

## TRAUMA AND THE NATURE OF EVIL

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*There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.*  
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

*If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?*  
ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

*We met - Katarina, August and I - and from then on it became impossible ever again to give up completely. I have given some thought to why this should be. I believe it was love. When once you have encountered it, you will never sink again. Then you will always yearn for the light and the surface.*  
PETER HØEG  
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It may legitimately be asked, “What is a psychiatrist doing delving into the long-standing philosophical question about the nature of evil?” As we know, finding meaning and redefining reality to incorporate the experience of trauma is a fundamental task for the survivor of overwhelming life experiences (Herman, 1992; McCann and Pearlman, 1990; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). So too, is it one of the fundamental tasks for those of us who listen to the stories of trauma, those who attempt to provide the support needed for victims to turn their nonverbal, inexorable pain into a healing narrative. The effects of trauma are contagious and the witness is always in danger of becoming a secondary victim (Figley, 1995; McCann and Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995). The present philosophical exploration of the nature of evil is one of my own attempts to wrestle with this question of meaning. The vicarious brushes with transparent and veiled evil that are a daily experience in the life of a trauma-based physician have led me to explore the eternal question of the nature of man’s inhumanity to man, always with the purpose in mind of locating some keys to its reduction.

Like most of us, I come to the subject with many preconceived, implicit, and unarticulated assumptions about my subject, assumptions that spring largely from my immersion in a Judeo-Christian, Western, modern, psychological culture. It seemed important, then, to begin my exploration by learning about the various discourses on the nature of evil that have challenged the beliefs and behaviors of every culture throughout time. “Theodicy” is the word used to the age-old philosophical attempt to reconcile the goodness of God with the existence of evil, a concept generally shortened to “the problem of evil” (Noddings, 1989; Solomon, 1989). For the sake of organization I have broken these discourses down into categories to simplify my discussion. It is likely that these discourses are intermingled in most modern cultural milieus, but the differentiation allows

us to shine a spotlight of understanding on each one separately.

The tribal discourse attempts to focus on how our early ancestors understood the nature of evil, the basic building blocks of our experience with and perception of the subject. The Zoroastrian discourse of extreme, irreconcilable duality is discussed because of the profound effect it had on the Judeo-Christian outlook. Western culture has been powerfully influenced by Greek ideas, so we will look at how the Greeks understood evil. The Judeo-Christian concepts of evil have probably had the most impact in determining present attitudes towards wickedness, and have also powerfully influenced the Islamic beliefs about evil, but much contrast can be made with the Hindu, Confucian, and Buddhist viewpoints. After the rationalism of the Enlightenment, Romanticism reopened the engagement with the dark forces of nature and man. Modern psychology has powerfully influenced our current discourse about the relationship between evil deeds and disturbed traits and states and sociobiologists have provided us with more naturalistic, evolutionary discourses about the nature of evil as resident in a biologically, evolutionarily programmed organism. Sociologists and social psychologists have offered another contextualized version of why people pursue nefarious ends. The feminist philosophical discourse challenges much of what we have presumed to be true about evil, largely defined by a male point of view. Finally, I believe that our burgeoning knowledge about the biopsychosocial and interpretational effects of traumatic experience sheds new light on what makes evil “tick”.

### Etymology of Evil

As an introduction to these various frames of reference it may be useful to first look at the etymology of the very word itself, “evil” since words themselves so bias our conceptual schemas. The Hebrew word for “evil” in the King James’ s translation of the Bible is *ra*. *Ra* meant primarily worthlessness and uselessness, and by extension it came to mean bad, ugly, or even sad. Thus originally it meant simply bad as opposed to good (Taylor, 1985). Later words were used to refer to the breaking of the covenant with God and referred to such notions as “falling short of a target”, “breaking of a relationship or rebelliousness”, and “twisting, making crooked or wrong”. In a number of languages, such as those of Bantu Africa or Balinese, some terms translatable as evil have the sense of physically rotten, misshapen, and ugly or dirty. The word for evil in Hindu texts refers to inert and benighted lethargy, to something not properly alive and yet capable of being activated as evil (Parkin, 1985a). Neither the Japanese nor the Chinese make any contrast between “bad” and “evil”. The Chinese character used to express “badness” connotes “disgust” rather than “wrong”. In Shinto thought, good and evil are connected with purity and impurity, with life and death (Moeran, 1985). The Fipa of south-west Tanzania are Bantu cultivators who live in semi-permanent, concentrated settlements and whose ethical code enjoins sociability and nonviolence and they don’t even have a word for what we have come to know as “strong or radical evil” (Willis, 1985).

In English the word for evil has a folk usage that derives in part from Teutonic tradition and in common with the German *übel* and the Dutch *euvel*, derives from the Teutonic *ubiloz* which refers to the root *up, over*; primarily meaning “exceeding due measure”, or “overstepping proper limits” (Pocock, 1985). In English there appears to be a

strong and a weak meaning of the word, *evil* (MacFarlane, 1985). The strong meaning refers to the antithesis of good, which usage, interesting enough, the Oxford English Dictionary declares is obsolete when referring to persons. The strong sense carries the implication of moral depravity and thorough wickedness. The weak meaning is the one used nowadays meaning to cause discomfort and/or pain, to be unpleasant, offensive and disagreeable, to be 'not good'. MacFarlane (1985) believes that the "disappearance of evil [in the strong sense] is one of the most extraordinary features of modern society". Likewise, suffering that occurs as a result of forces of nature, are described as natural evil, whereas, suffering that occurs as the result of deliberate or negligent human agency is at least a partial definition of moral evil (Noddings, 1989). Metaphysical evil is a term used for the necessary lack of perfection that exists in an created cosmos, since no cosmos can be a perfect as God is perfect (Russell, 1988a). Radical evil has been used to describe a "fundamental warping of the will that underlies individual actions ... people who have allowed their wills and personalities and lives to be swallowed up by Radical Evil" (Russell, 1988b).

Our present definitions of evil incorporate a number of different meanings: 1a: not good morally : WICKED; 1b: arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct archaic; 2a: INFERIOR 2b: causing discomfort or repulsion : OFFENSIVE; 2c: DISAGREEABLE; 3a: causing harm: PERNICIOUS; 3b: marked by misfortune : UNLUCKY archaic - evil. 2. evil n. 1: something that brings sorrow, distress, or calamity 2a: the fact of suffering and misfortune 2b: a cosmic evil force n. (Webster's, 1996).

This brief, and albeit incomplete, look at word origins tells us something about the enormous variability of human thought and perception about the nature of evil across time and across cultures. But in every culture evil has been associated with calamity, misfortune, sorrow, and suffering and therefore with traumatic experience. Now let's take a look at a few of the numerous discourses on the subject.

### The Tribal Discourse

Unprotected from the malevolent potential of nature, primitive peoples developed complex explanatory systems to help make sense of the world. Interestingly, several authors have emphasized evidence for their celebration of life rather than a preoccupation with evil. The French philosopher, Messsadié, (1996), spent years researching the Devil's "geneology". In studying paleolithic and neolithic cultures, the evidence that exists shows that religious sentiment was entirely directed toward the celebration of life and fear of, hatred of, or even preoccupation with Evil is little in evidence. Primitive man's life was social and within this social context, he and she created rituals to attempt to exert control over the otherwise uncontrollable forces of the natural world.

The evils they described and attempted to deal with were, for the most part, "natural evils", the evil forces of Nature. Evil was illness and untimely death and could be caused by spirits or demons, invisible and essential malevolent creatures who could be controlled through the human, magical, ritual behavior of the sorcerers, witches, and shamans of the tribe. In order to control his life, man must drive away evil, which is illness and death. To do

this he must conquer demons and other hostile forces which require the creation and performance of rituals and ceremonies on the part of the social group (Messsadié, 1996; Becker, 1975).

Among Native American tribes, there was an almost universal belief in a Great Spirit whose power and authority were supreme over all life, but there was no single devil opposed to this Great Spirit. The Trickster figure, more mischievous than malevolent is the closest to a devilish entity in Native American mythology. They accepted the fact that human beings combined in themselves both good and evil and shame was used more than guilt, as a social form of controlling bad behavior. The goal of a well-lived life was to find wisdom and to avoid the path of evil (Sanford, 1981).

For central and southern African tribal peoples, the concepts of good and evil are dependent on the purpose of a person's life. Anything that enhances the well-being of the family and the tribe is good and anything that causes sickness or death is evil. The evil that occurs may be blamed on malicious or angry ancestors or other spiritual beings or it may be caused by the actions of still-living and magically powerful people like witches and sorcerers. The sorcerer is one who loves evil while a witch must do evil deeds for self-sustenance, for life-strength (Cavendish, 1980).

The objective of tribal religions is to establish a balance, a harmony between various supernatural forces that encircle human beings and this is done through ceremonial ritual. There is not an irreversible split between good and evil in the world, nor is man in the thrall of supernatural forces. The gods and demons exist and the goal, when possible, is to keep them from interfering in human activities. There is generally not a centralized figure that embodies evil, like the Devil. Messsadié (1996) suggests that this situation can exist when experiences with disaster are intermittent and affect only a few individuals at a time, and when the disasters are largely acts of nature.

### The Zoroastrian Discourse

Four millennia ago, a group of nomads from what is now southern Russia, the Kurgan people, came to settle in ancient Persia, now Iran. They came to be called the Indo-Europeans and all the cultures that we today call "Western" arose out of their invasions. It is argued that much of the monotheism that influenced Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought was forged within the matrix of their expanding civilization. From them, angels, archangels, and the devil were born. At some point in their history, there was an amalgamation between the Persian and Indian deities and Vedism reached its hour of glory sometime after 800 B.C. The Rig-Veda was written between 1200 and 900 B.C. The religions revolved around two main groups of supernatural entities, the *ahuras* or higher deities, and the *daevas* or lesser deities. These were ruled by two principle gods, Ahura Mazda and Mithra, but there was no known counter-god or demon comparable to the Devil (Messsadié, 1996).

There was, however, for the first time in the history of religion, the possibility of "salvation" and where there is salvation there is also damnation. As these myths developed, Mithra was a savior, announced by prophets, whose birth takes place in a cave, with the miracle child's birth announced by a special star. Mithra became an intermediary between Ahura Mazda the Good One and Angra Manyu, the Bad One, the governors of the universe.

