman refers to scientists, e.g., Birdsell, 1968), who believe that throughout much of our evolutionary history we would have lived in relatively small groups, ranging from 25 to 500 members, where the actions of other members would in many cases directly affect the well-being of the rest of the group. If that was indeed the typical condition of the human race for thousands of years, it might account for our present preoccupation with evaluating the third-party behaviour: “[This preoccupation] may be a result of the fact that our mind is equipped to handle ancestral environments that consisted of small social groups where the behaviour of others had an increased probability of impacting one’s inclusive fitness.”²⁰ Thus, what initially appeared to be an outcome of distinctly *moral* sentiments and values, Lieberman argues, is simply a *by-product* the earlier non-moral process of adaptations designed to deal with very different social environments. Common concern with others’ actions, including the interest in regulating it even when nothing is at stake for the person thus concerned, turns out to be an epiphenomenal result of primarily self-interested evolutionary mechanisms after all. Passing moral judgments on distant others is nothing but a biologically entrenched *habit* of the mind, which might as well disappear in the foreseeable future.

Lieberman’s explanation, if adopted, suggests a very interesting picture of the person suffering from ‘promiscuous nonjudgmentalism,’ that is, an amoralist. Presumably, an amoralist still cares about what others do when his own welfare is directly at stake. But he conspicuously lacks a disposition to worry about the actions of others when there is little chance of direct interaction. If Lieberman’s account of the roots of the third-person concern is correct, the amoralist may be either (1)defective in some of the innate cognitive mechanisms that aim at maximizing his own evolutionary fitness or else (2)he may represent a higher stage on the scale of evolutionary development – he is a person who escaped the grip of the vestigial psychological systems which ceased to be fitness enhancing in contemporary social environment. If the former option is true, this cognitive deficiency should manifest itself in other aspects of his behaviour as well. An amoralist

(e.g., a psychopath) would then (on average) be less capable to make outcome calculations, detect dangers, and choose the most efficient means for his goals. The available factual evidence, however, does not support this expectation. In fact, there exists overwhelming empirical data that a great number of individuals suffering²¹ from psychopathy exhibit high levels of general intelligence. Indeed, in some cases the level of intelligence exhibited by a psychopath is significantly higher than that of an average person of a comparable age and social status, and the image of a 'bright sociopath' is widely exploited in popular fiction and film.²² John Deigh's observation is especially relevant here:

Though amoral the psychopaths appear nevertheless to be capable of reasoning, weighting evidence, estimating future consequences, understanding the norms of their society, anticipating the blame and condemnation that result from violation of those norms, and using these cognitive skills to make and carry out their plans.²³

I conclude that an innate or acquired deficiency in psychological mechanisms responsible for maximizing one's own inclusive fitness cannot be cited as an explanation of persistent nonjudgmentalism that some people clearly exhibit. It remains now to consider the second option.

The second explanatory option assumes the truth of Lieberman's account, namely that a tendency to judge others in the circumstances where the consequences of others' behaviour are neutral with respect to our own welfare is often *useless* from the evolutionary perspective, and yet this tendency can be explained as a vestige of an earlier and evolutionary *useful* tendency aimed at our benefit, which is simply carried over to a contemporary social environment where it ceased to fulfil the original function. A nonjudgmentalist, then, is a person who shed this evolutionary baggage, and adapted to modern social conditions *better* than an average person. He is disinclined to judge distant others because he sees no point in doing so, and he is quite right insofar as the evolutionary interests are concerned. There is a short step from here to glorification of an amoralist as a higher kind of being. Nietzsche's exaltation of the *Übermensch* (who can be interpreted as amoralist) is one classic example. A book by Alan Harrington, *Psychopaths* is a relatively recent addition to this trend. In this most interesting presentation the author voices the following view: "Although originally founded upon an anti-social condition, it [psychopathy] offers exciting new alternatives to the way we have lived until now...What was formerly diagnosed mental illness has turned into the new spirit of the age...Conceivably the times are calling for an idealized version of the psychopath as saviour [...]"²⁴— there is hardly a need to extend the quote any

further. I take it that any explanatory theory which implies the view of an amoralist as a higher kind of being, or a being on a higher stage of evolutionary development, is under plenty of pressure to substantiate these counterintuitive consequences by further evidence. Until then we would be justified in rejecting Lieberman's reductionist explanation of why we are often concerned with what other people do.

Our evaluative attitude toward oneself and others reflects a distinct class of values and interests, which are not necessarily connected with personal gain or personal well-being. These specific 'detached' interests which have social significance is what we properly capture by the term 'moral values', and the presence (as well as the absence) of these interests determine the status of a mature agent within the moral universe. The lack of disposition to judge others from moral perspective (with the proviso discussed) is a sure indication that we are dealing with a person who would not apply evaluative categories to his own behaviour as well, and thus a person who truly remains alien to the world of morality. Being 'outside' morality, however, does not yet spare a person from the demands of the moral law, nor does it compromise our practice of holding amoralists morally responsible for their actions. As Bernard Williams rightly observes, "the moral law is more exigent than the law of an actual liberal republic, because it allows no emigration."²⁵ All we can say is that an amoral person refuses to participate in the world of shared values, which put the long-term interests of a society above the immediate interests of an individual.

I argued above that the most efficient way of recognizing an amoralist is by noting his indiscriminate tolerance of what distant others do. Since most of us are often guilty of remaining cold toward news of atrocities and crimes committed at a distant land towards foreign people, it is worth noticing that amoralism comes in degrees, and there is a fine line between being an immature member of a moral community and being a true outsider. It is dangerous to think of amoralists as a rare species, who are 'born that way.' Habit, emotional fatigue, rationalizations of observed sufferings and injustices, combined with intellectual laziness can lead to moral degradation faster than one suspects. Diagnosed psychopaths might be extremes on the continuum, but the danger of gradual slipping in that direction is always present. Being sensitive, and, when need be, *judgmental* toward others, whether near or far away, is one of the ways of keeping one's 'moral fitness'.

Notes

¹ The label of *amoralist* is attached to a psychopath (or sociopath) by Norman Williams (*Introduction to Moral Education*. Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1967, p. 272), Derek Wright (*The Psychology of Moral Behavior*. Baltimore,

Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 208ff), and David Brink (“External Moral Motivation” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 1986, p. 29). For the contrary opinion see Milo, R. *Immorality*, 1984, pp. 60-62.

² e.g., Christopher Cherry talks, for example, of the amoral traditions of the Ik tribe (“Agreement, Objectivity and the Sentiment of Humanity.” *Nature and Conduct*. R. S. Peters, (ed.). St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1975, p. 85); Lever-Tracy and Holton refer to “amoral familism” as a stable (but reprehensible) social practice of some ethnic minorities (“Exchange, Reciprocity and Amoral Familism.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 27, 2001, pp. 81-99), and *The Jerusalem Post* has published not long time ago an editorial entitled “Paris the Amoral” (July 22, 2004, p. 15).

³ There are notable exceptions to this generalization. For instance, Cosmides and Tooby refer to natural selection as “amoral process” which can yet produce “moral intuitions” (“Can a General Deontic Logic Capture the Facts of Human Moral Reasoning?” *Moral Psychology*, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), Cambridge, MIT Press, 2008, p. 54). In all those cases, apparently, the meaning of the term ‘amoral’ is closer to that of a purely descriptive ‘non-moral’, and does not bear any negative connotations with it. The same applies to Ronald Milo’s denotation of little children as “amoral agents” (*Ibid.*, p. 59) which in that case refers to their *pre-moral* status.

⁴ R. Garner, *Beyond Morality*, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1994.

⁵ I. Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Allen Wood and G. Giovanni (trans. & eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1793/1998.

⁶ R. Fullinwider, ‘On Moralism.’ *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 22, 2005

⁷ Milo himself attributes this distinction to Frankena.

⁸ Milo, R., *Immorality*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, p. 179. Psychiatrist Hervey Cleckley supplies factual confirmation of this possibility in his case study of a young psychopath named Anna. Interestingly enough, Cleckley observes, during Anna’s long and versatile criminal career, she, among other things, taught a Sunday school class, and according to observers, “her teachings were ethically admirable and she gave a strong impression of sincerity” (*The Mask of Sanity*, The New American Library, New York, 1982, p. 60).

⁹ Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York, Dolphin Books, 1890/1960

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 84.

¹¹ R. Fullinwider, ‘On Moralism.’ *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 22, 2005, p. 113.

¹² At the very least: we are *more* in control of our behaviour, than that of other people – even it may be granted that our own actions are not always *entirely* under our control.

¹³ E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, Macmillan, London, vol. 2, 1906/1932, p. 123.

¹⁴ It is important to keep the distinction between capacity and willingness to make a moral judgment in mind here. This difference becomes especially relevant in discussions of moral responsibility. If an amoralist (e.g., a psychopath) is truly incapable of controlling his behaviour in accordance with requirements of morality, then it makes little sense to hold him morally accountable. Elsewhere (2008) I argue that it is *not* the case with most cases of psychopathy.

¹⁵ C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Penguin Books, London, 1871/2004, p. 120.

¹⁶ We might recall the classic terminology of social agreement, mutual contract or covenant, which connotes the voluntary acceptance of certain obligations. See also C. Wilson, *Moral Animals: Ideals and Constraints in Moral Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004.

¹⁷ “I should like to propose that psychopaths differ from psychoneurotics and indeed contrast with them in their most important characteristics. The typical psychopath and the typical psychoneurotic are, in some important regards, on opposite sides of the normal. Where the psychoneurotic suffers from excessive inner conflict, the psychopath makes others suffer from his *lack* of inner conflict,” Jenkins, p. 319.

¹⁸ Cleckley describes a certain psychopath named Max and observes that Max was “unfamiliar with the primary facts or data of what might be called personal values and is altogether incapable of understanding such matters. It was impossible for him to take even the slightest interest in the tragedy or joy in the striving of humanity as presented in serious literature or art. He was also indifferent to all these matters in life itself. Beauty and ugliness, except in a very superficial sense, goodness, evil, love, horror, and humor had no actual meaning, no power to move him” (Ibid, p. 26).

¹⁹ D. Lieberman, ‘Moral Sentiments Relating to Incest..’ *Moral Psychology*, W. Sinnott-Armstrong, (ed.), MIT Press, Cambridge, vol. 1, 2008, p. 196.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The use of the word ‘suffering’ in this context is idiomatic rather than literal. As Martha Stout rightly observes, “sociopathy stands alone as a ‘disease’ that causes no *dis-ease* for the person who has it, no subjective discomfort. Sociopaths are often quite satisfied with their lives” (*The Sociopath Next Door*, Broadway Books, New York, 2005, p. 12).

²² e.g., Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971, based on Anthony Burgess' novel.

²³ J. Deigh, 'Empathy and Universalizability,' *Ethics*, v. 105, 1995, p. 743.

