Henry Kellerman

Psychoanalysis of Evil

Perspectives on Destructive Behavior

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Psychoanalysis of Evil

Perspectives on Destructive Behavior

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For
beautiful
Maria Oliva Van De Mark
forever friend

Preface

In the winter of 2013, I was invited to attend a conference on the issue of evil. A symposium was featured, composed of several professionals representing the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, and psychiatry. With the exception of one thorough overview on the literature on evil (presented by Anna Aragno, Ph.D., in her paper entitled: *The Devil Within: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Evil,* 2013)) it seemed to me that most of the remaining presentations and discussions boiled down to several people agreeing that what was needed was a conclave of philosophers, theologians, psychoanalysts, and other interested specialists to join hands and perhaps learn how to finally develop the program to annihilate evil. This would be accomplished by virtue of understanding the mystery of evil; that is, to gather their cumulative intellectual mastery in order to produce an exorcism so that then, good-by forever to such a mystery of evil.

It would not be incorrect if one were to suspect some disenchantment on my part. Although much was covered at the symposium, actually, I noticed that there was an absence of any suggestion about how to begin a thinking process regarding an entry point (any entry point) on the subject of evil. An appreciable amount of time at this symposium was devoted to discussing World War II, in which it was agreed that Nazi objectives (and of course, the actual accomplishments of Nazi aims) were uniformly evil.

In my opinion presenters and attendees were stating a variety of self-evident truths (axioms) in the form of what I would consider clichés, and then also focusing on the psychopathology and sociopathology of evil by referencing the diagnosis of psychopathic personality and correlating it to evil behavior. Along with this, other comments were heard in the variety of ways one can focus on the concept and importance of "empathy" (or rather the lack thereof with respect to evil), as well as on the obvious idea of "being a good person." Yet, I thought: 'Does the self-evident truth that empathy is the necessary antidote to cruelty and sadism (under the overarching umbrella of evil) tell us anything at all about the deep structure of evil, about the essence and deepest source of evil—about its genesis?' The answer I gave myself was a resounding "No."

However, the references to World War II at this symposium and its genocidal vicissitudes, brought to mind another act of the war that might shed some light on how

to approach the issue of evil, and who it should be that finally does this approaching. It occurred to me that there is one specialty or intellectual domain that is perhaps better primed to do such analysis in contrast to other intellectual domains—even in contrast to those that claim some special perspective on the entire issue of evil. Despite such assumed claims, it is my sense that the infrastructure of evil remains insufficiently understood, not entirely parsed, nor thoroughly unraveled. This is true even in the face of such certainty from a variety of intellectual, philosophical, and/ or theological provinces regarding the assurance of having already produced prodigious amounts of theoretical abstractions and perhaps, empirical data leading to an already assumed effective penetration into the issue of evil.

However, it is simply not enough to examine the issue of evil and then arrive at a point of only reiterating the axioms: namely, referring to the necessity of empathy, extolling the value (and virtue) of being a good person, and in terms of the necessary psychoanalytic concept in the study of evil—that is, in a positive sense of having an uncontaminated superego, or in a negative sense of having an underdeveloped or punitive superego.

It might be interesting to find an example that shows that rather than convening individuals representing a conclave of various scholarly domains to tackle the particular subject–matter of evil, it might be more efficacious to find the one domain that possibly has the technology, the understanding of psychological infrastructure to perhaps suggest a path that permits a more penetrating and discerning entry into the psychology of evil.

As I thought about it, I was reminded that during the symposium, the Second World War was mightily discussed and so it further occurred to me that the Second World War might be an example of an arena in which representatives of one domain only (not a conclave of concerned domains), unraveled something that desperately needed unraveling.

During the Second World War, Nazi U-boat submarines were playing havoc with all allied shipping, especially and relentlessly with the shipping of supplies from the United States to our European allies. In this sense, the North-Atlantic became a lamentation—an unforgiving egregious graveyard to allied shipping. The U-boats were successfully torpedoing everything in sight, so that during the war these U-boats sank 2779 ships comprising a total of more than 14 million tons of cargo. This figure is roughly 70 % of all allied shipping losses in all theatres of the war.

However, one of the U-boats was captured by a British submarine and was boarded. Its objective was to secure the German High Command code used on these U-boats that were encrypted in a code-machine known as *Enigma*. Ultimately it was British military intelligence with the aid of information from Polish and Swedish cryptologists that first broke the code. Nonetheless, the British code-breakers also worked with their American counterparts on all sorts of code-breaking tasks. In later developments, other U-boats were boarded and again Enigma machines, codes, and ciphers were taken (liberated).