And then came Zoroaster (Messsadié, 1996).

Zoroaster in Greek, Zarathustra in his native Persian, was a prophet who lived around 1500 B.C. during the establishment of the great Persian empire under Nebuchadrezzar II. Zoroaster took the position that God is wholly good and that all evil, suffering, misery, and death come from the devil. Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, existed above for all eternity, in light and goodness while below in darkness and ignorance resided Angra Mainyu. Ahura Mazda created the heavenly beings and then the universe as a trap to ensnare evil and he also created the perfect man, while Angra Mainyu was busy creating his own pantheon of demons and noxious creatures. A destroyer by definition, he set about to destroy the creations of Ahura Mazda, attacking the perfect man and the primeval bull, inflicting on them suffering and death. But then, when he attempted to leave, he found his exit blocked and he remained trapped on earth. From the perfect man's seed a plant grew whose leaves formed the first human couple and from the bull's seed came all the beneficial animals and good plants.

With evil trapped in a world full of life, the battle between the forces of good and evil had begun and would last through the course of history. Ultimately evil is to be defeated after a struggle that is to last 3,000 years. There will be a last great battle and all the natural, God-given order will be overthrown, the sun and the moon will cease to give off light, and the world will endure a terrible winter and the monster Azi Dahaka will terrorize the earth. Then, a virgin will give birth to the final savior, Saoshyans who will raise all the dead and assemble the court for the final judgment. The wicked will be returned to hell, the heavenly and demonic forces will wrestle until finally, Angra Mainyu is defeated and the world is saved. The last animal will be sacrificed and men will live a perfected, immortal life (Cavendish, 1980).

Zoroaster invented a Good and Evil that were preexisting and immanent in the universe and whose conflict was not to be resolved until the end of time. The soul could achieve salvation but only by moving the locus of happiness from this world to the next and if there was to be salvation it depended on one authority whose representatives were the clergy. These seeds powerfully influenced Judaism and later Christianity and are still with us today, particularly in the powerful Christian fundamentalist movement (Messsadié, 1996). Beelzebub, which means "lord of the flies", one of the New Testament names for the devil, comes from the lore about Angra Mainyu who was said to have entered the world in the form of a fly (Sanford, 1981). As we will see, the Manichean heresy provided a further development of Zoroaster's ideas.

### The Greek Discourse

The Devil never took up residence in ancient Greece. Among the Greeks there was no specific entity who epitomized evil. Not even Hades, ruler of the Underworld, was evil. He simply ruled over the lower realm of the dead. Instead, each deity in the Greek pantheon is capable of both good and evil (Sanford, 1981). The only Greek entity even remotely linked - through his horns - with the Devil - is the Minotaur, the beast that lurks in the labyrinth (Messsadié, 1996). In fact, in many ways the Greek gods appear to mimic all-

too-human behavior. As Messsadié (1996) has observed, “The paradoxical genius of the Greeks was to come up with gods but to refuse them tyranny, since tyranny, the absolute power of one or of a few, was incompatible with the Greek spirit”.

In terms of relating to humans, one of the interesting characters in Greek mythology is Prometheus. Like Satan, Prometheus is a rebel who steals fire from Zeus, the figure of supreme authority. His motivation for such theft, however, stands in direct contradiction to that of Satan. Prometheus’ act is one of compassion for the suffering of humanity who are deprived of fire. He risks punishment for the sake of their betterment. Another Greek mythological character is Dionysus within whom recognized evil and good are combined in such a way that there is a dialectical development which can go either way, depending on the circumstances (Kavolis, 1984). And then, there is the story of Pandora, who visits evil on men, evil given by Zeus as punishment for the transgression of Prometheus (Noddings, 1989). Only in the Orphic mysteries did the Greeks speak of an antagonism between Good and Evil and of the concept of original sin. According to Orphism, since human beings are made from the ashes of the Titans, who are malevolent spirits, there must then be a good deal of evil in humans as well. Orphism never really took root, however, because it set up a powerful priesthood which would have undermined the democracy. “The Greeks never forgot that they had invented their gods, and that the gods reflected them; they were never slaves” (Messsadié, 1996).

But the Greeks were as superstitious as anyone else. There were shadowy practices, incantations of magi, sorcerers, and witches, some of whom proposed to work with the malevolent dead or with spirits of the underworld, who could be coaxed to do evil deeds, especially around matters of love and money (Messsadié, 1996). The Greek philosophers responded to this irrational behavior on the part of their citizenry by establishing a discourse about the nature of evil.

Socrates held that no one would stray from the good except out of ignorance (Hobart, 1985). For Plato, evil had no real being, but instead is a lack of perfection (Mora, 1984) Plato divided the soul into three parts, the lowest part was animal and degraded, the second was the spirited passions and noble feelings, the third was reason, the highest part (McCrone, 1993). He did, however glorify the notion of the absolute, perfect, knowable and intelligible Good which implies the presence of absolute Evil. (Messsadié, 1996). The Epicureans linked evil with pain (Hobart, 1985). They posed the problem of evil as a trilemma: if God could have prevented evil and did not, then he is malevolent; if God would have prevented evil but could not, then he is impotent; if God could not and would not, they why call him God? (Noddings, 1989). The Stoics too puzzled over how evil could exist in a world ruled by a good God (Noddings, 1989). A partial solution to the problem was their claim that the supreme deity is in a state of perpetual becoming. The Greek dramatists conceived of a dialectic in which the opposites evolve, changing their own character and the structure of their setting in the course of a battle in which the cards are not stacked in advance in favor of one participant as they are in the God-Satan paradigm (Kavolis, 1984). In Aristotle’s view, people are interdependent and he acknowledged that goodness and happiness depend to some degree on luck. He accepted tragedy in the lives of good people. Aristotle, however, underscored the association of woman with matter and man with soul, characterizing women as deformed or incomplete males and in doing so he helped to reinforce the charges against female nature - that there was a fundamental

weakness in women's morality.(Noddings, 1989).

### The Judeo-Christian Discourse

The cornerstone of ancient Hebrew thought as transmitted to us through the Old Testament is ethical monotheism. As a result, evil as an independent principle, opposed to God, could not exist. This does not mean, however, that they did not believe that there was something to be feared. They did believe in the existence of spiritual beings, some of whom were perceived to be evil. In the Old Testament, the devil first appears as an independent figure alongside God and in direct relationship with God. In the Book of Job, he appears as a partner of God, who on behalf of God, puts the righteous one to the test (Encyclopedia, 1995a).

Under Moses and Aaron, the Hebrew people entered into a Covenant with God, a formal relationship between an inferior and a superior. To keep the Covenant it was necessary to keep God's laws and there were many of them. Failure to carry out this obligation was called a "sin". Transgression meant the breaking of a relationship or rebellious behavior. Trespass referred to a person who does wrong, is crooked or twisted. All three words - in Hebrew, *ht*, *psh'*, and *'awon* - refer to the disruption of order: either the failure to act in an ordered expected way, or the breaching of the public order by means of revolt, or twisting of the ordered path. Sins required confession individually, publicly, and on the Day of Atonement, collectively (Taylor, 1985).

Evil also was regarded as impurity or defilement, a contagious blemish and once affected, a person became unclean and impure. Impurity was dealt with largely through ritual, and that which was impure came to be seen as immoral. On the Day of Atonement, sins would be confessed and then through ritual, the sins of Israel would be placed on the head of the scapegoat who was led into the wilderness. Murder, idolatry, and adultery were defiling and therefore immoral, could not be forgiven and warranted death. They defiled the land, permanently broke relationship, and confession could not restore the relationship. Punishment, therefore, was necessary. The reasons for punishment were that God had been offended, a desire for retribution (*lex talionis*, an eye for an eye), a way to put away or get rid of sin (Taylor, 1985).

Over time, as Hebrew religious life became more and more institutionalized, people became increasingly aware of their offenses against God and a movement occurred from shared, collective responsibility and culpability to individual guilt. Where the evil originally came from, however, was never fully answered. Two Genesis myths are presented, one in which the fall of angelic beings somehow accounts for the evil ways of men, and the other famous story of Eve succumbing to the temptation of the serpent, the source of evil outside of man, and seducing Adam into sinning with her.

But the actual origins of the evil tempter remain mysterious (Taylor, 1985). During the Babylonian Exile, 586-538 B.C., the dualistic thinking of Zoroastrianism entered Hebrew thought and Satan became more of a counter-god, who in the Dead Sea Scrolls becomes Belial, "angel of darkness" and the "spirit of wickedness" and adversary of the "spirit of truth". Only in later Judaism does the devil become the adversary of God, the

prince of angels who entices other angels to revolt and in punishment for his rebellion is cast out of heaven and thenceforth struggles against the Kingdom of God. In this role he seeks to seduce man into sin, to disrupt God's plan for salvation, and he becomes the slanderer and accuser of the saints to reduce the number of entrants to heaven (Encyclopedia, 1995a).

At the time of the birth of Jesus, a burning expectation of the Kingdom of God was widely held in Israel. Although there was still a belief that God had chosen Israel to be His people, this faith had united itself with the contradictory experience that Satanic powers were reigning in the world. Hope in the Messiah was strong but Jesus never overtly declared himself the Messiah. He cast out demons and overcame Satan's temptation but the dominant feature of his preaching was mercy and love towards the suffering, the guilty, the outcast and to all those who, for the "pious" could expect no salvation. He practiced what he preached and in doing so, consorting with the poor and the criminal element, offended the pious. He counseled against arrogance, conceit, and preached forgiveness, nonviolence, and like Lao-Tzu, counseled humankind to "turn the other cheek" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995f).