²⁴ A. Harrington, *Psychopaths*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1972, pp. 48-50.

²⁵ B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 178.

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“Victory is Mine!”
C. Montgomery Burns and Stewart Gilligan Griffin
On the Lighter Side of World Domination

Richard J. Piatt

Abstract

Evil has been a staple of cartoon comedy since animation began. Cartoons have consistently held up a mirror to the cultural context in which they were created, showing us both the laughable traits and the more serious and socially reprehensible parts of social life. It should come as no surprise, then, that world domination would crop up as a recurring theme at the end of the twentieth century. The wildly popular and controversial television programmes the Simpsons and Family Guy boast two of the most popular and potentially most evil characters seen on mainstream network television. Montgomery Burns and Stewie Griffin, while they represent humanity at opposite ends of the life cycle also embody the seven deadly sins and Machiavellian prowess with a wit unmatched by many, if any other animated characters. How do these characters embody the seven deadly sins? In what ways are they truly the Machiavellians *par excellence*? And what does all this say about those of us who faithfully watch their failed attempts at world domination?

Key Words: Machiavelli, evil genius, Simpsons, Family Guy

“It seems today that all you see is violence in movies and sex on T.V.” So we are told in the opening lyrics to the highly successful FOX television animated programme *Family Guy*. In fact, while sex and violence are replete on broadcast television, two of FOX television’s most successful programmes, *Family Guy* and *The Simpsons* boast two of the most powerful and arguably most evil characters on television. This is a BOLD statement to say the least given the violence of characters like Tony Soprano and countless other murders, rapists, extortionists and so called “evil geniuses” that pepper crime dramas, soap operas and made for television movies. Yet, Mr. C. Montgomery “Monty” Burns and Master Stewart Gilligan “Stewie” Griffin not only embody to varying degrees all of the classic seven deadly sins, but they appear to enthusiastically subscribe to Niccolo Machiavelli’s princely advice. How is it that such a claim could be made let alone take seriously? Let’s begin by looking at these seemingly innocent animated males and their embodiment of the seven deadly sins.

“To punish you for your desertion, it is company policy to give you the plague.”¹

According to the official *The Simpsons* website, Springfield U.S.A.’s resident billionaire Montgomery Burns is “More misunderstood than evil”² Creator Matt Groening states, “As owner of the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant, he has been able to control local elections, manage a championship-winning baseball team, hold a chair on the board of Springfield University and build a contraption large enough to block out the sun and plunge the town into complete darkness”.³ Baseball aside, he has also attempted to drain the sea of fish to power his recycling plant, turned the local church into a corporate advertising nightmare, drained the local school of funds, and dumped nuclear waste in Lake Springfield. Misunderstood, perhaps, but make no mistake about his iniquity: Monty Burns manages to embrace all of the seven deadliest with more vigour than an old man who “weighs no more than his clothes and keys” should be able to muster.

Starting with the least indulged of his sins, Mr. Burns occasionally lusts after some of the town’s women, married or otherwise. He has gone so far as to arrange for the kidnapping of Welsh crooner Tom Jones in order to impress the programme’s matriarch Marge Simpson. Failing to win her from her husband Homer, Burns eventually turns his lustful gaze on Marge’s mother and sister. Equally slim in the practice department is the sin of gluttony; which he uses more as a tool against his enemies (perceived or real) than an indulgence of his own. “That’s right, keep eating,” Burns says while watching Homer on CCTV. “Little do you know you’re drawing ever closer to the poison donut! There is a poison one, isn’t there, Smithers?”⁴

Sloth in the traditional sense of laziness is not an accurate description of Mr. Burns, but if one turns to Aquinas who understands sloth more as “oppressive sorrow” or a “vice that opposes the virtue of joyful charity,”⁵ then Mr Burns is full of it. He absolutely cannot stomach the happiness of others when he is not. While he has occasionally shown compassion and mercy, his natural inclination is to destroy anyone and anything that in any way embarrasses or offends him. His exercise of such sloth is not limited to humans, as is evidenced in the episode, “The Burns and the Bees.” As he leaves the construction site of his new arena, what he himself calls the embodiment of the “American Dream: a billionaire using public funds to build a playground for the rich and powerful,” he declares, “I can not be stopped!” As he turn he, walks (slowly) into a tree and falls to the ground. Embarrassed and outraged he glares at the tree and orders his employees to “kill his acorns and make him watch!” In fact, it is his sloth that more often than not opens the door to the sins he embodies the most.

While he himself is barely able to lift a baseball bat by himself, he often orders his minion Mr. Smithers to exact physical revenge on others, is

blindly jealous of the joy of others (note his lust for Marge is combined with jealousy of Homer for being the object of her affection), and his pride in being the most powerful man in town and one of the wealthiest on earth is quite clear.

Which leaves his avarice. There is nothing that Montgomery Burns does not desire, and nothing short of control over all of Springfield will do. In the episode, “Who Shot Mr. Burns: Part One,” he goes so far as to use his capital to construct a device which will eternally block out the sun, thus making all of Springfield constantly dependent upon the power supply under his sole control. He gives no thought to any consequences his actions will have on either the local economy or the environment, thinking only of his short term personal gain. No one seems to be able to stop him. Having already succeeded in making the citizens of Springfield bow under his power, all he has left to do is take a lollipop from baby Maggie Simpson, an act of avarice rooted in his pride and lust for power. It is this act, however, that proves to be his downfall and forever cements baby Maggie, who shoots him, as his arch-nemesis. Ultimately, while he has elevated avarice to an art form and indulges to various degrees in all of the other deadly sins, Mr. Burns remains little more than a sharp critique of the venture capitalist and the means such a one will take to reach his personal goals; that is in comparison to the malevolence of Stewie Griffin.

Stewie: Machiavelli! You've told me nothing I don't already know! Ah Sun Zhu's *The Art of War*.

Lois: Stewie, those books aren't for babies. Here. Watch the Teletubbies.

Stewie: How dare you! That book may hold the key to my enslaving of all mankind.⁶

In her 2007 essay “MMMYEZ: Stewie and the Seven Deadly Sins,” Sharon M. Kaye goes to lengths to connect baby Stewie to lust, gluttony, sloth, avarice, anger, envy, and pride. Rather than simply repeat her analysis here, in which she describes Stewie as a poster boy for St. Augustine and Original Sin,⁷ suffice it to say that her argument is compelling. Stewie does indeed exhibit sexual desire and behaviours well beyond his age, uses food as a weapon against his obese brother and a tool for gaining affection from a pre-school girl, “opposes joyful charity” by showing “malicious indignation” when his mother (or anyone else) treats him according to his chronological age, combines capitalistic greed with “gangster” style violence, can become enraged when situations and plots fail to go as planned, has actually killed on more than one occasion, is jealous for the attention of others, and takes great pride in his genius and ability to outwit nearly everyone. As Kaye points out,

both Augustine and Foulcut consider pride as being predominately about power; and Stewie 's *raison d'être* is ultimately the pursuit of power!⁸

Stewie appears to have been born bad and, if Augustine is correct in his analysis of the human need to be released from the bonds of original sin, then Stewie needs a GREAT deal of God's grace. After all, this Machiavelli reading terror is truly an *enfant terrible*. He has waged playground wars with his nemesis and half brother Bertram, vaporized a cult leader he feared was attempting to put him back in the womb, and actually succeeded in building both a time machine and a weather control device. Yet it is his murderous attention on his mother Lois Griffin that cements his place in cartoon history. Stewie's relationship to Lois is many ways even more sinister than the relationship between Damien and his adopted mother in the 1976 horror film *The Omen*. In fact, in a scene from the episode entitled "Death is a Bitch," which is reminiscent of the moment Damien hits his mother with a tricycle, causing her to fall over the balcony with life threatening injuries, Stewie manages to push Lois down the stairs with his big wheel, cuts the legs off a wardrobe which lands on her, and hurls a live hand grenade which detonates on Lois. However, since Death is laid up with a broken ankle, no one can die; Lois walks away unable to see that her baby caused her "accident."

Why does Stewie want Lois dead? Well, as he explains in "15 Minutes of Shame," he does not so much want her dead as "not living anymore." To paraphrase his first lines in episode one,⁹ when he is working on a mind control device cleverly disguised as a toy gun (we discover in subsequent episodes that the device is real), "[she has] impeded [his] my work since the day [he] escaped from [her] wretched womb!" Lois serves a practical purpose for Stewie (and Robert Sharp suggests that she is the Ego to Stewie's Id), but one he would rather not admit.¹⁰ It is not until the 100th episode that Stewie actually succeeds in his two greatest ambitions: killing his mother and world domination. Yes, baby Stewie succeeds in killing Lois (or so he thinks) and through an ingenious plan to control the world's energy supplies (reminiscent of Monty Burns and his giant sun blocking device) takes over the world itself.

In a Gilbert and Sullivan take off, World Leader Stewie bans sex, Disney straight to DVD films, limits the country's milk supply to that from actress Hillary Swank's breasts, orders citizens to throw apples at his father and reveals a list of other persons whom he has had quite enough of for their various social and cultural sins. Through these incredibly absurd and very funny laws, Stewie succeeds in the rather serious business demanding population control, placing constraints on the means of cultural production, limiting the supply of food staples and the public humiliation (or death) his enemies. In so doing he believes he is the embodiment of Machiavellian *virtú*; namely "that quality which enables a prince to withstand the blows of Fortune, to attract the goddess's favour, and to rise in consequence to the

heights of princely fame, winning honour and glory for himself and security for his government.”¹¹

Ultimately, the audience discovers that this entire two part episode was Stewie using a computer simulator to determine what might happen if he actually went through with his plans to kill Lois and take over the world. What he discovers is that Machiavelli was correct in his assertion that a tyrant will ultimately not make a successful leader. Yet our evil genius is undeterred in his plans for global domination, only temporarily stalled, for a careful look at previous episodes illustrate that he does indeed understand Machiavelli’s princely virtù. Stewie consistently adapts to his situation so as to appear as good or as bad as is necessary to achieve his goal (note his deal to be good in order to obtain plutonium from Santa Claus...who delivers the goods!), keeps his goals of world domination and the matricide close to the centre of all his actions, and learns to analyze the effects of his actions and adapt accordingly, again to obtain his stated objectives.

