

THE DEVIL YOU SAY

If the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness. Dostoevski

God sends meat and the Devil sends cooks. John Taylor

An apology for the Devil: It must be remembered that we have only heard one side of the case. God has written all the books. Samuel Butler

'Merci Mon Dieu' and 'Thank You Satan' are titles of two French songs with lyrics and music by Leo Ferré

Who I am is of no import. I am a scholar who has long been interested in the contradictions that surface with any objective examination of that chimera aspect of philosophy called "Ethics". I became engrossed with this subject matter during my university days. My academic specialties, namely, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology and Social Psychology actually heightened my fascination with Ethics as exemplified by Moral Beliefs, Codes and Principles. How these get translated into 'legal strictures' intrigued me. My post graduate research has been devoted to simply trying to establish a universal understanding of what is 'good' as opposed to what is 'evil'. I have had a partial success.

I started by using an old cliché based upon three laws of physics. As cold is the absence of heat, darkness the absence of light and silence the absence of sound, doesn't the analogy that evil is essentially the absence of good hold true? Since technology allows us to measure heat, light and sound on an indexed scale, wouldn't it be a major coup if we could start with absolute evil as we do with absolute darkness, sound and absolute zero degrees of heat? We should then be able to construct a technology that would allow us to create an indexed scale of goodness. I spent thirty years developing such a device. I believe I succeeded to the extent that I was able to remove from it most elements of subjectivity. It does not answer exactly what the nature of evil and good is but it is as precise a barometer as humanity can hope for. It is akin to a thermometer, which reveals how hot or cold something is. Unfortunately, it does not reveal exactly what total evil is. Like absolute darkness and absolute cold, we can come very close to absolute evil but cannot attain it.

I am reminded of an old enigma. Can someone stranded alone on some alien world that is replete with all the imaginable necessities, who knows that he/she will never again have any form of contact with another living entity, commit an act of evil? This poser raises another puzzle. Is some form of social contact necessary for the commission of acts of good and/or evil? To this day I am conflicted by this question.

During my torturous mental probing I became fascinated by another mystery. If my hypothesis that evil is nothing more than the absence of good is correct, why is it that there is a plenitude of anthropomorphic and bestial icons for evil? Some examples are: *The Devil, Apollyon, Beelzebub, Clotie, Diablo, Archfiend, Lucifer, Old Gooseberry, Old Nick, Old Scratch, Satan, Serpent, Prince of Darkness, Dybbuk, Cacodemon, Succubus, Villain, Mephistopheles, the Wicked Witch, (with apologies to the fair sex) Eve, amongst*

many others. This suggests that evil has an independent existence, separate and apart from goodness; Evil is therefore not amenable to the 'Goodness Meter' I had invented.

More importantly, why do we not have some similar icons for 'goodness'? It is true that humanity has produced some exceptional personages such as Schweitzer, Mother Teresa, Florence Nightingale, Maimonides, Moses, Buddha and many others. However they are not icons. They are real people who do not inspire in us the type of emotional response needed to lessen or eliminate the fear and horror provoked by the Devil and his/her various aliases. It became apparent to me that such a powerful symbol was absolutely necessary to promote goodness in a manner that would enable us all to successfully combat evil. I decided to devote the rest of my life in searching for this elusive agent or attempting to create one. I know that some would argue that such exist as "God", "Allah", "Jehovah", "Jesus", and any other deity. One could write tomes as to why these concepts have failed since it appears evil has grown as much if not more than ever before.

My search took me all over the world. I consulted with many of the world's leading thinkers from just about every theological, scientific, philosophic, humanities and social science institute of renown I could identify. I was particularly interested in the views of those from the mountainous regions of Asia. To that end I climbed some hazardous crags and peaks in northern India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, to meet with the learned Lamas and Gurus that resided there. I guess I thought that those who lived in isolation at a higher elevation would be able to provide a fresher perspective. While there was a wide divergence of views about 'good and evil' and with the exception of those who denied their existence, no one could explain the non-existence of a goodness icon or could even suggest an appropriate example. All this left me disheartened. I had no idea where to turn to next. I actually considered trying to create my own 'Goodness' icon and then use a variety of Madison Ave. techniques to promote it. This was a sign of how desperate I was. Unfortunately, I am not imaginative or courageous enough to have been able to concoct such a scheme and follow through with it.

As I was about to board a plane to return home I was handed the following terse message. "Delay your return home and go with the messenger. He will take you to me. You will not be sorry. I have all the answers."

For inexplicable reasons except perhaps, that I felt I had nothing to lose, I acquiesced. We traveled by train, bus and then on the backs of mule-like creatures. It took us about ten days. I was reminded of the famous novel and movie, Shangri-La. Our destination turned out to be a rather ordinary cabin at the summit of a high mountain. How it ever got built is still a mystery. I was ushered into a simple chamber. I was offered refreshments, an opportunity to bathe and then to sleep. I gladly accepted these offerings. I was told that my host would make an appearance shortly after I awoke. It was suggested that I needed to be totally refreshed for our sessions. Many hours later I awoke feeling groggy. I was handed a potion to drink and assured that it would make me feel fully alert. I was also ravenously hungry. After consuming a superb meal that left me feeling wonderful, I was ready to meet my host.