The message of Jesus was interpreted and reinterpreted over the centuries following his death. The Manichean heresy arose in the third century A.D. and was a further evolved development of Zoroastrianism. In fact, it became one of the most long-lived and influential Christian heresies. Two eternal principles. God and the Prince of Darkness control the universe. Both are eternal, but only God is divine. God created the Mother of Life who creates Primeval Man and the three exist in a Father/Mother/Son Trinity. Adam and Eve are born out of the union between a male demon who has consumed a monster who has eaten of the divine and lightbearing plants of the Father, and a female demon. Adam and Eve are the offspring of this disgusting union that combines cannibalism and lust. Jesus is sent down to tell Adam the truth of his existence, that his body is an evil invented by demons and that Adam, Eve, and their descendants can only be rescued by liberating their souls from such a disgusting prison. This liberation will only occur at the endtime, the time of the apocalypse, when all spirit will be liberated from matter, and those who have freed their spirits will mount to heaven and the rest will be rolled together in a dark, eternal pit (Russell, 1988). Under the Manichean influence the entire realm of the sexual became demonized, the special temptational sphere of the devil and woman is the instrument of this diabolical enticement (Encyclopedia, 1995a).

St. Augustine himself was a Manichean for a time, and although the doctrine itself was rejected, its denunciation of the body had a tremendous influence on the development of Christianity (Noddings, 1989) and remains a presence in modern Christianity as does its insistence on the irreconcilable opposition between good and evil entities. "According to this model, humanity (and perhaps the entire universe) is locked in a titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil, between God and the devil. The battleground of this struggle is the individual human soul. The only question of ultimate significance is whether the individual soul will be won to God or won to the devil" (Peck, 1983).

St. Augustine set the tone for much of the subsequent Christian discourse on the subject of evil. He had been quite interested in the Manichean heresy early on. "I concluded that in goodness there was unity, but in evil disunion of some kind... I believed that evil was.. a kind of substance, a shapeless hideous mass which might be solid, in

which case the Manichees called it earth... And because such little piety as I had compelled me to believe that God, who is good, could not have created an evil nature, I imagined that there were two antagonistic masses, both of which were infinite, yet the evil in a lesser and the good in a greater degree". He goes on to tell the reader of his conversion to a different understanding of God and goodness, "Whatever is, is good; and evil, the origin of which I was trying to find, is not substance.... For you [God] evil does not exist, and not only for you but for the whole of your creation as well... yet in the separate parts of your creation there are some things which we think of as evil because they are at variance with other things (St. Augustine, 1988). In the Augustinian tradition, human beings are born perfect because we are part of God's creation but because of free will we are able to turn away from the good, from God, and this turning away is itself evil. Women are particularly liable to turn away from God toward evil. Human beings had a choice, they did not have to sin. In early Christian thought, evil entered the world because men and women wanted to be like God, and from the beginning man has been rebelling against God. This is the "original sin" of Augustine, a term he first used in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Original sin means that all human beings, regardless of their individual sins, are infected with the inescapable taint of corruption and no human effort alone can erase this corruption. Man is fallen, evil and guilty from birth. Only through the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross can man be saved and made perfect in the next world, after death (Cavendish, 1989).

We suffer only because we cannot see the bigger picture because in the long run, all things work together for the good. Besides, suffering is required to balance moral evil. Since God has allowed free will and therefore human choice, that choice has produced moral evil and God must make us suffer to maintain the harmony of the universe. To the extent that humans do great evil, then, hell is a necessity to establish harmony in the universe. Since people earn their own damnation we do not have to be concerned about their eternal punishment because they are necessary to the eternal happiness of those who have done right or have been chosen. In fact, the misery of the sinners may augment the happiness of the saved (Noddings, 1989).

By the fourth century of Christian theology, everyone agreed that the Devil existed but no one was in agreement as to where he came from. Augustine's arguments were persuasive, but an earlier theologian, Origen (c. 185-c.254) had voiced some other ideas. He found the idea of an everlasting Hell and an unchanging Devil to be unconvincing, "Since, as we have often pointed out, the soul is eternal and immortal, it is possible that, in vast and immeasurable spaces, throughout long and various ages, it can descend from the highest good to the lowest evil, or it can be restored from ultimate evil to greatest good" (Turner, p.77). His ideas were influenced by Platonic thought and not dissimilar to some Eastern ideas. Origen believed that at the end of time the devil would also be saved and that Hell would not persist after the end of time because that would signal a victory for sin and for the Devil (Turner, 1993). But, in 553 the Council of Constantinople rejected his ideas and excommunicated the three centuries dead Origen. The dualistic, Antichrist teachings dating back to Zoroastrianism won the debate. The Christian bishops at Constantinople decreed that, "If anyone shall say or think that there is a time limit to the torment of demons and ungodly persons, or that there will be an end to it, or that they will

ever be pardoned or made whole again, then let him be excommunicated” (Turner, 1993, p. 82).

For centuries, throughout the entire medieval period and beyond, the Devil became the main focus of the church’s existence (Sanford, 1981). Centuries of debate ensued as to the nature, origins, and purpose of the Devil. Over the time the Devil appeared everywhere, in pictures, carvings, statues, on pulpits, church doors, cathedrals. So too did efforts to root out the Devil, leading to the development of a massive clerical bureaucracy sustained by the money of those trying to help buy their way into heaven, witchhunts, the Inquisition and millions of deaths. During the Inquisition, any sort of sadistic, brutal, murderous behavior could be justified if the target for the torture was considered to be an agent of Satan. Gradually, beginning after the twelfth century, people began to become disgusted by the savagery and corruption of the Inquisition. The fifteenth century gave birth to the printing press and people began reading the scriptures for themselves. Change was in the air as was rebellion against a church perceived as corrupt.

Enter Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Luther, a priest, reread Augustine and developed his belief that man’s life was predestined, damnation or salvation entirely decided in advance by God. He dispensed with Purgatory and the intercession of the Virgin and saw Hell as designed by an omnipotent God for the punishment of the wicked. The Devil was God’s servant, destined by Him for the fall. Calvin, the second leader of the Reformation carried the idea of predestination even further. Christ did not die for all men but only for the elect and Satan acts at God’s command to punish the wicked. Nothing can help the damned - not prayers, not good works, not repentance, not absolution. Later, Arminius proposed “conditional predestination” so that those who chose freely to believe in Jesus could be saved - this last idea came to dominate Protestantism (Turner, 1993).

Many theologians find Augustine’s thinking seriously flawed. One might ask, “Do serious contemporary people still believe in Satan or the devil?”. According to a recent poll, 53% of Americans still believe in the reality of hell (Noddings, 1989). One study conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion and the Princeton Religion Research Center sampled a broad population to discover widespread religious beliefs in the United States (Gallup and Poling, 1980). Three general options were offered to Gallup’s sample: 34% said the devil is a person being who directs evil forces and influences people to do wrong; 36% said the devil is an impersonal force that influences people to do wrong; 20% said the devil does not exist as either a being or a force; and 10% would not voice an opinion. (Gallup & Poling, 1984)).

As Nell Noddings (1989) has pointed out, “the enormous influence of Augustinian theodicy on our political and social structures makes it imperative that all educated persons be familiar with its main points and effects”. Augustine’s arguments continue to provide us with a clear and usable justification for placing sinners - criminals - into hellish environments from which they can never truly escape or be redeemed. It also supports the notion that people who suffer do so for very good reasons, either because they have done evil or because they are restoring balance to the universe, and we therefore need have no pity for them.

### The Islamic Discourse

Islam has the strictest form of monotheism and yet managed to retain spiritual beings such as *jinn* as well as the devil (Taylor, 1985). According to the Qur'an, the being who became Satan, known as Shaitan or Iblis, had previously occupied a high position but fell from grace because of his disobedience to God in refusing to honor Adam. Ever since he has been trying to beguile man into error and sin. His act of disobedience is construed as the sin of pride and his machinations will cease only on the Last Day. Man is very vulnerable to the manipulations of Shaitan, but it is always possible for sinners to repent and redeem themselves through genuine conversion to the truth. Man starts life in sinlessness and can restore that state through God's forgiveness (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995d).

Evil is "pride and opposition to God... infidelity or the ascribing of partners to God, murder, theft, adultery, unnatural crimes, neglect of the Ramadan fast and of the Friday prayers, magic, gambling drunkenness, perjury, usury, disobedience to parents" (Weick, 1988). Shaitan is not God's problem but man's. Evil is never necessary and it is man's responsibility to drive out the evil that Shaitan represents (Parkin, 1985b). The real cause of Evil, is the individual's claim to individuality. One must submit to God and whoever does not do so is Shaitan's tool (Messadié, 1996).

### The Eastern Discourses

Hinduism and Buddhism accommodate imperfection, like ignorance, as evil within a theory of unified existence. Thus, even when a human "falls short" he or she is perhaps, lesser, but still an integral part of existence in the whole and never opposed to it (Parkin, 1985a). In Hindu philosophy, good and evil are both illusions and both vanish in Brahman or God. God is not responsible for good and evil and there is no need for a devil to embody the evil principle. Nor does man have to struggle against evil. Man must free himself from illusion, not sin, and only then can the soul lose itself in Nirvana, the union with God. Through the effect of karma man gradually purifies his soul. We bring upon ourselves our own karma through ignorance or evil deeds but the purpose of karma is not punishment but learning, cleansing, and balancing one's life. Man's problem is ignorance (Sanford, 1981).

There is no real concept of evil in Buddhism, meaning there is no concept of evil in the strong sense. Wrongdoing, of course, exists, but emphasis is placed on the harm that will come to the wrongdoer from his own destructive act. He will not be punished by a god because there is none. The evil agent is his own victim, for his suffering follows the act naturally (Southwold, 1985). The closest thing to the Devil in Buddhism is Mara, lord of the world of passion, whose name means "death" or "thirst" and whose attributes are blindness, murkiness, death, and darkness. His daughters are Desire, Unrest, and Pleasure and along with their father, they attempt to obstruct the lord Guatama's progress toward enlightenment, but the Buddha drives them away (Russell, 1988a). For the Buddhist, the source of moral wrong is within the person, not external to man. There is no concept of

“radical evil” with its attendant lack of forgiveness, damnation, and demonology in Buddhism (Southwold, 1985). In Buddhism there are four “noble truths”—the fact of human suffering, the understanding of the origin of suffering, the removal of the causes of suffering, and the path to the transcendence of suffering. Beyond all worlds is found Nirvana (“bliss” or enlightenment), “the indescribable goal,” whose attainment means redemption from the cycles of existence (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995e).