But why is any of this important? Do these characters and the cartoon worlds they inhabit say anything of worth about us and our daily reality? Surely our time at this gathering is better spent discussing the real evils of the world enacted on a daily basis by the wicked of the earth? But perhaps that *is* the point of the absolute absurdity of both Monty and Stewie, particularly the later. While *The Simpsons* is certainly social satire, and while Montgomery Burns does embody to varying degrees the seven deadly sins, he remains mainly a laughable caricature of capitalist greed. On the other hand, *Family Guy* and Stewie in particular take things to a level of absurdity, which makes us laugh and dismiss what we witness as mindless drivel. But it is the fact that no character (save the talking, alcoholic family dog) really takes Stewie’s intelligence and dare I say sinfulness seriously (he obviously embodies Augustine’s argument that infants are capable of personal sin). This dismissal of his evil genius makes him effective and enables him to plot his mother’s demise and study the art of war. In an interpretation of Jean Baudrillard’s remarks that, “Disneyland is presented as imaginary *in order* to make us *believe* that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real,” J. Jeremy Wisniewski claims that *Family Guy*’s absurdity masks the cultural caricatures we ourselves have become.¹² By seeing Stewie as an absurd creation, we can forget that dictators were once babies, and by dismissing the utter folly of the Griffin family unit, we can pretend that our world is a little more real.

Lois cannot see, as can the audience, that her youngest child is a dangerous terror. Her dismissal of his behaviour as simply part of his childhood ignorance rings true to those who choose not to see, but rings false to Brian the dog as well as the many victims of Stewie’s atrocities (the vaporized cult leader and the babysitters murdered boyfriend, to name only two). We see, and we laugh. By mocking and elevating Stewie’s faults, we

can dismiss our own failures to our own children. By seeing only a frail old fool in Mr. Burns, we can dismiss his corporate and social sins. By refusing to look in the mirror held up to us by the creators of these cartoon evil beings, we refuse to see, as does Lois, our own faults, failings and – indeed- our own sins in a fit of laughter. Or am I reading too much into all of this? Perhaps I should lighted up and continue to enjoy the absurd rides down Spooner Street and Evergreen Terrace? Or is that exactly what the Stewie's of the world want; for us to be lulled into a false sense of security? Perhaps we would be wise to heed Stewie's threatening promise to Lois: "when you least expect it, your uppance will come!"

Notes

¹Mr. Burns to Homer in "And Maggie Makes Three."

²http://www.thesimpsons.com/bios/bios_townspeople_burns.htm

³ibid.

⁴"Homer's Triple Bypass."

⁵S. Kaye, 'MMMYEZ: Stewie and the Seven Deadly Sins', in *Family Guy and Philosophy: A Cure for the Petarded*, J. Jeremy Wisnewski, ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 2007, pp.79.

⁶"A Hero Sits Next Door."

⁷S. Kaye, p 78.

⁸S. Kaye, p 84.

⁹"Death has a Shadow."

¹⁰R. Sharpe, 'The Ego is a Housewife Named Lois' in *Family Guy and Philosophy: A Cure for the Petarded*, J. Jeremy Wisnewski, ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 2007, p. 178.

¹¹Q. Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford, 2000, p. 40.

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Evil Laughter: The Joy in Evil Throughout History

Robert W. Butler

Abstract

Humour is an important and little-examined facet of humanity's efforts to comprehend evil. While no single theory adequately explains all examples of Humour, the moral evil of Nazi Germany and the natural evil of the Black Death offer examples to demonstrate how laughter has historically been used to resist, ameliorate, or accommodate evil.

Key Words: Humour, evil, laughter, joke, moral evil, natural evil, Nazi, Hitler, Black Death

Our annual conference has acquired something of a reputation. A year ago, the staid, scholarly group meeting next door (Law and the State) found itself constantly interrupted by gales of laughter coming from "Evil 9." They were at first irritated, but later helplessly bemused. "Why are the evil people all laughing?" they would ask plaintively when we gathered every evening at the Stieglbrau bar. They were more than wistful (evidently, the law is a fairly dry subject); they were mystified: what could we possibly find to laugh about in such a dark subject? Earlier meetings had regarded us the same way. When we coincided with a conference on Love, our group quickly and heartlessly divided attendees into two basic types: 'warm and fuzzy' (a.k.a. the 'shiny happy people all around'), and 'dark and twisty.' Is it necessary to tell you which group had more interesting colleagues and fascinating panels, which group stayed out later in the evening or had livelier debates in the bar - in short, which group had more fun? It was 'the evil people,' of course.

So why *are* the evil people all laughing? Always on the lookout for unexamined facets of our subject (and desperate for an interesting paper topic that would justify our attendance at this thoroughly enjoyable conference) we decided to look into the connection between evil and laughter. What is the function of Humour in the face of evil? Who laughs, and why? What are their motives, and do these align with current thinking about Humour as a subject? At the intersection of evil and Humour, what do we find, and what might this tell us about ourselves?

Scholars traditionally divide evil into a variety of categories. Such theodical hairsplitting can be continued almost ad infinitum, but in general three basic types are posited. The first is metaphysical evil: in philosophical terms, anything created is by definition less perfect than its creator, and so is

to some extent not good, or evil. This is a category in which jokes and Humourous stories are hard to find: ontological philosophers seem to be not merely dry, but Humourless overall (present company excepted, of course.) A second category is moral evil, or radical evil: the infliction of suffering on one human by another, or 'the evil men do' (to quote Shakespeare slightly out of context.) Finally there is natural evil, or suffering resulting from unplanned natural phenomenon such as a storm or earthquake. The categories of moral and natural evil are the focus of this paper.

Analyses of Humour are of limited use in this investigation. To quote the famous American author E. B. White, "analyzing Humour is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested, and the frog dies."¹ Beliefs about why we laugh range from the biological (it is a means of expressing aggression or dominance) to the philosophical (it is a way of sharing intimacies and affirming group identity.)² Historically speaking, laughter was one method of establishing our humanity. According to Aristotle, laughter appeared in infants on the fortieth day, which marked their completion as human beings.³ The earliest known collection of jokes, the *Philogelos*, appeared toward the close of the classical era, about the 4th or 5th century; its focus seems to be on stock figures that recur throughout time, such as the sex-starved woman, the foolish husband, and the *scholastikos* or absent-minded professor.⁴ Humour in medieval Europe seems to have been underappreciated; at all events, it went largely unrecorded. This is something of an optical illusion, of course; songs such as *Gaudeamus igitur* suggest that the young especially enjoyed laughing (often at the old.) With the Renaissance literary references to Humour revived, albeit slowly at first.⁵ Current theories explaining Humour divide into four basic explanations: (1) superiority: we laugh at others because we feel superior to them; (2) incongruity: ambiguous or unexpected meanings produce startled laughter; (3) ambivalence: conflicting emotions produce laughter, an outward sign of an inner conflict; (4) release; a socially acceptable way of letting out taboo feelings.⁶

Glimpses of Humour's power are persistent. The Greek philosophers (especially Plato) seem to have been the first to try and regulate laughter, fearing its impact on society⁷; to the Roman elite, such as Cicero, Humour was like salt – a very little went a long way. In the middle ages, claim some scholars, the Church frowned on Humour (because of its association with the element of fire, the realm of the devil.)⁸ The Puritans of the 16th and 17th centuries hated jokes – witness Shakespeare's caustic reference to their virtuous attitude toward 'cakes and ale' in *Twelfth Night*. And in the 19th century, Mark Twain wrote that nothing so weakens or destroys a humbug as laughter.⁹ Not recently, it would seem, have we become conscious of the role of Humour in undermining authority structures.

When those structures are widely perceived as evil, what form does the Humour take?

Among the most evil structures of the modern world will be ranked the government of Nazi Germany. Some efforts at Humour regarding Hitler's reign will be remembered by everyone; Charlie Chaplin's famous film, *The Great Dictator* (1940), is a classic Humourous take on the German leader, and more recently life in the camps has been portrayed in *Life is Beautiful* (1997.) But both exist in a space apart from their subjects: the one because of time, the other because of distance. What did those unable to remove themselves from Germany, and without the ability to create a grand cinematic statement, laugh about when they considered the Nazis?

In January of 1940 the Australian newspaper *The Age* ran a story entitled "Jokes That Are on Hitler." The paper claimed that "a grim type of Humour is circulating in Germany; it is born of suffering and depression; its general theme the time when Germany will be free from the Nazi regime."¹⁰ It referenced two books that collected jokes and Humourous responses to the new rulers: Count Alfred Hessenstein's *The Joke's on Hitler*, and G. Ward Price's *Year of Reckoning*. Price's book, suggested *The Age*, recorded jokes from Germany that "have a basis of respect," and which the party leadership tolerated "in order to keep up the morale of the people." Hessenstein's, in contrast, featured far more bitter jokes, "underground whispers from the land of the concentration camp." Humour as a response to evil in pre-war Germany, then, divided into two categories: from those who were a part of the system, and from those who were its victims.

One popular joke began when the Fuhrer's car ran over a dog. Hitler ordered the driver to go up and apologize to the owner; a few minutes later, the driver returned laden with food and wine:

"I rapped at the door of the house, my Fuhrer," he explained. "Heil Hitler! The dog is dead," I said. "Good gracious," exclaimed the man, "what great news. Take this to celebrate it."¹¹

Such anonymous jokes, widespread at the street level, could not often be controlled. But more prominent displays of Humour could get the teller into serious trouble. One quip, from a popular German comedian, demonstrated the risks involved in making fun of the Nazis:

[He] told an appreciative audience that Dachau, the concentration camp, was "like a fortress, surrounded by barbed-wire entanglements, with a moat round it, live wire, protected by machine guns and heavily-armed sentries, and yet - it's funny, isn't it - I managed to get in."¹²

Humour such as this was common in the context of the early years of the war. Later on, as the war news turned increasingly dire, jokes could get the teller killed. German the courts enforced laws against malicious Humour. In 1944 a female munitions worker was executed for “undermining the war effort” via this uninspired gibe:

Hitler and Goring are standing on top of Berlin’s radio tower. Hitler says he wants to do something to cheer up the people of Berlin. “Why don’t you just jump?” suggests Goring.¹³

Another collection of Humour in the Nazi period (Rudolph Herzog, *Heil Hitler, Das Schwein is Tot!* [*Heil Hitler, The Pig is Dead!*]) is more recent, and therefore has a more sophisticated point of view about the regime. It begins with a repeat of the joke about Hitler running over an animal - but in this version, it’s a pig, and the driver returns not just laden with gifts but already drunk from the party. The Humour in this collection is more pointed and cynical. The bitterness is about a lack of equity in the regime’s treatment of its supporters; jokes were common about party leaderships’ foibles (Hermann Goering’s love of medals for instance, or Joseph Goebbels’s short stature.)

Nevertheless there was no true opposition displayed by such jokes; they allowed one to vent frustration, not to prepare a rebellion. Despite their faintly subversive nature, the jokes demonstrate two related points: (1) there was no evidence of a mass-movement to overthrow Hitler; and (2) the population of Germany was never hypnotized by Hitler to the point of blind obedience; as Herzog points out, hypnotized zombies are incapable of making jokes. Humour demonstrates awareness. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the jokes about concentration camps began almost as soon as the camps themselves were open. And jokes told by Jews indicated early knowledge of, if not death camps, at least mortal peril:

[Hitler is] rescued from drowning by two boys, one an Aryan, the other a Jew. Gratefully he promised to meet any wish they made. The Aryan asked for and was granted a motorcycle; the Jew asked for a State funeral. Hitler was amazed. “What do you mean?” he asked. The Jew boy [sic] answered: “They will kill me at home when they know what I have done.”¹⁴

And:

Two Jews are about to be shot. Suddenly the order comes to hang them instead. One says to the other, "You see, they're running out of bullets."¹⁵

Whether originating from German rulers or Jewish victims, such jokes were widespread enough to indicate how desperate the times were, and served as a way of reducing at least minimally the fear and terror the times inspired.