A tall, very distinguished looking man entered the room and sat down opposite me. He talked with an accent I could not place.

“My name for the purposes of this get-together is John and I know that yours is Asher. I will make a brief presentation and then answer any of your questions. I am an alien from somewhere in deep space. I am not as you see me. My native form is much too strange for you to appreciate. I am able to change your visual perception of me at will. To demonstrate the veracity of what I am going to relate, just watch.”

To my astonishment he changed in succession to a variety of popular images of the devil and then reverted to what he originally appeared to be.

“You are the Devil,” I blurted out.

“No, I am not. All will become clear. Let me continue.

I arrived here on Earth about 15,000 of your years ago, which for my kind is a short period of time. I am the only member of my species here. Basically, I am a space explorer. I am also considered a healer, not in the medical sense but in a social sense. I am willing to show you around these premises to further convince you of my truthfulness.

Technologically, we are eons ahead of you. You were invited here because of your work with ethics. Of all those who pursue the questions you have raised and despite the naivety of your inquiries, you have come closest to some semblance of the truth.

When I landed on this planet, humanity consisted of bands of feral savages who spent most of their time killing each other often in a cannibalistic fashion. Fear seemed latent but never overt since it would have been considered a sign of weakness. A form of Social Darwinism, in other words, the ‘Law Of The Jungle’ was pre-eminent. There was no sense of social harmony. Tribal customs allowed for total anarchy. Life expectancy was very short. Victims were often the young. In my mind, humanity appeared to be headed for extinction unless some civilizing factor was introduced. Normally, I would simply have abandoned these ferocious, mindless and cruel barbarians to their inevitable fate. For unfathomable reasons I felt I could not. I sensed a hidden potential and hoped that I could awaken it. As you can determine, I have had a partial success. Yet, I am reminded of the old maxim, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

After trying many approaches, I decided to use fear methodically, to alter human behavior. I chose to combine religious doctrine promoting ‘goodness’ and the amalgamation of all horrible behavior (sins). I balanced “God”, with an opposing force, the ‘Devil’ whose residence is ‘Hell’. The Devil had to be fearsome, bestial and very clever. Hell had to be a place where sinners were consigned to suffer interminably in a tortuous environment. Over time the concept of the Devil caught on. There have been many versions of him. My favorite was captured by the actor Claude Rains as a sophisticated Devil in the film, “Angel On My Shoulders.” While the Hell of fire and brimstone was favored by Dante, my favorite remains Shaw’s in “Don Juan in Hell.” Despite its contrived ending, my obvious favorite tale, one that has become legendary, is the story of “Faust” selling something he does not possess, his soul, to the Devil

Now you know how the notion of goodness and evil arose. Your first mistake, albeit it had some merit, was to equate goodness with physical traits such as heat, sound and light. Ergo, your meter of goodness was based on a false premise. Evil and goodness are things of the mind and do not have an independent existence. Thus there is no way

they can be measured in some sort of indexed scale. In fact there is a continuum between the two. Goodness is never without some evil with the reverse being equally true. Thus the initial fabrication of my imagination, God and the Devil, are not either totally good or evil. In due course they became figments of humanity's psyche so much so that they appear impossible to eradicate. While I invented the notion of the Devil, Humanity must take credit for embellishing it with legends and metaphors that rendered that personage more compelling. In any case, searching for icons is a futile waste of time. Seeking a better world may not yield much fruit but it is superior to a silly academic exercise.

That is it. I hope I have provided you with some enlightenment.”

I sat there for several minutes in a state of shock.

“Do you mean to tell me that just about all that humanity has accomplished is because of an experiment that you decided to carry out some 15,000 years ago, which to a large degree you consider a failure? Also, if God and the Devil, in their current perspectives have become mere human fictions, then does it not follow that the icons depicting them reflect what humans are all about? I am reminded of the old saying from a well-known comic strip. “I recognize de enemy and dey is us.”

The alien sadly shook his head affirmatively.

“Your recapping of what I have enunciated is correct. Also, I know that there is nothing more that I can do for humanity. If you are to survive in an enlightened fashion it is up to you achieve that goal. I will be leaving this world shortly. All that is here will also disappear. No one is going to believe you if you recount what transpired between us. I sincerely hope that you will be able to make a contribution to world peace and harmony. I tried to be a malicious Devil and a benevolent God. Perhaps the reverse would have been more productive.”

“Thanks a lot! What the Devil? We must have frightened you. In time we will find out who you are and do to you what you did to us,” I muttered.

Jack Basuk

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<http://www.jackbasuk.com>