The two greatest moral philosophers of ancient China were Lao-tzu in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C. and Confucius (551-479 B.C.). Lao-tzu is best known for his ideas about the Tao, literally the Way. He preached gentleness, calm, and nonviolence and 600 years before Jesus, he said “It is the way of the Tao... to recompense injury with kindness”. He believed that by returning good for good as well as good for evil, all would become good. To return evil with evil would lead only to chaos (Encyclopedia, 1995b).

Confucius did not take up the question of evil directly but his follower, Mencius asserted that humans are naturally inclined to do what is humane and right. Evil is not in human nature but is the result of poor upbringing or a lack of education (Encyclopedia, 1995b). In Confucian thought, evil is not an independently active force but accidental, not deeply motivated, and due mainly to ignorance (Kavolis, 1984).

### The Romantic Discourse

Romanticism was a reaction against classicism, rationalism, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. It was influenced by the libertarian and egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution and is associated with a belief in a return to nature and the innate goodness of human beings. In the romantic view, it is the destruction of the imagination of creative responsiveness that leads to despair, hatred, and self-destruction. Compassion, even for Satan, is a prominent theme in romanticism. One is to come to know and admit to all of oneself, the good, the evil and the mixed (Kavolis, 1984). Characteristics of romanticism include a deepened appreciation of the beauties of nature; a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect; a turning in upon the self and a heightened examination of human personality and its moods and mental potentialities; a preoccupation with the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure in general, and a focus on his passions and inner struggles; a new view of the artist as a supremely individual creator, whose creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to formal rules and traditional procedures; an emphasis upon imagination as a gateway to transcendent experience and spiritual truth (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995c).

The Romantics also showed a marked predilection for the exotic, the remote, the mysterious, the weird, the occult, the monstrous, the diseased, and even the satanic. (Encyclopedia, 1995c). This fascination with the demonic continued throughout the nineteenth century in such works as Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, many of the tales of E.T.A. Hoffman, and of Edgar Allan Poe (Furst, 1969). The emotions typically experienced by readers of Gothic fiction are terror, pain, and sexual excitement. Many Gothic novels deal with pain, torture, sadism, and masochism. Aberrant sexuality is often presented hand and hand with terror and pain and is often associated with supernatural beings, demons, vampires, witches or men with an uncanny power to control. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* captures the collective struggle between the Victorian ideal of purity and the human urge to

express passion (Reed, 1988). Faust, also called Faustus, or Doctor Faustus, is the hero of one of the most durable legends in Western folklore and literature, the story of a German necromancer or astrologer who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. Goethe's literary, Berlioz' musical, and Gounod's operatic Faust all testify to the vibrancy of this story (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995f).

The Romantics tended to take Milton's Satan as the archetype of the heroically defeated Prometheus, the poet-as-hero in the first stage of his quest, marked by deep involvement in political, social, and literary revolution, and a direct, even satirical attack on the institutional orthodoxy of European and English society (Bloom, 1986). For Shelley the power which dethrones the principle of evil is the principle of life which asserts itself and breaks its imprisoning bonds. In this conception Shelley uses certain ideas which meant much to him. In the first place, he believed that in the end evil is conquered because it breeds its own opposite. As Prometheus hangs in chains on his rock, he is deeply troubled by the images of cruelty and evil which have attacked him. For Shelley, the earth and everything in it are alive and directed by an immanent principle of life. *Prometheus Unbound* dramatizes the defeat of evil by the spirit of life. Evil is subdued through love. The vast causes that obsessed him were the causes of humanity, and his belief in them was accompanied by a real compassion for the dark condition of man. Shelley's compassion for the persecuted and the oppressed inspires some of the finest lines he ever wrote. The deliverance of humanity was for him a real and urgent question which aroused his finest emotions. According to Mary Shelley, "The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was, that evil is not inherent in the system of creation, but an accident that might be expelled... Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none." (Bowra, 1950)

The Romantic period generated the first questionings of the existence of meaning - not the meanings of particular things and statements, but of meaning itself. The question the Romantics asked was not, "What is the nature of the meaning of the universe?" but "Is the universe meaningful at all?" It is meaninglessness that we wish to be assured of today. What frightens us is not evil, but nothingness, sheer materiality, with no 'meaning' whatever. It is alienation, in fact, which constitutes the essence of the Romantic predicament. Modern man is sundered from himself, no longer whole, alienated (Thurley, 1983)

### The Psychological Discourse

Throughout the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern psychology has paid relatively little attention to the subject of evil. William James entertained the idea that "It may be that there are forms of evil so extreme as to enter into no good system whatsoever... the evil facts are as genuine parts of nature as the good ones" (Russell, 1988). For Freud, the Devil and all his related symbology was a metaphor for the dark, repressed unconscious, the personification of repressed drives. Jung developed his concepts of the archetypes, most particularly the Shadow and made much more room for the reality of religious concepts. For the most part, psychology has been

dominated by a rational and potentially explainable view of cruel and destructive acts. In psychoanalysis evil is the distortion of the natural nature of humanity by oppressive forces of society and it is society that is evil, acting to distort, constrict, and reduce individual freedom. (Pattison, 1984). In a broader psychological sense, evil behavior is generally seen as springing from negative childhood experiences and poor socialization experiences. Since most psychological theorists have avoided the notion of evil and have instead focused on concepts of violence and aggression, outside of a coherent and integrated meaning system, other discourses on the subject often slip in, unannounced and largely uninvited, but powerfully effecting the treatment of individuals. The relationship between demonic possession and mental illness has yet to be completely broken and the mentally ill have historically been unrealistically feared, ostracized, scapegoated, labeled and mislabeled, and blamed for their illness. Implicit have been the age-old concepts that suffering is somehow deserved, that women are particularly sinful and deceitful, and that moral depravity may somehow be involved in the nature of mental disorder. The more difficult the patient is to treat, the more likely that these “explanations” are to be secretly, or even overtly, invoked.

### The Evolutionary Discourse

The evolutionary or naturalistic discourse focuses on evil as a biological force of nature. In this discourse evil is seen not as a supernatural force but as a part of our evolutionary heritage for which there are valid reasons. For naturalist Lyall Watson (1995), ecology is concerned with three basic issues: distribution, abundance, and association. Order is disturbed by loss of place and order is disrupted by loss of balance. Likewise, order is destroyed by a loss of diversity. The result of these three observations is the formulation of the three principle ways in which benign things most often deteriorate and become malign: 1) Good things get to be bad if they are displaced, taken out of context or removed from their locus; 2) Good things get very bad if there are too few or too many of them; 3) And good things get really rotten if they cannot relate to each other properly and their degree of association is impoverished. Then there are several genetic instructions which seem to be common to and appropriate to all life. Rule number one is: Be nasty to outsiders. Rule number two is: Be nice to insiders. Rule number three is: Cheat whenever possible. In social survival, these rules present a challenge. On the one hand, it benefits individuals to maintain the structure of the group, while on the other hand, the social structure encourages and rewards those individuals who discover how to exploit and outmaneuver their fellows. “By its very nature, a complex society creates calculating beings - ones who recognize the consequences of their own behavior, who predict the response of others, and who measure the net profit and loss in everything that happens” (Watson, 1995, p. 75.) Likewise, it is possible to show how reciprocal altruism evolved, and how it is possible for individuals and species to gravitate towards reciprocity and mutual advantage even while intent on pursuing their own selfish interests. The point here is that “we are the products of natural selection, of genes that are essentially and necessarily selfish, with a rigid set of rules that maximize a very narrow kind of short-term advantage. It is a system that works wonderfully well, on its own limited terms. It has produced everything in us that is both “good” and “evil” but it is completely amoral, devoid of empathy and long-term

concern” (Watson, 1995, p.290)

Howard Bloom (1995) looks at the question of evil from a different, although perhaps complementary point of view. Evil, he says, is a byproduct of creation, and in a world evolving to higher forms, hatred, violence, aggression, and war are all part of an evolutionary plan, a plan he calls “The Lucifer Principle”. According to this principle, Nature, through all that we call good and all that we call evil, is ever moving the world towards greater heights of organization, intricacy, and power. He believes that each individual is only an unwitting cell in a larger social body, the constant unfolding of self-organizing, superorganisms and only through our own moral imagination can we choose a less violent path of evolution.

### The Social Discourse

For at least the last one hundred years there has been a vibrant discussion among sociologists and social psychologists around the social aspects of man’s character, his behavior, his morality, and his immersion in the group. Since the early studies on crowd behavior, it has been recognized that people brought together in crowds will behave in ways that are quite different from, and often contradictory to, their behavior as individuals. Janis has described “groupthink”, the tendency for group decision-making to deteriorate under conditions of stress resulting in adverse and ill-advised decisions that the individual would have made differently (Janis, 1977). Milgram’s famous experiments in obedience demonstrated the powerful influence that social pressure could have in completely overriding moral behavior, allowing a normally compassionate person to inflict cruel punishment on an innocent person simply because of the experimental demands of the situation (Milgram, 1974). The anthropologist, Colin Turnbull has witnessed what happens to a previously moral, family-oriented, ecologically fit hunter-gatherer tribe of people who are displaced from their ecological niche in such a way that their entire social structure is disrupted and destroyed. Under such conditions, the Ik became so cruel that their behavior could easily be described as “evil” - the very young and the very old are abandoned, the dead are left unburied, the sick are uncared for, they have become, as Turnbull described them, “the loveless people” witnessing the “end of goodness” (Turnbull, 1972).