In addition to moral evil inflicted by individuals, mankind must also face the natural evil inflicted by the universe. Unpredicted storms or sudden disastrous earthquakes might strike hundred or even thousands; but by far the greatest natural calamity faced by humanity is epidemic disease. Europe's greatest epidemic was the 'Black Death' of the fourteenth century. Bubonic plague arrived in Italy in 1348 and rapidly swept across Europe. Over the next five years, between one third and one half of the continent's population died a horrible death. In a time when medical science struggled to explain, let alone stop, the ride of the first horseman of the apocalypse, what role did Humour play?

The impact of the Black Death on European culture is well documented. Among the most famous literary responses is Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a loosely joined collection of a hundred short tales told by refugees. In one sense, the entire book is a response to the plague. Ten young Florentines flee the city and wait out the epidemic in an isolated villa. To pass the time, each tells ten stories to distract the others from the terror of the outside world. Humour is used, then, to keep fear and panic at bay.

But Humour was more than simply a pretext for a book. The impact of the plague on Florence is famously described in the introduction, and it is here that the different facets of Humour begin to appear. Boccaccio describes the reactions of the Florentines to the disease. Some, he writes, shut themselves up in their homes, and tried to live quietly and moderately. But, says the author,

Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking excessively, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease; so they practiced to the fullest what they believed by going from one tavern to another all day and night, drinking to excess; and they would often make merry in private homes, doing everything that pleased or amused them the most.¹⁶

A widespread reaction to the plague, therefore, is frantic, almost manic laughter and enjoyment. Boccaccio makes clear that he does not approve; many victims were buried without mourners, because

most relatives were somewhere else, laughing, joking and amusing themselves; even the women learned this practice too well....¹⁷

Because of the plague, public order is breaking down. This is evidenced by the use of inappropriate, class-based Humour: one of the aristocratic narrators speaks with scorn of

the scum of our city, excited with the scent of our blood, who call themselves *becchini* and who ride all over the place on horseback, mocking everything, and with their disgusting songs adding insult to our injuries.¹⁸

The plague had released dangerous laughter that unsettled an established, orderly hierarchy - precisely as Greek philosophers and Roman rhetoricians had feared it could.

However, Humour was also recognized as a preventive therapeutic strategy against the disease. Gentle pleasure and moderate happiness were believed to strengthen the body, and enable it to withstand the plague. Boccaccio thus writes that some lived moderately, "entertaining themselves with music and other pleasures that they could arrange."¹⁹ And the leader of Boccaccio's small group of soon-to-be refugees, the noblewoman Pampinea, suggests to her followers that they

take what enjoyment, what happiness, and what pleasure we can without in any way going beyond the bonds of reason....enjoying what happiness and merriment these times permit.²⁰

Humour, as preventative praxis was widely acknowledged in less literary but perhaps (given the times) more eagerly read plague tracts. These pamphlets, written by physicians, described what the plague was, how to avoid it, and what to do if you caught it. Based on contemporary medical understanding derived from Avicenna, the tracts focused on balancing Galen's four bodily Humours, by means of carefully adjusting six non-body influences on them. These influences were called "non-naturals," meaning non-corporal influences; things such as air, proper food and drink, moderate exercise and rest. One of them, the *accidentia animae*, corresponds roughly

to the modern concept of “emotion” - and it is here that we find a role for Humour.²¹

The earliest plague tract was written in 1348 by a physician named Jacme d’Agramont, as the Black Death approached his Catalan city of Lerida. D’Agramont advised his readers to cultivate “gaiety and joyousness” in a temperate manner, so as to avoid the fear that imagination could inspire; for “from imagination alone, can come almost any malady.”²² “Live in joy and gladness as much as possible,” noted another tract from the same year, produced by the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris.²³ Another tract noted specifically that, if one were overwhelmed by fear, recovery from the plague would be impossible.²⁴ How should one achieve the proper ‘joy and gladness’? Beyond religious meditation, the physicians recommended music, songs, stories, pleasant companionship, and cultivating generally a “merry and cheerful” character.²⁵

Laughter in the age of the Black Death suggests a number of facets worthy of attention. First of all, the reaction of “eat, drink, and be merry” is an age-old response, and not a very constructive one. Second, the loosening of social controls as a result of the epidemic allowed Humour to be used in a divisive manner, pitting rulers against ruled. Finally, the medical response of the plague tracts is most interesting. In many other plague episodes, earlier and later, where frantic Humorous reactions were noticeable, but were not used for medicinal purposes.²⁶

Humour in the face of these two examples of evil, moral and natural, offers interesting points for consideration. To begin with, none of the four current theories explaining laughter seem to suffice. Superiority? - people felt afraid of the Nazis and the plague, not superior to them. Incongruity? - we see this to some degree in the ‘dog is dead’ joke, but it’s absent in the Florentine plague. Ambivalence? - conflicting emotions certainly are in evidence in both cases, but this seems a description of a condition, not an analysis of motive. Release? - this usually refers to personal inhibitions, not political restrictions. No single theory about laughter adequately explains the Humour we see.

Second, Humour can fulfill a variety of functions. It can oppose evil, or it can accommodate evil - it is easier to laugh than to think, easier to chuckle than oppose. Humour can be simply a way of distancing ourselves from evil. Laughter becomes an anodyne for the toothache that won’t go away.

Finally, the nature of Humour appears to be different in these two cases of moral and natural evil. Laughter serves different functions in both cases. It would seem that the crucial difference is human agency. Moral evil calls out for a personal decision, a response, whether of opposition or of accommodation; natural evil can be ameliorated, opposed, even accommodated, but the moral question is absent.

The ancient Egyptians saw Humour as creative force. One legend of creation says that the world began when the god laughed. Out of the laughter, order was imposed on chaos - and the universe was born.²⁷ Perhaps there is a clue here; we need a pattern, however frail or fragile, to make sense of the universe, and of the evil within it. Humour achieves that goal. Whether it serves to oppose, accommodate or ignore, Humour is a significant response to evil. The ancient philosophers were right; Humour *is* what makes us human, for better or for worse.

Notes

¹ Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves, *Only Joking: What's So Funny About Making People Laugh?*, Gotham Press, New York, 2006, p.78.

² Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1997, p. 547; Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Laughing Matters*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, pp. 28-29.

³ Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995, p. 5. Carr and Greeves note (p. 18) that physicians today suggest that babies laugh at four months.

⁴ Jim Holt, *Stop Me If You've Heard This: A History and Philosophy of Jokes*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 2008, pp. 9-11. Jokes about breaking wind seem to be a recurring theme; the oldest goes back 1,500 years (p. 43.)

⁵ Holt, *Stop Me*, p. 15.

⁶ Carr and Greeves, *Only Joking*, pp. 81-89.

⁷ Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, p. 55.

⁸ Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, pp. 61, 114, 75.

⁹ Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *The Age*, "Jokes That Are On Hitler," 20 January 1940; accessed on 27 February 2009 at

http://150.theage.com.au/view_bestofarticle.asp?straction=update&intt...;

¹¹ *The Age*, "Jokes That Are On Hitler;" quoting from Hessenstein book

¹² *The Age*, "Jokes That Are On Hitler;" quoting from Hessenstein book.

¹³ *Spiegel Online*, "Did You Hear the One About Hitler?" 30 August 2006; accessed on 27 February 2009 at

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,druck-434399,00.html>

¹⁴ *The Age*, "Jokes That Are On Hitler."

¹⁵ *Spiegel Online*, "Did You Hear the One About Hitler?"

¹⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1972, trans. by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella, p. 8.

¹⁷ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 10.

¹⁸ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 14.

- ¹⁹ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 8.
- ²⁰ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 15.
- ²¹ Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1982, pp. 40-43.
- ²² Olson, *Literature*, p.170. Pliny had said much the same thing a millennium earlier: see Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, p. 79.
- ²³ Olson, *Literature*, pp. 168-69.
- ²⁴ Olson, *Literature*, p. 171.
- ²⁵ Olson, *Literature*, p. 172.
- ²⁶ Modern medicine sometimes takes a similar approach, recognizing the therapeutic value of laughter: compare the career of Dr. Hunter Adams, and the movie based on his life starring Robin Williams titled *Patch Adams*. Carr and Greeves, *Only Joking*, p. 22.
- ²⁷ Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, p. 1.

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Is the Big Bad Wolf Really Bad or Just Misunderstood?

Cynthia Jones

Abstract

The werewolf has long been believed to be the essence of evil or even the form of Satan himself. However, the wolf or the werewolf in folklore is not necessarily the evil creature that society believes it to be. Society turns the werewolf into an evil being because they refuse to see the natural wickedness that exists within man. The werewolf becomes shunned because he has some mystical knowledge on how to change his form that the rest of humanity does not have. According to Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*, humans have a natural aggression that society represses and it is through this repression that they become discontent. The werewolf then becomes a being that is able to act out his/her natural aggression during its wolf phase and then is able to return to society after having turned back into its human form. The wolf has become the symbol of the evil that lurks within men, that is kept under lock and key, just waiting to get out.

Looking specifically at the *lais*, *Bisclavret*, by Marie de France, the folktale *Manawee* collected by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, and also the Greek myth of Lycaon, the Arcadian king, it becomes evident that there is a natural wickedness inside man. In this paper I will argue that the werewolf is actually the inverse mirror of man himself that he is unwilling to face and also examine how it may be possible to reconcile this dialectic within man. Humanity wants to keep itself safe within the confines of society, ignoring the natural wicked tendencies that are a part of man. Man is essentially the inverse of the werewolf, wearing its fur (wicked side) on the inside, hiding it from the daylight. The werewolf wears his fur freely on the outside, giving into his wicked nature. So, the real question then becomes, how does man face the wolf that is within?

Key Words: Werewolf, folklore, literature, Greek myth, Manawee, Bisclavret, Lycaon

1. Introduction

Often in folklore and literature, it is the wolf or the werewolf that becomes the symbol for man's inner animal nature or wickedness. The werewolf has become the symbol for wickedness, but the werewolf or wolf, is not necessarily the evil creature that society makes it out to be. In this paper, I will be discussing the use and role of the werewolf and how it represents man's inner animal nature by looking at three different folktales:

‘The Story of Lycaon,’ from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the Breton tale, *Bisclavret* by Marie de France, and an African-American folktale, *Manawee*, collected by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. However, before discussing the role of the werewolf, one must first discuss the true nature of man, and then figure out why it is the werewolf that has become the symbol of human wickedness.

2. The Nature of Man

What is the true nature of man? This is a question that men have been dealing with ever since the existence of society began. According to Rousseau, man, outside the contexts of society, is peaceful. In his essay “Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes”, he claims that man, before the creation of society, was neither good nor bad, and had neither vices nor virtues. It was not until man started living in groups/societies, that he became corrupted and evil. This is why he insists in his book *Emile* that the boy is taken away from society to learn, and to cultivate his goodness, before having it corrupted by society. Rousseau argues that the first state of nature is that of the “bon sauvage” and that people who call primitive man savage and cruel were looking at peoples that were already far from this first state of nature.¹ So, man in his natural/animal state, before the formation of groups, societies, and countries, is good and peaceful.

This view is notably in much opposition, to that of Thomas Hobbes, who stated that “homo homini lupus,” or “man is a wolf to man,” meaning that he will devour and take what he wants no matter the cost to his fellow men. Man is constantly at war with man. Without having rules and society placed upon them, they “are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.”² Thus, the life of man is short and brutish.

Using both Hobbes and Rousseau, what I am trying to illustrate is that both of these natures make up man. Man is both good and brutish. Alone in nature gathering fruits and living off the land, man is peaceful, however once man decides to join in packs and starts to covet what the others have, we see this brutish nature come out. These two natures live inside man, and he is continually trying to find the balance between them both, without letting one become stronger than the other.

In modern man, it becomes a question about the dialectic between man’s cultural/societal nature and his animal/savage nature. Since man has evolved from living in the wild to living within society, there still seems to be traces of this evolutionary past that leaves us longing to connect with nature. The instinctual nature that exists in man reminds him that he was or is still part animal. So how do we make the distinction between man and animal?

Ever since Darwin and his theory of evolution, man has been asking himself: what distinguishes himself from an animal? Man is an animal, but an

animal is not a man. Rousseau makes his distinction by noting that man is able to choose by his own volition, where as an animal will rely purely on his instinct. Also man is able to perfect himself; he is able to develop his faculties which will remain with him for the rest of his life, whereas an animal will remain the same. Therefore in man's old age when he complains about becoming an imbecile, it is because he has something to lose, while the animal would have nothing to lose, only keeping his instinct.³ However these animal instincts still exist within man, and when man feels these animal instincts within himself, that is the moment where he fears this unknown and long lost animal that exists inside.

Why does the wolf become the symbol of the evil nature inside man, and not any other animal? Wolves are not purely destructive creatures, they can also be nurturing like the she wolf in Romulus and Remus. Wolves often mate for life and live in packs, which makes them not that much different from humans. Yet the wolf becomes the projection of man's inner beast which according to Nietzsche: the greatest fear in man is the fear of that which is inside him: "for fear of wild animals-that hath been longest fostered in man, inclusive of the animal which he concealeth and feareth in himself: - Zarathustra calleth it 'the beast inside.'"⁴

There is a part within man that he does not trust, or that he is scared of, because he does not fully understand it. This instinctual side of man that causes him to act outside of the laws of society is often personified as a ferocious beast, like the wolf or the werewolf. The wolf becomes the personified fear that man has of his own instinctual nature. In folklore and mythology this becomes a mechanism for man to confront his animal nature or to distance this nature from his cultural nature. According to Mary Midgley, "man has always been unwilling to admit his own ferocity, and has tried to deflect attention from it by making animals out to be more ferocious than they are."⁵

At one point in the course of man's evolution, there was a rupture from being prey to being predator. Anthropologist, Robert Eisler, claims that there was a conscious movement from the peaceful fruit gathering herds to a lupine pack of hunters, and that this is proven by ancient Indo-European tribal names such as "Luvians, Lycians, Lucanians ... meaning wolf men."⁶ According to Eisler, ancient man would don the pelt of his predator thus mimicking or "aping" the behavior of his predator:

The Paleolithic hunters of mammoth, reindeer, wild cattle and horses on the plains of south Russia and central Europe must have made themselves 'clothes of skin,' since the stone scrapers for preparing these, and beautifully finished bone needles for sewing them together, are found in close proximity.⁷

If we accept Eisler's theory, then within man's collective unconscious there is the recognition of belonging to a peaceful fruit gathering herd or what could possibly be the closest to Rousseau's "bon sauvage." However there is also the memory of becoming this carnivorous pack of the "wild hunt" and it is the combination of these two ancestral pasts that causes man to feel a duality within himself; one side that is peaceful and the other savage and terrifying. The beast that man fears within himself is the beast that he once used to be. To cite Eisler once more:

We are all descended from the males of the carnivorous lycanthropic variety, a mutation caused by the climatic change at the end of the pluvial period, which induced indiscriminate, even cannibalistic predatory aggression, culminating in the rape and sometimes the devouring of the females of the original peaceful fruit-eating 'bon sauvage' remaining in the primeval virgin forests.⁸

This great upheaval in man's past has caused him to feel guilt over his carnivorous past. He has gone from living dispersed amongst the jungle to living in small groups, to living in small villages, to what is known today as "society" and he has tried to repress this ferocious image of his past by defining man as "civilized" and animal or savage as "uncivilized." This is why the image of the werewolf becomes so terrifying, because it represents the savageness that once existed and still exists within man. By projecting the fear of one's own animal instincts onto the wolf, it "provides settled people with a personification for those persistent vices in themselves which constantly make settled life so difficult. The killing of the personification makes them feel they have actually killed the vice. They are symbolically destroying their own wildness," according to Mary Midgley.⁹ Living within society has forced man to cut all ties from his savage past, but there is always the collective subconscious memory of his wild ancestral past. If man chooses to repress this animalism within himself, then according to Freud this animal will return, but will act in a distorted fashion.¹⁰ Thus the natural predator aggression will come back much stronger, more than just instinctual nature, but causing havoc on all that stands in its path. If man represses his inner animal too long, he will then become the animal. An instance of this is seen in the story of King Lycaon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This myth is one of the many examples where the wolf is portrayed as vicious, ferocious and essentially evil; however, in the citations that follow, we will discover that this is not always the case.

3. The Story of Lycaon

The story of Lycaon is an example of the guilt that man feels within himself from the evolution of a peaceful fruit gathering tribe to the carnivorous tribe. These predatorily and often cannibalistic tendencies that early man had, has marked his past with a feeling of guilt. In this story Zeus hears of the wickedness of King Lycaon. He came to Earth, disguised as a man and gave the people of Arcadia notice that a god had come. King Lycaon decided to test this and invited Zeus to his house. He served him the flesh of a recently slaughtered slave. Zeus knew at once it was human flesh and struck a bolt of lightning which destroyed the entire household. Lycaon fled in terror and was transformed into a wolf: "blood thirsty still, he turned against sheep, delighting in their slaughter, and his arms were legs, and his robes were shaggy hair..."¹¹

Zeus had wanted to kill all of mankind for this evil that he had found, but instead made Lycaon into an example. The example proves that if one lets his animal side take over his whole being, he will transform into the animal. King Lycaon took pleasure in slaughtering animals and people, and even worse committed cannibalism. According to Eisler the carnivorous lupine packs of early men often "preyed on the more conservative fruit-gathering human herds reluctant to adopt the bloodthirsty new mode of life, killing males and enslaving females."¹² Now that man is civilized and this type of behavior outlawed within societal codes, man feels guilty of his cannibalistic past. To take such delight in the eating of one's own species is terrifying to man today, but at one point in his evolutionary past he had partaken in such activities.

The saying that Hobbes uses: *homo homini lupus*, applies directly in this story. Lycaon is a brutish powerful king who slaughters his servants for his own pleasure. Lycaon is a murderous tyrant, and the only thing that he fears, is another murderous tyrant who would be more powerful than he. Lycaon proves to be the exemplary Hobbesian man, he is by his nature evil and continues in this fashion until he is put in his place by a power that is higher than himself.

4. The Lais, Bisclavret

A different representation of the werewolf is found in the *lais*, *Bisclavret*, by Marie de France. *Bisclavret*, which serves for the name of the main character in the story but also coming from the word "bleiz lavaret" meaning, talking wolf.¹³ The tale of *Bisclavret* is about a "Garualf" living in Brittany. He leaves his wife three days out of every week, and when his wife confronts him about his strange disappearance, he reluctantly confides in her that he goes into the woods and turns into a werewolf. The wife then becomes terrified and disgusted with her husband, and she weasels him into telling her how and where this transformation takes place. Upon finding out

that it is the shedding of his human clothes that allows him to turn into a wolf, and that without these clothes he cannot become human again, she dupes an old lover with the promise of her love, into following her husband and stealing the clothes. The husband is thus bound to his wolf form, and forced to remain in the woods. The king finds this “civilized beast” in the woods and takes the beast to his court. Bisclavret lived for a year in the court until one day he saw his wife and her new husband come into the court, upon seeing her he became so outraged that he bit off her nose. The court surprised by his abnormal behavior finds out that it was his wife who had stolen his clothes. She returns the clothes and Bisclavret is able to become human again.

The most interesting part of this story which distinguishes it from other werewolf stories, is that Marie de France begins the lay by describing how horrible and frightening werewolves are: “A werewolf is a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage and dwells in vast forests.”¹⁴ However, she leaves us to question the true nature of a werewolf, for when we meet Bisclavret we find that he is amiable and not at all like the ferocious beast described above. Upon the wife’s constant questioning, the reader learns that he goes deep into the forest to wait out his metamorphosis. Marie de France simply states that he lives off of prey that he captures much like a man going into the woods to hunt small animals. In this instance, he seems no more wicked than the men that go off on the “wild hunt” in order to hunt game. After returning from the woods he is always happy and in high spirits, “*joius e liez*”¹⁵.

The transformation into the werewolf in this story is much like an infliction that he must suffer through. He is a kind, gentle and a loving husband, who will do anything to make his wife happy. “He was a good and handsome knight who conducted himself nobly.” “He loved her [his wife] and she returned his love.”¹⁶ Nothing about this man seems deserving of punishment like in the story of King Lycaon. He suffers from a malady, which causes him to go out into the woods and turn into a wolf for a few days. What this tale is trying to illustrate is the balance that Bisclavret is trying to find between his cultural nature, the nature that belongs to society, and his animal nature, the nature that is a part of his evolutionary past. He cannot kill the beast that is inside himself; however he does not want to be fully taken over by his beast either.

It should also be noted that when he returns from these visits, he is joyous and gay. This process in the woods is cathartic for him, it is allowing him to release his inner animal rather than repressing it, which according to Freud this repression will cause him unhappiness. Since this animal nature is not repressed, it will not come back in a distorted fashion either. Thus, he remains ever kind and faithful to his wife. Bisclavret is simply trying to find the balance between these two sides within him. Unfortunately it is his wife who is not comfortable with his dual nature, nor does she probably realize

that there is a dual nature within herself, and as a result of repressing her own animal nature, she also seeks to destroy that of her husband's as well.