In a century of incomparable bloodshed, violence, brutality, destructiveness, and under the threat of total annihilation, many authors have searched for keys to understanding evil behavior in the sanctions of the social system. Most of their efforts have been directed to the glaring evils of the twentieth century which have produced collective, state-organized acts of enormous evil. In doing so, they search for the answers to what one author cites as four distinguishable questions: 1) How is evil legitimized?; 2) What kinds of shared values or beliefs or sentiments are appealed to in order to render the prosecution of evil permissible or desirable?; 3) How are people mobilized for evil actions?; and 4) How is evil rationalized? (Smelser, 1971). Evil is legitimized first by demonizing the other, while holding oneself or one’s group as morally superior. The more the demonization of the other fits preconceived social stereotypes, religious beliefs, and social traditions, the easier it is to view them as evil. Rampages of destructiveness are much more likely when some

person or agency in a position of power authorizes or encourages or fails to discourage, the behavior. When combined with the failure of any countervailing forces of restraint, the behavior can become completely unrestrained. Rationalization of all kinds then serves to justify and excuse the perpetrators, turning their evil behavior into good. "All's fair in love and war", "Done in the line of duty" are two such socially condoned rationalizations which assure the perpetrator that guilt is unnecessary, perhaps even unpatriotic or sick (Smelser, 1971).

Another author, prompted by the My Lai massacre in the early 70's during the Vietnam War, wrote a chapter in which he described the eight conditions for a guilt-free massacre: 1) The person must be seen as a symbol of something totally contrary to what others in the community regard as the communal good - the humanity of the victims must be denied; 2) there must be a connection between faith in the well-being of a society and faith in its organizational arm of violence and citizens must conclude that their organization arm of violence can do no wrong; 3) the organizational arm of violence must believe that organizational grounds for action are superior to individual grounds for action; 4) loyalty to the organization must take precedence over every other consideration, every other loyalty, every other morality and individuals who violate this standard must be ostracized; 5) individuals in the army or police or gang must begin to believe that their actions are satisfactory only to the extent that they relate to organizational rules; 6) organizations must find ways to avoid blame as well, often through secrecy and isolation that is considered vital to such aims as "national security"; 7) there must be a target population, a vulnerable population that cannot adequately fight back; 8) there must be a motivation to commit massacre, or any other evil act now defined as good or at least necessary (Duster, 1971).

Important research on the nature of authoritarianism was published in the 1950's and reviewed again in 1971. In this study, 2500 Americans from all walks of life were interviewed about their attitudes towards Jews. The term ethnocentrism was used to describe prejudice against an out-group and bias in favor of the subject's own group. The hypothesis was that high ethnocentrism would be associated with other traits that could predispose people to act against members of an out-group, particularly within the demand of an established and authoritarian system. What they discovered was that there is a close association between ethnocentrism and the following tendencies: rigid adherence to conventional values; submissive attitudes towards moral authorities in the in-group; readiness to punish the slightest violation of conventional values; opposition to the subjective, imaginative, or tender-minded; belief in primitive hereditarian theories and in mystical determination of the individual's fate; inability or unwillingness to deal with the indefinite, the ambiguous, or the probable; preoccupation with the dominance-submission aspect of human relationships and exaggerated exertions of strength and toughness; cynicism with respect to human nature; and disposition to ascribe evil motives to people. They called this pattern of traits "authoritarianism" (Sanford, 1971).

More recent authors like Ervin Staub (1989) have taken these sociological analyses even further and include the critical role of the bystander in determining the behavior of perpetrators. Many other authors and researchers explore the various destructive roles played by the economic, scientific, psychological, sociological, and political paradigms in creating the situations that are the breeding grounds for the perpetration of evil acts.

## The Feminist Discourse

The feminist discourse on the subject of evil has been most coherently outlined by Nel Noddings in her book *Women and Evil* (1989). She begins by acknowledging that there has always been general agreement that evil involves pain, suffering, terror, and destruction. Thus, in a feminine phenomenology of evil, in which violence is directly associated with evil through pain and terror, she wonders how and why evil and violence became “unstuck”. Her central question is, “If women were central to the argument about the human view of evil, how would evil be defined?”

She also, like other feminist philosophers and theologians, questions the entire notion of suffering as retribution for sin. Such a position, based on the judgment of a wrathful father-god, turns us away from the notion of a loving parent who would relieve and eliminate suffering. She points out that much of the theoretical dogma about the “problem of evil” serves to justify obedience to authority, and promotes a mystification, dependency, and powerlessness of the powerless.

Noddings points out how much Zoroastrian and then Manichean dualism influenced Christianity to reject the body, nature, and therefore the female, always associated with what is physical and natural, the “Devil’s gateway”. Women since Eve and then Pandora, have been blamed for bringing evil into the world, have been castigated for their lack of morality, even by Freud, and have been portrayed as the reason for men’s violence and their unrestrained sexuality. Simultaneously, modern women continue to bear the Victorian legacy of being the “angel in the house”, embodying the virtues that Western religions have cultivated, expected, and demanded in them: obedience, poverty, patience, charity, compassion, adulation, truth, humility, prudence, purity, chastity - and virginity.

In marked contrast, women have always accepted, loved, nurtured, cared for, and ministered to the bodies of others. In a feminine ethic, evil is human suffering, good is any attempt to prevent or alleviate such suffering. In dealing with real humans, in real bodies, women see the intimate interlinking of good and evil in each individual child and adult. To locate evil in bodily human life and to posit good in a spiritual realm, vastly separates us from human relationships and in fact justifies many abuses to other people on the basis of a belief in God.

In a feminist ethic there are three great and definable evils: pain and the infliction of pain, separation and neglect of relation, helplessness and the mystification that sustains it. From a feminist position, relationships and relational needs are more basic than the individual. Anything then that decreases needless suffering and pain is good and whatever induces suffering is an evil, regardless of whether it is individually or state-induced, politically justified suffering. Likewise any acts or conditions that promote helplessness, conditions like poverty and any form of oppression, whether it be economic, racial, gender or based on age, are fundamental evils. Finally, any act or condition that encourages separation and discourages the maintenance of relationship is a basic evil, including an ideology of individualism that supports the competitive, rivalrous, adversarial way of life so characteristic of our modern era.

## The Trauma-Based Discourse

According to the 20th-century Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyayev, the devil has no true personality and no genuine reality and, instead, is filled with an insatiable "hunger for reality," which he can attain by stealing reality from the people of whom he takes possession (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995a). One name for the devil is "diabolos", meaning the divider, the splitter-into-fragments. We know this splitting as dissociation, a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, and perception. William James described the "divided self" which can under certain conditions, "embrace evil an extreme lack of restraint" (Lifton, 1986). Bettelheim in discussing his own concentration camp experience said, "a split was soon forced upon me, the split between the inner self that might be able to retain its integrity and the rest of the personality that would have to submit and adjust for survival (Bettelheim, 1960). Robert Lifton, in his classic study of the Nazi doctors described his concept of "doubling". And folklore is filled with tales of the "doppelgänger, the spirit double whose appearance predicts our death, an idea that is rooted in ancient Egyptian mythology, is given literary life in Dostoyevsky's, *The Double*, Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This split-nature idea has long been with us and is symptomatic of both traumatic experience and the perpetration of evil behavior. It may be possible to say that in the face of an extreme event, we can split from consciousness and faint, split consciousness from memory and develop amnesia, split consciousness from feeling and become emotionally numb, and split consciousness from conscience and do evil deeds. This strikes me as a good starting-point for a discussion of the relationship between trauma and the subject of evil.

The literature that describes traumatic experience has much in common with many of the discourses about the nature of evil that we have briefly reviewed. Sickness has traditionally been one of the great evils that plague mankind, and sickness has traditionally been represented as a loss of intactness, a separation into parts, a fragmentation. And old expression for mental illness was describing someone as having "lost their balance". The original therapists, the Greek *therapeutes*, were the attendants of the cult of Asclepius, the god of healing. According to Plato, it was Asclepius who was able to bring about "love and reconciliation between the most antithetic elements in the body" (Meier, 1989). The connection between illness and social harmony has long been recognized by tribal cultures. For the Navahos, "illness is the symptoms that somewhere on whatever level or levels - the ecological unit is disturbed. To be sick is to be fragmented. To be healed is to become whole, and to become whole one must be in harmony with family, friends and nature (Van der Hart, 1983).

Pain is another of humankind's great evils and we now have a much clearer idea of what the overwhelming stress of suffering does to the human organism. As Elaine Scarry (1985) has poetically put it, "What is literally at stake in the body in pain is the making and unmaking of the world". Pain and fear rob us of language, split us off from our innate need to share our experience with others of our kind. There is a growing body of evidence to support the recognition that traumatic experience may, indeed, generate a separate consciousness, which, although absent language, may still carry with it memory, emotions, images, sensations, and a frustrated plan of action (Galín, 1974).

Separation and the loss of relationship is yet another great human evil. The Devil's loss is that he is separated from God. Once seated in a place of honor, through his own pride and disobedience he is now a fallen and unredeemable angel. To the extent that traumatic experience shatters the bonds that keep the victims connected to others, they are cut adrift, alone in a sea of pain, anger, guilt, despair, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. Other people avoid them because they are tainted, defiled, bad, crooked, ugly, impure. They are infected with evil and must be shunned. As bearers of troubling thoughts and feelings, victims are suppressed; listeners change the topic away from their tales of woe; they attempt to press their own interpretation of events upon the victims; they blame them for their pain, and finally shun them altogether (Coates et al, 1979). The effects of trauma are catching, and the listener is always in danger of empathically resonating with the victim and thus converging emotionally within the same traumatic envelope (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992; Hatfield, 1994). As Euripedes said several thousand years ago, "Where there are two, one cannot be wretched and one not".

Throughout the history of the human species, helplessness has been another great evil. Helplessness evokes shame, a feeling so overwhelming, so paralyzing and disabling, that it must be defended against. One reaction to helplessness is to the loss of agency, a perpetual dependent turning towards external authority for rescue, a pervasive sense of powerlessness. But another reaction is anger, a willingness to seize power, an escalation of anger to rage, fury and a profound desire to seek revenge and defeat the shame. The greater the loss, separation, helplessness, shame, and suffering, the greater will be the temptation to avenge oneself and at least preserve even a fragmentary sense of pride.

The "problem of evil" and the role of God, is fundamentally a struggle to make meaning out of a universe that appears cruel, and wicked experientially overlying a intuitive awareness of goodness. The experience of trauma shatters our fundamental assumptions of security in the world. One of the most striking metaphors for what trauma does to the victim is that of the "black hole" (Pittman and Orr, 1990), also a metaphor for Hell, the dark, speechless, empty, meaningless, suffering void of evil. Like characters reenacting the tragedies of Greek drama, victims of trauma wrestle to pull some meaning out of war, plague, earthquakes, fires, floods, incest, betrayal, accidents, torture, rape, assault, suicide, murder, genocide. But like Prometheus, they are often chained to the rock of traumatic reenactment, while an eagle eats their immortal liver that continually replenishes itself.