The typical roles of the villain have been changed in this story. In a typical story it is the werewolf that is the feared villain, however in this lay it is the wife that then becomes the villain. Disgusted by the thought of her husband becoming an animal she contrives a plot to rid herself of her husband and run off with another man. Thus it is the wife and not the werewolf who becomes the villain. Unable to accept this aspect of her husband's life she traps him permanently in his animal skin, making it impossible for him to return to society.

Here we see the husband, who has achieved a balance with his inner animal juxtaposed with his wife, who has not. The husband allows the cathartic release of his inner animal once a week for a period of three days. He leaves the confines of society in order to return back to nature. However, he always returns back to society. The wife, on the other hand, remains in the strict regulated world of society and does not allow this kind of transformation. Instead her inner animal comes back distorted; she becomes the villain. By devising a malicious plot to rid herself of her husband, she is actually letting this repressed animal that is inside her bring out evil and malicious tendencies.

Even when the husband is in his wolf form, he is still not a ferocious and savage beast. Upon seeing the beast, the king remarks, "see the marvelous way this beast humbles itself before me! It has the intelligence of a human being."¹⁷ Even though Bisclavret is in his animal form, he still keeps his human qualities. In fact, the only time that Bisclavret harms another human being is when he sees his wife and her "new" husband appear in court a year later for a party, without thinking he leaps at her and bites off her nose in revenge for what she had done to him.

In Bisclavret we have explored the dual nature of Man and his wife's reluctance to accept that nature, but we must also remember that there is a dual nature within Woman as well.

5. African-American Story, Manawee

In the African-American story *Manawee* the man cannot marry the sisters until he recognizes their dual nature. The story centers on a man who courts twin sisters, and he cannot marry them until he can guess their name. The twin sisters represent the duality within women. The man cannot name the sisters until his dog (or his animal nature) gives him the names.

The dog remarks in the beginning of the story that "one sister was prettier than the other and the other sister was sweeter than the other. Though neither sister possessed all virtues..."¹⁸ That is to say that our wildish nature is not the same as our cultural nature and vice versa. One side cannot possess all virtues; it is a delicate balance between the two. This tale

is quick to point out that until the man could name, or accept, the duality of the women, he could not marry them, and also likewise, until he learned to listen to his animal nature, he could not learn the names of the sisters.

What Estes refers to as the “wildish woman” is similar to the wolf side of Bisclavret. The wildish woman, or instinctual/animal side of woman, is looking for someone who can understand and accept the beast that is within. Unfortunately in Bisclavret’s tale, the wife was not accepting of this duality, but luckily for the sisters, the man listened to his instinctual self and was able to prove a successful mate.

6. Conclusion

Within each of these three tales, we see how the wolf or werewolf represents the animal instincts or desires of man. In the story of Lycaon, he is overcome with his drive to hunt and kill, like the wild lupine packs of our ancestral past, donning the pelt of a wolf or bear believing in its powers to turn us into that animal. Lycaon is proof of man’s fear of this inner beast and what it will do if let loose. Men are afraid of their own brutality; therefore this wickedness must be displaced in an alien form that is not a part of their own being. The image of a werewolf, a man trapped inside the body of a wolf, is the precise image of man fearing, that which lurks within his own being. By killing or ridding oneself of the werewolf, man is trying to kill this brutal and animalistic side of his nature. As seen in the tale of Bisclavret, where the wife rids herself of her werewolf husband; an attempt to rid herself of her own inner evil. The wolf becomes the symbol of this ravenous beast that kills in mass quantities for mere pleasure, which is not normal wolf behavior. If only one could listen to this unknown nature within themselves, then man could find peace, like in the case of *Manawee*. Once the man listened to his dog, representing his animal nature, he was able to name the sisters and marry them. Therefore it becomes a question of acknowledging this *beast* or animal nature within us and learning to balance this part of ourselves within society.

Notes

¹ J.J. Rousseau. *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes*, Gallimard, Paris, 2006, p.74.

² T. Hobbes. *Leviathan*,. R. Tuck (ed), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.88.

³ J.J. Rousseau. *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes*. Gallimard, Paris, 2006, p.41-2.

- ⁴F. Nietzsche. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. T Commons (trans). Pennsylvania State University, 1999, p.266.
- ⁵M. Midgley. *Beast and Man*, Routledge, New York, 1979, p.30.
- ⁶R. Eisler. *Wolf into Man*, Spring Books, London, 1951, p.33.
- ⁷Eisler, p. 34.
- ⁸Eisler, p. 42.
- ⁹M. Midgley, *The Myths we Live by*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p.166.
- ¹⁰A. Bleakley, *The Animalizing Imagination: Totemism, Textuality, and Ecocriticism*, St Martin's Press, New York, 2000, p.35.
- ¹¹Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, R. Humphries (trans), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, line: 235-7.
- ¹²Eisler, p.37.
- ¹³P. Walter 'Preface, traduction nouvelle et notes' *Lais: Marie de France*, Gallimard, Paris, 2000, p.449
- ¹⁴Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*, G. Burgess and K. Busby (trans). Penguin Books, London, 1986, 2003, p.68. I have also included the old French: "Garualf ceo est beste salvage: Tant cum il est en cele rage, Hummes devure, grant mal fait, Es granz forez converse e vait"
- ¹⁵Marie de France, P. Walter (trans), Gallimard, Paris, 2002, p.148.
- ¹⁶Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, G. Burgess and K. Busby (trans), Penguin Books, London, 1986, 2003, p.68 Translation in French: "Beaus chevalers e bons esteit E noblement se cunteneit/ C'était un beau et bon chevalier d'une conduite irreproachable." "Il amot li e ele lui/ il l'aimait autant qu'elle aimait" Marie de France, *Lais*, P. Walter (trans), Gallimard, Paris, 2002, p. 146-8.
- ¹⁷Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*, G. Burgess and K. Busby (trans), Penguin Books, London, 1986, 2003, p.70. The French translation: "Cum caste beste se humilie! Ele ad sen de hume, merci crie...Ceste beste ad entente e sen" Marie de France, *Lais*, trans, Philippe Walter, Gallimard, Paris, 2002, p.156.
- ¹⁸C.P. Estes, *Women who run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1992, p.116.

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Violence in Film: Measuring Existential Reactions to Evil

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Abstract

The effects of media violence have been well established and documented within the field of psychology. The research conducted within this area of study often report drastic increases in aggression centered behaviors amongst their participants following exposure to violent images. However, these particular studies have arguably produced results that are questionable when discussing and audience's actual interaction with and interpretation of violence. Clearly misunderstood among psychological research in this area, the way in which an audience reacts to violence is dependent upon a wide variety of cultural and individual factors, which shape attitudes toward evil. Such individual factors cannot be measured solely through objective measures nor can they be explained entirely by psychological theories. Based upon a mixed-method approach and a progressive combination of social-psychological and humanist theories, the current study utilized film in its entirety to support the contention that narrative is an important subjective variable that commands further investigation. Results from our study indicate that fictional violence is more than simply an action or set of actions that conveys negative ramifications. Instead, narrative enables an audience to existentially identify with and cast judgments about the use of violence based upon the particular context in which it occurs. Thus, violence can and should be interpreted as a mechanism used within film to transmit messages about cultural occurrences, as something that is reflective of both our social systems and us.

Key Words: Violence, evil, film, media, existentialism, narrative, context, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek, methodology

1. Opening Argument

The great hallmark of human consciousness is the ability to create meaning out of a violent and often terrifying world. One of the ways in which the individual accomplishes this is by engaging with cultural narrative structures that assist them in arranging and analyzing violence and evil so as to understand how these concepts and actions affect their lives. Narrative genres, such as literature and film, provide an appropriate mechanism for the edification concerning evil. Specifically in connection with film, the individual's engagement with this visual medium allows for a movement between the heights of pity and fear, as Aristotle suggests good narrative

should, leading them away from their atavistic desires toward a deeper understanding of themselves. Film provides audiences a platform to explore the destructive nature of violence without having to enact violence. The theory of catharsis, the purging of horror and immorality through the engagement with narrative, is apropos for the current discussion of the use of violence in film because it provides a strong framework for our study. The main focus of this particular research is on the way in which the mind interprets violence within its narrative context. While many psychological studies point to the pejorative effects that screen violence has on audiences, our study suggests that these effects are not as causal as they seem. Violence in film can be perceived as having a positive outcome, especially when the ways in which violence fits within a larger narrative structure are considered. The problem is in convincing a rigid scientific community that human consciousness, specifically the subjective means in which the mind interacts and interprets, has the ability to be uncovered and demonstrated. Therefore, in the enquiry of how audiences interact with an interpret film violence, this study propounds three things: (1) film violence interacts with audiences on significant existential levels, where the audience or audience member is asked to identify with the characters and situations in order to make sense of the function of violence in film; (2) the narrative construct of a film is just as important as the act or acts of violence represented within the film, and as such narrative should be accounted for when constructing measurements for psychological studies; (3) a more interdisciplinary methodology that employs a mixed-method approach has the potential to yield greater and far more detailed results than any straight-forward experiments or surveys are capable.

It is of utmost importance to create a research methodology that incorporates the subjective phenomenology of human experience because it is this phenomenology that necessarily drives the human towards objective consciousness. If there is a correlation between film violence and actual violence, it will not be found within a discourse that reduces the human to a robotic organism merely acting on behaviourally programmed responses. Instead, the solution may be found within the realm of the subjective, where the shape of one's worldview leads one to either embrace or disregard violence and evil. The focus here is not on motive, but how individuals identify with depictions of violence and how they convince themselves that violent actions are acceptable or deplorable. This is a more complex set of interpretive acts than behavioural studies allow for, which is precisely why the current study has chosen to frame empirical research in connection with the existential need to create meaning out of what ostensibly appears emetic.

2. Methodological Concerns

There is a rather extensive collection of psychological studies, which have measured the connection between media violence and

maladaptive behaviours. Methodologically, these studies often expose participants to a “gratuitously violent” condition or a non-violent condition.¹ In more elaborate designs, truncated or artificially constructed versions of narrative are presented which define the violent actions of the victimizer as either just or unjust.² An infinitesimal subset of research in this area has chosen to utilize film in its entirety. Although this particular effort is laudable, the objective is not to preserve narrative structure nor examine a narrative’s reactive effect upon the participant. Instead, situational factors such as interruptions,³ consecutiveness of exposure,⁴ and editing⁵ are emphasized as mediating of the participant’s aggressive responses. These psychological manipulations of media violence are in direct contention with film studies as a discipline. Through their own methodological observations, film studies has established that a directed film narrative, which is easily defined and understood as “The way in which the story events of a movie are organized,”⁶ encompasses stylistic components, such as voice-over, music, character emotion, flashbacks, and metaphors, that define a context cognitively for an audience. This stylistic definition applies to any genre of film, regardless of whether violence is depicted. Therefore, psychological studies that define violent actions by methodologically manufacturing or manipulating narratives have repetitively demonstrated that an empathetic individual will respond in an intended manner to a violent act based upon their knowledge of its justification. What these studies ultimately disregard is the extent to which the cultural symbolism encased within a directed narrative cognitively enables an audience to existentially connect to and evaluate an act of violence as contextually moral or immoral, and justified or unjustified.⁷

Violence is a way of life for many, but as such it demonstrates the core concepts of evil: that of defilement and degradation, both of the victim and the victimizer. Violence is an act that allows one to regain or enforce superiority over one’s victims. Therefore, violence is not a mindless construct, as popular culture quite often portrays it to be. Instead, there is always a specific desire that violence fulfils within the victimizer. More importantly, violence, both fictional and real, is a symbolic action, which establishes the strength of defilement and degradation over the psyche. Paul Ricoeur writes, in *The Symbolism of Evil*, that in order to understand violence and evil, “we have to transport ourselves into a consciousness for which impurity is measured not by imputation to a responsible agent but by the objective violation of an interdict.”⁸ It is with this in mind that we formed our main hypothesis for our study, which suggests that the unconscious interdict controls or regulates the violent impulse. We designed our study to measure the way in which audiences interpret their understanding of violence and how it actually affects their judgments. This could not be achieved by showing a violent scene to an audience and then recording their subsequent reactions;

instead, the current study endeavoured to exemplify that an audience's comprehension of violence and evil is a phenomenological activity in which analysis and interpretation are just as influential on behaviour as the reaction to the violence itself. As Ricoeur writes, "These [violent] actions become evil only in a system of reference other than that of infectious contact, in connection of divine holiness, respect for interhuman [sic] ties, and self-esteem."⁹ Because narrative elevates violence to the level of a symbol, it has the potential to help audiences make larger cultural implications of violent behaviour. The significance therein lies in the conjecture that the semiotic interpretation of violence based upon a filmic narrative is more complex than content analyses and predictable scales can account for. Thus, the current study has chosen to blend together a methodology that measures the quantitative reactions of earlier studies with the qualitative insight of our audiences.

3. Theoretical Framework

Numerous theorists have written about the cultural significance of semiotic interpretation. Yet, since the subject of film and media violence is a multidisciplinary phenomenon of interest and study, the most appropriate theoretical infrastructure necessitates the juxtaposition of both social-psychological and humanist approaches. Most relevant to this particular study are the psychoanalytic approach of Jacques Lacan and the socio-cultural approach of Slavoj Žižek. Lacan is acknowledged within the psychological discipline as adopting a more existential view of Freudian psychoanalysis. The existential nature of Lacan's analyses is manifested in how an interpretant exists within a social construct where ideas are represented in semiotic systems either consciously or unconsciously. These ideas become applicable to Freudian concepts in the areas of dream states and desires. Lacan views dream states as narratives. In *On the Interpretation of Dreams* Lacan discusses how the "Dream has the structure of a sentence,"¹⁰ and how the patient's dreams come to operate more as a dialogue as the dream progresses. This recognition of a rhetorical process in the dream state can be applied to film in the respect that narrative structure is also based upon a form of dialogue that becomes an apparatus for interpretation. Germane to existentialism, this implies that individuals construct meaning through a communal dialogue in an attempt to impart the complexities of their social lives. Semiotics retains relevance in our social construction of societal norms, and media remains one of the most powerful and accessible instruments of conveyance.

Žižek postulates extensively on the interaction between culture and media. Specifically, Žižek contends that film is a culturally defined experience, and is assigned meaning through a viewer's desire and fantasy for a specific outcome.¹¹ The narrative process, according to Žižek, contains

semiotic components that animate these vagaries. To illustrate and apply Zizek's ideas, consider the following descriptive scenes. *American History X*, which is one of the films used within our study, consists of an opening scene where the audience is directly subjected to symbolism. One of the first symbols that the audience becomes exposed to in the opening scene of the film is that of a swastika tattoo displayed on the chest of the main character, Derek Vinyard. This tattoo is a symbol, a semiotic component, which conveys cultural meanings of hate and intolerance. Immediately, the audience develops an expectation about the content of this film and about the character himself. When the scene cuts to the African-American trying to steal his truck, the audience unconsciously "knows," or can infer that the situation is bound to go awry and will most likely result in violence. The brutality that occurs thereafter is an escalation of Derek's hatred that results in two of the robbers being killed. This violence also becomes the medium for which the audience interprets and concludes that he is an evil person that deserves punishment. Also, because the swastika has become a universal symbol of hatred, this may subconsciously act upon the audience to assign judgment before any violence occurs. Comparatively, within the opening scene of *In the Bedroom*, another film used within this study, we are confronted with two lovers, Frank Fowler and Natalie Strout, frolicking in a field full of yellow flowers on what appears to be a summer's day. Following this scene of tranquility however, the audience begins to infer that any happiness that they feel will surely be short-lived. Natalie's ex-husband, Richard, is more than simply jealous. Through glaring remarks and threatening gazes the audience awaits the tumult that will occur at the hands of this sociopath. Ultimately, Frank is killed by Richard who is arrested but minimally pursued by the legal system. Meanwhile, Frank's father, Matt, is haunted by the images of his son, and these are injected into the film in order to cause the audience to lament. This combination of sorrow and frustration creates an interesting combination for the audience, where the audience desires closure in the form of retribution.

4. Findings

Bearing the previous methodological limitations and theoretical implications in mind, our study displayed films within their entirety in order to preserve narrative structure and style. We also employed a mixed-method approach that incorporated objective measurement and subjective inquiry. Consistent with previous studies in psychology, cultural studies, and film studies literature, the variables of mood, emotion, and empathy were examined in conjunction with two specific contexts of violence that were at the forefront of our analysis:

1. Justified or what we termed “romanticized.” Violent act(s) committed by a realistic character in a realistic setting. The strength of this context allowed for greater audience-character identification. Expressly, the violence in this type of film was used as a tool of retribution by a character that has been wronged in some way. In this sense, the violence is praised by the audience. The objective was to elicit a desire in the viewer for the violence to occur, ending in a cathartic and satisfying release of anger.
2. Unjustified or what we termed “social consequential.” Violent act(s) committed by a realistic character in a realistic setting. The strength of this context also allowed for greater audience-character identification. Specifically, the violence in this type of film was used by a character to perpetuate a social prejudice or hatred. Human pain and suffering as a consequence was accented. In contrast to the Romanticized context, the violence is condemned by the audience as outrageous. The objective was to elicit an element of frustration amongst the audience that was resultant of shame, powerlessness, and sadness.

The films that we selected for these defined conditions were *In the Bedroom* and *American History X*. These films were selected due to the extremeness with which they fit the operational definitions of our conditions.

Results of this study demonstrate that an individual’s reaction to, evaluation of, and identification with depicted violence is moderated by a film’s narrative structure. It was evident from both our objective and subjective results that a response to violence is both dynamic as well as indicative of a social and cultural experience. Narrative moderates the ability for an individual to denounce violence in one instance, but condone it in another. In some contexts, violence is representative of the evils, hatred and intolerance that imbue societal structures and there is a sentiment that violence is something that must be proactively eliminated. Yet, violence is also internalized as a tool by which we can right societal wrongs, punish those who deserve it, and rid the world of evils that threaten to destroy it. Both, of course, are in some ways symbolic of a morality and a justice that can only be envisaged and achieved through acts of vengeance. The reasons for this contradiction can only be uncovered through the study of preserved narrative and human reason. Furthermore, it is through the use of an existential theoretical paradigm that allows us to examine the reconciliatory nature of narrative itself, which brings together the fragmented moral and societal conflicts within the individual.

5. Concluding Remarks

The overall results provided by these predictions support the hypothesis of this study: that narrative context of violence resulted in different levels of audience identification, judgment, and emotion. The objective and subjective results indicate that the differences in participant response were guided by recognizable contextual components, and intended narrative was therefore successful in defining that context for the viewer. Of greater importance, what the overarching results of this study signify is an interdisciplinary methodology for measuring subjective consciousness is viable. The integration of the different methodologies and theories helped create a research design that purposefully examines a variable that has been minimally explored in previous research. Psychological studies have discussed contextual variables as important; however the definition of context varies in meaning and usage. While some of these studies have defined context in terms of violent acts that elicit aggression from viewers, others have defined context in terms of the setting in which the viewing takes place. Research produced within cultural and film studies tend to deal more with narrative, but even these disciplines have a tendency to indirectly study narrative by focusing entirely on the stylistic components of differing genres. Our integrative analysis has revealed that amalgamating these seemingly disparate fields can produce both solid quantitative results while at the same time measuring the subjective interpretations of our audience participants. This is evident in the overlapping ideas of psychology, cultural studies, film studies, and psycholinguistics grounded in the Lacanian and Zizekian theories used to support the research ideas presented in this study.

A distinct aggregation of research which has bolstered the theoretical and empirical recommendations of the current study is Plantinga and Smith's *Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. As the title alludes, this particular text identified that emotion is certainly a cognitive phenomenon, especially when an individual responds to the context of a filmic narrative. A subjective state, emotion is resultant of an individual's perception; this association has garnered recognition as cognitivists have begun to "emphasize the way that emotion and cognitions cooperate to orient us in our environment and to make certain objects more salient...which help us to evaluate our world and react to it more quickly."¹² For example, Plantinga and Smith identify that emotion is certainly a cognitive phenomenon, especially when an individual responds to the context of a filmic narrative. Reflecting upon Zizek's philosophy that film contains cultural representations, it is tangible that subjective emotion helps us to evaluate the cultural significance behind violence in film narrative.

All things considered, it is well overdue that research takes a different direction when dealing with media violence. It is suggested that this area of investigation begin with a thorough and meaningful assessment of

integrative research. Specifically, integrative research should be considered as a valuable methodology, which has the capacity to enhance scientific results and further their practical applications. Additionally, a focal shift in research design is necessary. As the results of our study have demonstrated, the utilization of film in its entirety, inclusion of methodologies that are not exclusively objectivist, and embodiment of a combinatory social-scientific and humanist theoretical framework are pivotal in the advancement of research findings. What this study has indubitably demonstrated through such a progressive analysis is that when considering and measuring reactions to violent images in film, and in other forms of media, the topic of interest should not be whether one is subjected to violence, but rather what type of violence one is viewing.

Notes

¹ D Zillman and J B Weaver III, 'Effects of Prolonged Exposure to Gratuitous Media Violence on Provoked and Unprovoked Hostile Behaviour,' *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 29, 1999, pp. 145-165.

² T P Meyer, 'Effects of Viewing Justified or Unjustified Real Film Violence on Aggressive Behaviour,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 23, 1972, pp. 21-29; R G Green and D Stonner, 'The Meaning of Observed Violence: Effects of Arousal and Aggressive Behaviour,' *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 8, 1974, pp. 55-63.