Most of the work that has thus far been done on survivors of trauma comes from the perspective of the victim. But if we are going to study the enactment of evil, if we are ever going to be able to prevent such enactment, then we will be better served by shifting our focus to the perpetrator. Ervin Staub (1989) has pointed out that perpetrators often disguise their true intentions, unaware of their own unconscious hostility and scapegoating, frequently hurting others in the service of a "higher good" and justifying their behavior on the basis of the victims' "evil" nature. The sociologist, James Aho (1994) takes this idea even a step farther, "My violation of you grows from my yearning to rectify the wrong I sense that you have done me. Violence merges from my quest for good and my experience

of you as the opponent of good”.

James Gilligan, former director of the Bridgewater State Hospital for the criminally insane and director of mental health for the Massachusetts prison system has a broad view of the relationship between trauma and the perpetration of evil and takes a much more tragic view of evil behavior than has traditionally been voiced in psychological circles, “Human violence is much more complicated, ambiguous and, most of all, tragic, than is commonly realized or acknowledged” (Gilligan, 1996, p.5). In his view, “all violence is an attempt to achieve justice” (p.11). Even murderers believe that they are performing an act of “righteous slaughter” (p. 77). It is his belief, after years of experience in working with rapists, murderers, sadists, and the most brutal of men, that shame is the primary and ultimate cause of violence whether it is self or other-directed. Combine shame with utter mortification of feeling ashamed, which is equivalent to a disintegration of identity, with a belief that nonviolent means cannot ward off the shame, a lack of emotional capacity for normal inhibition of violence, most importantly love and guilt towards others and fear for the self and we have a prescription for violence.

Carl Goldberg (1996) is another author who has studied and worked with perpetrators of evil acts. He discusses the formation of the malevolent personality and he too concurs that the cycle of malevolence begins with shame. For such people, their habitual experience of being shamed themselves pushes them to project their noxious feelings onto others resulting in a sense of contempt for other people that helps to reverse their own underlying feeling of self-contempt. But then, efforts must be made not to see that you are doing to others what was done to you, hence rationalization plays an important role in justifying one’s cruel and contemptuous acts, and taken further, you search for justifications for the malevolent actions. Regardless of whether we are discussing a parent’s explanation for hitting his child, or a murderer’s justifications for his acts, the same pattern emerges. For the malevolence to continue to escalate it is necessary that the malevolent person be unable or unwilling to examine his actions, motivations, and purposes for himself and magical thinking substitutes for a logical, reasoning, honest appraisal of the situation. This is the pattern of malevolence that occurs in the life of the criminal and is a pattern that can be seen even at the level of the group.

### What To Do About Perpetration?

In our present paradigm there are only two allowable responses to perpetration. Evil behavior is either ignored, denied, and reframed as good or it is condemned and punished. When the latter occurs, the evil-doer is banished and shunned - permanently. His reenactment will continue as he is placed in environments that are inherently, consistently, and repetitively traumatogenic. In order to survive he must perpetrate more evil, since the law of survival in prison demands such behavior as the norm.

If he survives prison and is finally released, the criminal remains forever a pariah. There is no way back. The ex-con will never be reconstituted as a full human being; he will always be an ex-con. There is no atonement, no restitution, no forgiveness (Bianchi 1995). He cannot be rehabilitated. He can only adjust to being a criminal by continuing to do evil deeds or by deciding, against the odds, to go straight. For most evil-doers, there is no integration. We have always looked at their denial of responsibility for their behavior as a

further manifestation of their evil characters. Perhaps it is, but an alternative option is that they really are dissociated from their evil “twin” of whom they are only partially aware, and that awareness more from what other people have told them than from what they really experience as their own self. This Mr. Hyde has no language, he only acts and he acts with a vengeance, heedless of any social constraints, cut-off from any feelings of compassion or connection.

This is not to suggest that we open the prison doors and let the perpetrators out. Much of what we are learning informs us that abuse and neglect of any sort in childhood can do such extensive developmental damage that we have no means of repair. We must create structures that are more effective in protecting us from perpetrators of violence. It is an act of evil, however, to make things worse, to damage these men and women even more, to sustain environments that are inherently traumatogenic and to fail to protect them, even from their own self-destructiveness, is itself a crime. Likewise, jailing a poor African-American man for stealing from a shop, while condoning corporate and government stealing is evil as well.

### The Cycle of Violence

Despite the fact that this knowledge appears to have little bearing on our penal systems, it has been well known since ancient times that the way children are treated bears directly on the adults they become. The effects of trauma are passed down from parent to child along with so many other traits, abilities, skills, and interests. We are beginning to understand that the mechanism that propels this intergenerational transmission works through the emotionally charged and largely nonverbal influence of attachment between caretaking adults and the child (Alexander 1992). When the deep, and unconditional regard we call love is available to the child it appears to provide a stable foundation for the continuing ability to connect to others in an empathic way. The caretaker resonates with the affective experience of the child and the child develops an internal working model for relationships that forms the basis of his or her personality, expectations, and behavioral repertoire. To the extent that the mothering person is unable to respond to certain emotional states in the infant, those states will be designated unacceptable. These feelings are unshareable, unacceptable, and must be disavowed. It is perhaps this constellation of un verbalized and unshareable affects that form the nidus for evil.

Many experiences that are acceptable, unremarkable, or mildly disconcerting for adult can be traumatic for a child. Children lack the experience, judgment, or perspective that allows adults to offer themselves reassurance and buffering against overwhelming stress. Adults often become astonishing insensitive to the sensitive, accepting, and vulnerable nature of a child. Childhood is so replete with painful experience that we block, distort, and often massively alter our recall of childhood experience. Murray Straus has noted that the family is, in fact, the cradle for violence. Corporal punishment affects 95% of Americans. Twenty-five percent of infants one to six months are hit and the rate rises to 50% for six months to a year (Straus 1994). Five percent of American parents freely admit to kicking, punching, or throwing their children down, or hitting them with a hard object on

some other part of their body other than the buttocks (Lewin 1995). In the name of discipline, we treat children to behavior that would get us jailed if we were to behave the same way towards another adult. Clearly, corporal punishment predisposes a society - and everyone in it - to use aggressive and punitive methods for dealing with social problems.

We know too that the stability of aggressive behavior patterns throughout the life course is one of the most consistently documented patterns found in longitudinal research (Laub and Lauritsen 1995). Parents act violently towards their children, who act violently towards others. It is not a very complicated scenario. But it is a lethal one. Children who initially display high rates of antisocial behavior are far more likely to continue to demonstrate traits that we call evil (Laub and Lauritsen 1995). We also know that adults can still alter those behavior patterns as long as the child is still a child (Laub and Lauritsen 1995). In a society in which cruelty and empathic failure become the normative ways of dealing with children, the normal human reactions to such treatment - rage, hostility, vengefulness, alienation, and sadism - can therefore be expected to run like an underground, denied, and suppressed river in the lives of every adult, since we are all part of the same social milieu. Such a river provides the ever present whirlpools and eddys that serve as potentials for evil acts - both those of commission and those of omission. As the U.S. Advisory Board On Child Abuse And Neglect warned us in 1992, *“Adult violence against children leads to childhood terror, childhood terror leads to teenage anger, and teenage anger too often leads to adult rage, both destructive towards others and self-destructive”*.

Normative violence towards children is the beginning of a cycle of violence that self-perpetuates itself, while hiding behind words like “punishment”, “discipline”, and “Biblical injunctions”. For centuries and with little Biblical justification (Grevin, 1990), parents have been trying to “beat the devil out” of children (Straus, 1994). Violence is violence. It is this normative violence that gives covert permission for the more traumatic forms of childhood abuse - the acts that more overtly lead to demonstrable and socially agreed upon evil acts. We know now that trauma changes a child’s brain (Perry 1994a, 1994b; Perry and Pate 1993). These brain changes do not fixate development as much as they permanently alter the developmental pathways, shaping the way a child views him or herself, others, and meaning in the world. The terrors of childhood are indelibly imprinted on the brain and these memories help to construct the way we view the world, each other, and ourselves forever.

How is that trauma can lead to evil deeds? What are the mechanisms, the pathways, by which the experience of suffering is turned into the willingness, motivation, and infliction of suffering on others? Our knowledge about the effects of trauma provide us with several intersecting and overlapping pathways to understanding. Fragmentation, helplessness, emotional numbing, detachment, alienation, cognitive distortion, traumatic addiction, traumatic reenactment, failed enactment, increased attachment in times of danger, trauma bonding, fixation to trauma, dissociation, and identification with the perpetrator all appear to play a role in understanding the urges towards the doing of evil deeds and help to explain the satisfaction and the choices involved.

The fragmentation that accompanies traumatic experience, particularly in childhood, creates the original fault lines in the self. Dissociation provides the mechanism by which

self-deception can occur as the child is forced to make sense out of contradictory input. Trance logic is the term used to describe our capacity to accept, at the same time, two completely contradictory sets of information (Schumaker 1995). By virtue of the “cognitive imperative” we must make sense out of the world around us. L.L. Whyte said that “*Order is the primary goal of human mental activity*”. For the child raised in a violent and cruel home, this capacity for dissociation is life preserving, serving to buffer the central nervous system from massive contradictions. The result is consistent and often escalating cognitive error and distortion of reality that actually protects the integrity of the entire nervous system (Schumaker 1995). This dissociative break in the integrity of the personality does not spontaneously heal. The capacity for dissociation remains active as long as there is a clear and present danger. But even after the danger has passed or been outlived, the flashback, nonverbal memory schemas will continue to assert that danger is present. Integration will not occur.

In many more cases than we have been previously aware, this fragmentation manifests as the development of separate ego states or even separate personalities that are not integrated with the other parts of the self and which can function autonomously, outside of the awareness of the perpetrator of evil. It is routine for convicted criminals to assert that “I didn’t do it”. This has been largely attributed to lying and avoidance of responsibility. What has not been clearly understood is that the deception may be as much a self-deception as a deception of others. Even after release from prison, when the more obvious motivation for lying has passed, ex-convicts may still claim that they “didn’t do it”. The evil twin self that lies beneath the surface, the Mr. Hyde freed from the restraints of integrated functioning, is the one that “did it”. The interactive social self may perceive, remember, or understand none or only a part of the evil behavior.

Robert Lifton has pointed out that when we are traumatized, images of some alternative behavioral scheme rise in our mind, schemes that would be far more positive but that are actually impossible to achieve and are, therefore, never completed (Lifton 1988). But the schema remains, unfulfilled, often dissociated and denied, but nonetheless, present, as does the overwhelming sense of helplessness at failing to protect oneself or someone beloved other. The helpless fury of abused and neglected children, their ferocious and utterly human desire for revenge, usually simmers underground for years until they have the adult capacity for self-directed behavior and can finally complete the enactment, sometimes on the original perpetrators but far more commonly on any available substitute.

As Drs. Gilligan and Goldberg maintain, it is quite likely that the unacceptability of helplessness and the shame that accompanies it is one of the prime movers behind the overwhelming frequency of male violence. In our culture, it is not possible to be helpless and masculine simultaneously. The experience of helplessness is a feminizing one, and must be not just stopped but valiantly overcome. For each episode of helplessness, masculine vitality must be re-earned, usually in kind. Self-empowerment does not usually satisfy the long-harbored and harrowing desire for revenge. Self-empowerment requires a self that has become comfortable with looking at itself, and as Goldberg has pointed out, the development of a malevolent personality prohibits this kind of self-evaluation. The shame is simply too great to tolerate honest appraisal and magical thinking and

rationalization is the dishonest substitute. Instead of healing, perpetration leads to perpetration. Rarely do we find a middle ground.

The abuse of power brings its own rewards. If helplessness results in inadequacy, shame, and weakness, then controlling the environment - and the people in it - is accompanied by a feelings of domination and power that brings a welcome sense of adequacy. Under such circumstances, it is quite gratifying to have one's needs met. This may be having someone take care of one's food, clothing, shelter, and sexual needs and the increase in power will help convince the person that it is his right. To do the forbidden, get away with it, and even get rewarded for it provides a sense of competence and all of these rewards are self-reinforcing. The ability to manipulate and overpower others increases further the sense of adequacy and serves to reinforce the notion that this is what he deserves, his given right, his just compensation for previous humiliation (Ryan & Lane, 1991).

Two other byproducts of trauma, emotional numbing and alienation, allow us to find satisfaction in spewing out our rage, triumphing over helplessness, glorying in revenge without being sidetracked by compassion, empathy, shame, or guilt. Abused and neglected children have years of practice in shutting off overwhelming, irreconcilable and noxious emotions. This disconnection is vital, a life-saving maneuver in the face of violent, cruel, and sadistic environments. Children need adults to help them to cope with emotions and when the adults, instead, generate emotions that are even more difficult to manage, the child is forced to fall back on its own meager and underdeveloped resources. We know from research with both humans and primates that the loss or unavailability of primary attachment relationships is physiologically, psychologically and socially devastating. Monkeys separated from their mothers from birth become extremely pathological, and are aggressive to themselves, to others, and to their offspring (Van der Kolk 1987). There is no doubt that we are born with native aggression, higher in some of us, lower in others. But, in the course of healthy development our aggression is channeled, limited, integrated with other functions, modeled after the behavior of others, and ultimately self-controlled. This socialization of aggression is dramatically skewed when a child is exposed to the naked and unintegrated aggression of adults, or when adults fail to provide the proper limit setting and redirection that aggression management requires. In such cases evil behavior is unwittingly, or sometimes, deliberately encouraged. The child, however, remains a social animal. If he or she achieves recognition, even if it is negative confirmation of the self, the evil behavior is reinforced. Without alternatives, the detached and neglected child will do bad things if they at least command the attention of someone. After all, for such children, abuse has become the norm, so that further abuse is only what is expected and it is better than being ignored.

Victims of trauma, particularly trauma experienced in childhood, become easily "addicted" to trauma, and for many this leads to evil behaviors (Van der Kolk et al 1985). The emotions that accompany the experiencing and re-experiencing of trauma are intolerable. Victims will do anything to block out, to stop the emotion. Many behaviors that are destructive to the self and to others can effectively block emotion, at least temporarily, in someone who has a history of repeated victimization. Self-mutilation, sexual activity, bingeing and purging, excessive working, excessive exercise, suicidality, risk-taking behaviors, violence - all can serve as tension reducers, probably on the basis of a complex

interaction between our own internal opiates - the endorphins - and many other brain systems (Van der Kolk and Greenberg 1987). James Gilligan (1996) observes that many of the most violent men in prisons direct the same vicious mutilations towards themselves as they inflicted on their victims. As he explains, for the prisoners, the experience of physical pain is preferable to feeling nothing. The choice of whether to hurt oneself directly, or to hurt someone else is a kind of Hobson's choice. If you hurt someone else you may gain a sense of power over helplessness. If you hurt yourself you may gain some degree of satisfaction for your own sense of personal responsibility. But either way, you lose - unless the social group provides some sort of support for one behavior more than another.

Clearly there is frequently a post-traumatic deterioration, with each flashback and the behavioral reaction to it producing further unresolved and unintegrated experiences. Perpetrator behavior tends to start in childhood or adolescence (Abel et al. 1985). When the child engages in his or her first act of perpetration, he layers the trauma of his own participation in the commission of an evil act onto witnessing the experience itself, all of which is layered over his own previous experience of victimization. Perpetrating an act of violence on someone else is accompanied by the experience of wielding power over another and becomes the antidote to the underlying sense of helplessness, while creating a dissociated and denied cesspool of shame and guilt that enlarges with every act of perpetration. Every time the victim traumatically reenacts his own experience by playing the role of perpetrator, he digs himself into an ever deepening hole. Since he has committed the evil deeds of his own volition, despite the fact that he feels compelled to respond to the inner propelling force of traumatic reenactment, he cannot pull himself out of the pit. As more and more boundaries are broken, as wider lines are crossed, the perpetrator moves from acts of simple cruelty to what has been earlier described as "radical evil". Perpetration is always a social act and requires a social response.

### A Culture of Perpetration

Lloyd DeMause has extensively studied the history of childhood. He makes some interesting claims. According to DeMause, the history of humanity is founded upon child assault. The murder, mutilation, and sexual abuse of children is not new, but instead a pervasive aspect of our society that has helped to mold and sustain our beliefs. "All religions began with the mutilation and murder of children. All nations sanction the killing, maiming, and starving of children in wars and depressions" (DeMause 1974). DeMause asserts that as an entire group, we maintain our homeostasis by using children as "poison containers" for whatever feelings, behaviors, and intentions we find unacceptable, and it is this mechanism of projection that holds together both families and nations.

From the Bible, to the ancient Greeks, through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and certainly today, many of our great scholars and literary figures have been pointing out that what we do to children determines the adults they will become and that children bear the burden of their parents iniquities: "*For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and four generation of them that hate me.* Exodus 20:1. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that we live in a

perpetrator culture, a society in which the perpetration of evil acts upon others is considered a norm, and often socially and politically justified. When 83% of Americans are victimized by crime; when there are over 200,000 million guns in U.S. households; when over 50% of married women will be battered (National Victim Center 1993); when one out of every 42 teenage boys will have to receive hospital treatment for assault (Guyer et al 1989); when one out of three girls will be sexually molested before they are 18 (Russell 1986); when 100,000 children carry guns to school every day (Time, 1993); when 2.2 million workers are attacked on the job every year (Anfuso 1994); when 60% of men on TV are involved in violence and 11% are killers (Gerbner 1994); when the prison population soars by 150% in only twelve years (Starer 1995); when 40% of people living below the poverty line are children (Freedman 1993); when the top 4% of the population earn as much as the bottom 51% (Bartlett and Steele 1992); when 10,000 species of plants and animals become extinct every year (Schindler and Lapid 1989); when at least 22 nations have the capacity to make chemical weapons and as of 1989 there were 50,000 nuclear weapons on the planet (Schindler and Lapid 1989) - when all this is real, then we are living in a perpetrator culture, a society in which only certain acts of perpetration are considered criminal and others are socially condoned.

As an entire culture we appear to suffer from cultural PTSD. We are fragmented into various and increasingly hate-filled factions. All of the above statistics - and there are hundreds more where those came from - bear witness to our dreadful self-destructiveness and uncontrolled aggression. We are numb to the sufferings of our neighbors, and blind to the cost of gross social and economic inequities. We suffer from serious memory problems, alternating between a dangerous amnesia during which we appear unable to learn from the lessons of the past and intrusive re-experiencing of some past danger for which we arm ourselves heavily while re-enacting the past. We are addicted to trauma, to violence, and to various substances, rarely going a night without our daily fix of shootings, beatings, and sexual assaults. Rather than doing effective problem-solving, we keep searching to a new and more strict authority figure who will set everything right again, remaining only dimly aware of the role we are playing in our own destruction, consistently refusing to deal with the reality that is right there before our eyes. Rather than make the necessary changes that healing requires, we remain organized around traumatic experience, mindlessly repeating our past.

On the question of "original sin", a concept so hidden and yet so implicit in the way we behave towards each other, we cannot yet know the truth. Until we have a society in which children - all children - are adequately nurtured and protected, we cannot begin to assess how much evil inclination is innate and how much is a result of the deformation that accompanies psychological trauma. But, as George Albee points out, "saving children means social revolution". It is impossible to truly protect children without eradicating the factors in society that are inherently traumatogenic, that is those factors that provide an increased risk that trauma will occur. This means that we must deal with the fundamental issues that continue to plague our social body - economic inequality, discrimination against people on the basis of color, gender, and sexual preference. Such a stand flies in the face of the present socio-political context which the playwright Howard Barker has so aptly described, "*We are reviving a medieval theology in which human nature is deemed incurably corrupt in order to reconcile the poor with poverty, the sick with sickness, and the*

*whole race with extermination*" (Barker 1989). If we are going to save children we will have to organize our society anew, around a new paradigm that does not center on the development and perpetuation of male perpetration. Our species has gotten dangerously out of balance. We have been carried away by male violence and by male perpetration and it now threatens the survival of all of us - men, women, and children. The personal is political and ethical neutrality is no longer tenable.