³ S Worchel, T W Hardy, and R Hurley, 'The Effects of Commercial Interruption of Violent and Nonviolent Films on Viewers' Subsequent Aggression,' *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 12, 1976, pp. 220-232.

⁴ Zillman.

⁵ M Berry, T Gray, and E Donnerstein, 'Cutting Film Violence: Effects on Perceptions, Enjoyment, and Arousal,' *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 139, 1999, pp. 567-582.

⁶ P Lehman and W Luhr, *Thinking About Movies: Watching, Questioning, Enjoying*, Harcourt Brace, Orlando, FL, 1999, p. 17.

⁷ C Plantinga and G M Smith, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1999; M Forrester, *Psychology of the Image*, Routledge, London, 2000.

⁸ P Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan, trs., Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1969, p. 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cited in J P Muller and W L Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, International UP, New York, 1982, p. 75.

¹¹ S Zizek, *Looking Awry (An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991; S Kay, *Zizek: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003; T Myers, *Slavoj Zizek*, Routledge, London, 2003.

¹² Plantinga, p. 2.

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Evil in the House of Truth

Craig Hanks and Vincent Luizzi

Abstract

Evil, evil people, their works, and works about evil are much discussed in the academy. As we study them, our concerns range from a determination of the evil being real and not just apparent, to an evaluation of what we find to be evil, and the imposition of sanctions where appropriate. In this essay, we wish to underscore how these considerations allow us to organize much of the work about evil as well as serving as a guide for our responsibilities as students and educators.

Key Words: Academic ethics, educational theory, evil in philosophy, literature, film, people.

Evil, evil people, their works, and works about evil are much discussed in the academy. As we study them, our concerns range from a determination of the evil being real and not just apparent, to an evaluation of what we find to be evil, as well as the imposition of sanctions where appropriate. In this essay, we wish to underscore how these considerations allow us to organize much of the work about evil as well as serving as a guide for our responsibilities as students and educators.

It is noteworthy that many of the contributions by the participants in this Tenth Global Conference on Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness fit nicely within these categories, and the first part of our essay documents this claim. If this fundamental way of organizing many of the approaches to studying evil is useful, its value increases as we couple it with ways in which our inquiries can become complicated. In the sections that follow, we identify myriad ways in which evil associated with people and their works can intertwine. We then turn to the responsibilities commonly associated with professionals, including educators and philosophers. These allow us to identify further ways in which our identifying, evaluating, and responding to evil can vary.

The thesis of many of the participants illustrates how they are grappling with these projects. As for the status of some apparent evil, whether it truly is evil, consider these claims of participants.

1. We should recognize that *acedia*, as sadness, melancholy, or depression, was, but no longer is, considered an evil for which an agent is responsible.

2. We should reject violence as an evil in film when an adequate narrative construct justifies this identification.

The topic most extensively discussed is how we evaluate the evil, and these projects provide excellent illustrations of how instructors can assist their students:

1. We should recognize that acts in film, which prima facie, are evil, may be a metaphor for critique, as cannibalism in film is for late capitalism.
2. A film director, who strips a novel of essential elements, as Wier did in omitting queer aspects of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is criticisable, and teachers of this film should make the omission, a wrong, known.
3. We should show how the move of rejecting all that is, as a response to troubled times, is a simplistic and unrealistic move.
4. We should resist the idea of the werewolf as being all evil, as the werewolf openly shows one side of its nature as well as showing its ability to revert to a socially cooperative being. From this we can also learn of our own complex natures.
5. We should see the evil in Baby Stewie as reaching a level of absurdity but in some sense holding up a mirror to ourselves.
6. We should see depictions evil aggression in teens as gender-based.
7. We should hold Dorian responsible for the evil person he became based on early decisions he knowingly made in an effort to understand how someone becomes evil.
8. We should recognize that very good and very evil people have something in common, an *aerite* or excellence of which each is an extreme case.
9. Zola may be deceiving and manipulating the reader as he uses differing literary techniques to account for religious experience in naturalistic terms.

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10. Indian Buddhism allows us to attribute sensibly the evil of self-delusion to groups.
 11. Authors of humorous works about evil may provide a means for responding to evil as the other so as to create a sense that we are not this other and we can prevail over it.

The following claims by presenters addressed the sanctions, which should be directed at the author or creator or the work itself:

1. The evils of *lustmord* and anti-Semitism in Fritz Lang's *M* are sufficient for lowering the importance of *M* in film history.
2. We can contain the evil that may come from the work of geniuses by containing geniuses in the ivory tower.

Let us now turn to ways in which our analyses of evil can become complicated and how a consideration of the circumstances surrounding people and their works can bear on how we evaluate and respond to them. We offer the following typology.

We might introduce works where the work itself advances evil.

A) Our first category might be cases in which the author of the work agrees with the evil present in the work and where the work is in part designed to advance that evil. Although she was very vague about this matter late in her life, most would place Leni Riefenstahl in this category. Looking to the Third Reich we also find Carl Schmidt and Albert Speer. These cases do seem to demand that some attention be paid to the moral failings of the work and the person. B) Our second category is where the author of the work does not necessarily agree with the message. Consider D.W. Griffith. His *Birth of a Nation* is a widely acknowledged masterwork, and yet one that not only articulated and reflected a story of racism and violence, but encouraged and for many seemed to legitimate such violence.¹ However difficult it might be for the modern viewer to understand, Griffith did not intend to advance evil, and later recut the movie to excise the glorification of the KKK, and released *Intolerance*, an epic critique of intolerance, to respond to critics. Once again, it seems that the relationship between the author and the work, as well as the explicit content of the work suggest that it would be irresponsible, intellectually as well as morally, to avoid the topic of evil.

Where the work is silent about evil, and thus might enact complicity with evil through silence (consider the creative person who works within the shadow of evil but does not address it, or the philosopher who writes moral theory but remains silent about the evil of her society). These cases might be consistent with our above considerations in which it is reasonable to discuss

the work without drawing attention to these (debatable) moral failings. At the same time, if we are to be passing on not only the content of intellectual and creative work, but also some sense of responsible personhood, it might be that the silence should be noted.²

Where the work might be consistent with, or open to, evil, but does not explicitly advance evil. Consider again Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, he characterizes everyday existence and everyday language and thinking as inauthentic under existing conditions. So, the ways we live and think and talk are evasive of fundamental characteristics of the human condition. We might, he suggests, locate a more authentic way of being by appropriating roots, heritage, history, and turning them toward a radically transformative future project, perhaps under the guidance of a hero. Based on this some argue that his work leads to fascism, and that his support was not merely incidental but a necessary outgrowth of his philosophical work. Yet, many argue that while his critique of the inauthenticity of modernity can open a door toward fascism, it need not necessarily lead there. In the first case, it seems that if the work of necessity leads to evil, then it would again be intellectually and morally irresponsible not to address this fact in the classroom. In the second case, his work is dangerous for opening a door through which we will hope not to again plunge. In this case, it seems we have some responsibility to equip our students with the necessary information and skills to be able to well evaluate this possibility. One, and perhaps the best, way to do so would be to discuss Heidegger's own journey into National Socialism, and to explore the possibility that the critique of modernity can be correct without that leading directly to fascism.

Where the evil in the author's work is intellectually irrelevant to the intellectual point at hand. Kant's comments about women or his racism seem far removed from his discussion of the sublime, or the transcendental aesthetic. In fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine what difference those problematic views would make in his aesthetic or epistemological work. So, if we are to teach the 1st or 3rd *Critique*, it seems that our earlier considerations against introducing the fact of evil do hold. One complicating factor here, in what might appear a fairly clear case against discussing the moral failings of the author or artists is that of the moral authority of works and teachers. When a student encounters the moral flaws in a work or in an author or artists' life in the absence of any acknowledgement in class, this can undermine the trust relationship necessary for good teaching, and it can undercut the worth or a text or work, even when that work is not directly related to the moral lack. This consideration, also present in category #5, relates to those of professional responsibility that we take up below.

Where the evil in the work is relevant, but can be jettisoned, that is the 'truth-value' of the work transcends the problems contained within. Aristotle's ethical and political work seems to be a good example of this.

Some have argued that we just should not read Aristotle because his racism and sexism are intrinsic to his work in the way that fascism was for Riefenstahl. This seems to ignore these two possibilities:

1. There is what we might call “surplus truth value” in any work that is insights and truths that transcend the limitations that are due to time and place and culture.
2. Even within the same work an author can be both right and wrong (and, might fail to see that those two aspects are inconsistent).

We can reasonably argue that Aristotle’s claims about the exclusion of women and slaves from full citizenship and full moral personhood are just based on bad biologizing that is bad empirical claims. Not only is the biology false, but without that ground there is no way to make his claims about women and slaves consistent with his larger moral or political project. Mere consistency would demand that we discount the problematic claims. In this case it seems we should address the limits, and again there are intellectual as well as moral reasons to do so. How are we to illustrate the difficult relationship between the empirical and the normative if we do not consider any examples? And, as one of our tasks is to help our students become more sophisticated and critical readers, exploring these matters in Aristotle, for example, enacts some of the very skills we hope to impart to our students. Such a discussion might help thwart the tendency to dismiss someone or something because of one problematic feature.

Where there seems to be a disconnect between the moral failing of the person and the content of the work. We could here consider the case of Schopenhauer, who in a fit threw his elderly seamstress down the stairs causing permanent harm. It is not at all clear that this private and personal failing is at all relevant to his work, nor does it seem that we learn much about his work by attending to this episode. This seems to be a case that is consistent with the argument against considering the moral failings of the author.

This typology helps to show how our analyses of evil can become complex. We can deepen this understanding as we consider the academician as a professional and how features of this role introduce another realm of variables. General principles which guide most professions include avoidance of conflicting interests, promoting the integrity of the profession, serving others, maintaining autonomy and an independent judgment, giving credence to the interests of their clients, patients, or students, and maintaining confidentiality with those whom they represent.

To what extent could it be considered a confidential communication between a contemporary teacher and a scholar of the past who endorsed practices now considered evil? What is the motivation of a professor’s

dwelling on the evil in the ways of some author or the author's works; is there a fundamental conflict of interest? Do professors, in their capacity of serving their students and the public, do so more faithfully by highlighting the brilliance of what the profession has to offer, or by showing the moral shortcomings of some of the players and their works?

Our primary lines of inquiry into evil may well be summed up as the identification, evaluation of, and response to evil, but, as we have seen in the second part of this essay, a host of factors can come into play to create a myriad of variations for how we follow up on these inquiries.

Notes

¹ President Woodrow Wilson during a private screening at the White House is reported to have enthusiastically exclaimed: "It's like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all terribly true."

² Consider Paul Ricoeur's analysis of how silence, or what is absent, often is what speaks most forcefully, or is what is most important.