Lyall Watson's observations (1995) about ecological fit may be very relevant to our present situation. Our present scientific, economic, and political paradigm may have left us in a state of ecological imbalance, no longer fitting into our evolutionary niche and our more complex and collective evil deeds may spring, like it does for the Ik, from massive disruption of our social network. Noddings (1989) observations about the vital importance of correcting the balance, of creating, implementing, and sustaining a fundamental ethical system that is based on nonviolence, empowerment, the nurturance of relationships, equity, cooperation, and freedom from oppression provides a direction we need to take. But we are trapped in a dilemma, an age-old dilemma. How are we to wrestle power away from the Devil?

The dominant paradigm in this period of our history insists on an implicit belief system about evil and how to deal with it, a belief system that appears often, from a humanistic point of view, to be a prescription for evil itself. In this paradigm, unquestioning obedience to power is important and rebellion is evil. Women, children, the poor, and people of color are inferior, soft, indulgent, and fail to understand the importance of strength and pitylessness. In the medieval era there was a preoccupation with the Devil and Hell. Now we are preoccupied with the atmosphere of Hell - violence, sexuality divorced from intimacy, criminality, and unrelenting punishment. People get what they deserve, human nature is basically evil and requires constant restraint, and once judged evil, there is no use for confession or atonement, no pity or compassion - Nothing can help the damned. This paradigm continues to serve those who have wealth and power, but it no longer serves the human race as a whole. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is time for us to leave medieval theology behind and envision a different way of being, hints of which have been anticipated in some of the less dominant discourses on the subject of evil.

Instead of "Lucifer" and "Beezlebub" let us rename the demons who plague humankind: fragmentation, helplessness, emotional numbing, detachment, alienation, cognitive distortion, traumatic addiction, traumatic reenactment, failed enactment, increased attachment in times of danger, trauma bonding, fixation to trauma, dissociation, identification with the perpetrator. Less poetic, but more accurate, these names give us a much guide to what must be done if the Devil is to be driven out. If evil is over-stepping boundaries, a lack of balance, then we must learn balance in all things. If evil acts occur with a higher frequency among people trained to be authoritarians, then we must train ourselves and our children for democracy in its most basic sense. If evil is inherent in the breaking of relationships, then we must change individual, social, political and economic practices so that relationships are protected and preserved. If evil breeds within the fertile ground of poverty, suffering, pain, hunger, deprivation, alienation, and shame, then we must make a social commitment to alleviating suffering. If evil feeds on opposition, then we

must work at healing the dualistic split that permeates our way of thinking and being, and focus our joy on integration, on restoring wholeness to a fragmented, splintered world. If evil is ignorance and illusion, then we must educate and inform, while protecting each other from shame. If evil is doing nothing to help oneself except waiting for a rescuer who never comes, then we must each recognize that only together can we bring about change through nonviolent means. When people are drowning and could be saved, there are no innocent bystanders.

### The Bystander

In any situation of violence, there are victims, there are perpetrators, and there are bystanders. The key to containing evil lies with the bystander. Bystanders determine whether or not the perpetrator has the room to do his evil deeds, or whether he is limited. Bystanders are the audience. They are all those present at the scene of an incident who provide or deny support for a behavior. The victim & perpetrator form a linked figure and the bystanders form the ground against which perpetration is carried out or prevented. It is of vital interest to note that among many acts of perpetration which have been studied, it is the behavior of the bystanders that determines how far the perpetrators will go in carrying out their behavior. In this concept lies the key to interrupting the victim-perpetrator cycle of violence that is destroying our social safety. History attests to the fact that once violence is tolerated and supported as a group norm, an increasing number of bystanders become victims and/or perpetrators until it becomes increasingly difficult to make clear differentiations among the three groups (Staub 1989). It is time to turn our attention away from our exclusive preoccupation with the pathology of the victim and the pathology of the perpetrator look at the role, or perhaps the mission of the bystanders.

Research indicates that when extremely negative statements are made about a group they affect basic attitudes about that group even more than moderate statements. Thus, people will discredit the exact content of statements that, for instance, Jews murder babies, or African-Americans have lower IQ's, but will devalue Jews and African-Americans in a general way in response to those statements. This process of devaluation is the first and essential step in guaranteeing that bystanders will not act to stop perpetrators. Countries in which Anti-Semitism was highest in the general population were the countries in which most Jews were killed. This basic prejudice did not cause the Nazi destruction but instead, allowed it to happen. In countries where Jews were more highly valued, the Nazi destruction of the Jewish population was significantly less (Staub 1989).

Denial is another vital mechanism that determines the outcome of bystander behavior. Bystanders often deny the importance of what they see around them if they are not directly involved. Despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary, there is still a pervasive amount of "just world thinking" in our social environment. "Just world thinking" would have us believe that people generally deserve what they get, that bad things happen to bad people. This is a rationalization that we are set to believe, reinforced by a multitude of childhood experiences when we are repeatedly told that we deserve what we get, that our behavior has been the cause of our experienced loss of love, affection, or even overt abuse. Such attitudes towards victims allows bystanders to ignore events, literally not see trains loaded with Jews on the tracks heading for the concentration camp, or to deny the

significance of events, or to displace any personal responsibility onto the group. In emergency situations, when a number of people are present each person is less likely to respond than if they were alone in the situation. Our influence upon each other is startlingly powerful.

The body social can become infected just as can the body physical and the metaphor of an infection is useful in understanding this phenomenon. The infectious agent can be seen as the perpetrator, the immune system as the potential victim, and the other resources in the body as the bystanders. The state of nutrition, fitness, and overall well-being of the body determines the state of the immune system which determines how far the infection can spread. In a deteriorating body, the capacity of the immune system is overwhelmed and death easily occurs. Once the body has become overwhelmed by a pathogen, no amount of attention to diet, stress management, or fitness will help determine the outcome.

Similarly, in social behavior, early intervention and prevention works best. As bystanders become increasingly passive in the face of abusive behavior, action becomes increasingly difficult. Just as there is a deteriorating spiral of perpetration in which each act of violence becomes increasingly easy to accomplish, so too is there a deteriorating cycle of passivity. As the perpetrators actively assume control over a system without any resistance on the part of bystanders, their power increases to the point that resistance on the part of bystanders becomes extremely difficult if not useless except to the extent that such behavior serves as an example for others (Staub 1989).

Interestingly however, all it takes is for one bystander in a group to take some sort of positive action against perpetration and others will follow. Resistance to perpetration on the part of bystanders, both in words and in actions, influences others to become active instead of passive. There is much to be learned from the behavior of bystanders who DO help because in any situation of perpetration, they define a different reality. Their actions provide an alternative way of relating, another example to the perpetrators, and would-be perpetrators, and victims, all of whom become locked into the cycle of violence and abuse.

Helpful bystanders have many characteristics in common that tell us a great deal about how we need to raise our children and how we must behave in situations which confront us. Helpers have strong moral concerns that are transmitted by their parents and among those values are a fundamental sense of empathy for others, standards which are applied to people in different social, ethnic, and religious groups. Bystanders who become rescuers often have experience with being marginalized or victimized themselves but have been able to sustain connections with others rather than disconnecting from deeply human bonds. Helpful behavior falls along a very long continuum and evolves gradually over time. Each successful attempt to help leads to more helping behavior that becomes self-reinforcing. This implies that helping behavior can be modeled, learned, taught, reinforced - that it is not a given in any situation but can and must be constantly recreated (Fogelman 1994; Staub 1989).

But even willing helpers can be derailed by social propaganda, by coercion, and by the influence of others who want to deny the perpetrator behavior and who offer an alternative out with such explanations like "He deserves what he gets", "People can always

find a job if they look hard enough”, “The problem is not guns its the people who use them”, “People just want to blame their parents”, “Welfare recipients are just lazy and don’t want to work”, “There’s more crime because we’ve gotten too soft on criminals”.

If helpers can get past the propoganda and see the flaws in thinking, they still have to feel that they have some responsibility for solving the problem and that they are able to choose something to do to help and put their plan into action. This sense of mutual responsibility can be taught later in life but is mostly easily modeled within the family systems by what the children see in the behavior of their own parents towards other people. Finding effective ways to help often requires larger scale organization and the participation of others. It is the reverse of the downward spiral of perpetration.

The fundamental question is whether witnesses to the mistreatment of other people have an obligation to act? How do we ethically define “perpetration”? Is it as wrong to fail to act, to fail to protect when one can - then it is to actually engage in an evil deed? What is our moral responsibility to each other? Are we, in fact, “our brother’s keeper?” In an altered, humanistic, feminist, multicultural, postmodern, trauma-informed ethic, the answers to these last three questions are a resounding “yes”. Until quite recently in human history, the family group or the tribe were the only groups to which we felt the kind of loyalty that demands protective action. In the last two centuries, our sense of loyalty has expanded to our national groups. More recently, global ethnicity has been commanding fealty. But we have entered an age of such intense global interdependency that perpetration against one can be seen increasingly to effect the whole in an every escalating cycle of violence and destruction. We may never be able to eliminate the forces that produce violent perpetration but it is not too late to contain the violence. This containment can happen, however, only if bystanders choose to become witnesses and rescuers, instead of silently colluding with the perpetrators. As John Gardner reminds us, “The forces of disintegration will prevail unless individuals see themselves as having a positive duty to nurture their community and continuously reweave the social fabric”.

This is an extremely difficult task. The perpetrators of violence always seem to have the drive and the energy to proceed down the road they are on. Desperate to escape the shame and horror of their past and always running from the present, driven by reenactment, and seeking material gains to temporarily soothe the hunger for love within, they are chased by demons. Afraid of our own darkness, scared by the hobgoblins of our youth, we run as if we too were chased, as if *they* know where they are going, as if they are going anywhere but to Hell. Shelley left us with an alternative vision:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

From *Prometheus Unbound*  
Percy Bysshe Shelley

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