It was in May of 1941 that the German U-boat submarines U110 and U201 were attacking a British convoy in the Atlantic. U110 surfaced and was abandoned by its crew because after taking some depth charges it was decided that the submarine was

sinking. Then it was the submariners from the British HMS Bulldog who boarded the U110 and seized its code books, ciphers, and the submarine's *Enigma* machine. The *Enigma* machine and code books enabled the British code-breaker encryption/decryption experts at Bletchley Park in England to then solve the German/Nazi code, ultimately and essentially contributing to the course of ending the war. Bletchley Park was Winston Churchill's secret intelligence and computer headquarters—an encryption/decryption government code and cipher school.

The point of all of this is to underscore the evident issue that it was cryptologists who were the ones with the necessary virtuosity, training, education, and experience in code-breaking-technology to do the job. In this respect, it was not necessary to consult with philosophers, theologians, historians, or any other particular interested parties. The reason for not consulting with these others was that these others obviously knew next to nothing (actually, nothing) about the task at hand—encryption/decryption.

Now we come to the breaking of the code of evil. So, who should break the code? Have philosophers done it despite centuries of considering it? Have theologians done it despite claims that the province of evil is more than likely in their domain, and who have also given us two millennia of analysis and writing on evil? Have psychoanalysts done it with their assumed intellectual capital that having expertise in the psychology of evil makes it clearly and actually a candidate for such a psychoanalytic excavation within the specific psychoanalytic domain? The answer to these questions is a resounding No! None of these respective intellectual disciplines has done it, despite the unalloyed fact that each has considered it, discussed it, and published breathtaking mountains of literature about it.

Thus, even after centuries of considering the ins and outs of evil we are all still confused. It seems evident that after having centuries of access to the writings of philosophers, theologians, and others, we are all still wondering: What in the world is evil all about? It would not be far-fetched to state that to this day, there has not been developed nor even suggested a systematic understanding of how to parse evil and in so doing, how to analyze it, and finally, how to see it synthesized—to carefully observe its architecture, its engineering, and its operation. Thus, to summarize, it is my distinct impression that the infrastructure of evil remains insufficiently understood; that is, not even close to being unraveled.

The question becomes, how to ascertain the core elements of evil—how to penetrate and finally see these presumed core elements? And importantly, what this all means is to see that evil does in fact contain core elements that are coalesced into an infrastructure. In this sense, (as will be presented in this volume), the unequivocal answer is a resounding "Yes"—evil does indeed contain a deep underpinning, a specific and identifiable infrastructure.

When evil (as a conceptual construct and as a behavior) might be so systematized and its infrastructure understood, presumably only then will we be able to know its derivation (the fount and basic source of evil), and why and how it, evil itself, very frequently and with vile and dreadful effects, just about always either threatens to, or actually manages, to gain the ascendancy. And without a doubt, as a historical incontrovertible fact, evil does indeed threaten, and does also very definitely (and quite successfully), manage to gain the ascendancy.

Of course by referring to evil as an "it" can miss the point. Evil is not an inanimate object (or even something anthropomorphized); that is, evil is not a table or a chair. Rather, on an individual psychological basis evil will always be related to a "*who*" not to an "it." One can only refer to evil as an "it" when relating evil to sociological events such as the Nazi-led Holocaust against Jews and others, the Armenian genocide, the Cambodian carnage, African-American slavery along with the catastrophic slaughter of native Americans—also including all sorts of ethnic-cleansing across the globe—from tribal and ethnic/racial clashes in Africa and Asia to ethnic cleansing in Europe.

In addition, and in my opinion, despite the rather vainglorious attempts of psychoanalytic excavations into the understanding of the nature of evil, in this volume, I will attempt to show that the concept of evil in fact and assuredly can be revealed in its essence (regardless of past rather failed and even tepid attempts at deriving such essence) by applying psychoanalytic constructs to the entire course of evil—especially to its absolutely existing infrastructure. Such a psychoanalytic excavation will unfold here, and claim to uncover the code-breaking revelation in the understanding of behavior, deemed, defined, seen, or even intuited as evil. We will show that evil does indeed have an infrastructure and that this infrastructure is located and organized in:

the person's psyche.

Thus, I am taking aim at evil through the application of psychoanalytic meta-psychology. I believe it is there that the definition, nuances, and variations in the understanding (even sensation) of evil will be revealed. And in this pursuit, we will review material on evil offered by philosophers, theologians, and others but we will not consult them on the infrastructure of evil as it operates in a person's psyche, because these other virtuoso thinkers from these other domains may not understand the language of the psyche—and even if they do understand it, usually probably not to the extent necessary. Of course, although in the past evil certainly has been a subject considered by psychoanalysts, nevertheless and unfortunately, and as I've stated, the code of evil has remained essentially un-breached.

In the spirit of the cryptologists and decryption experts during the Second World War who only consulted with other kindred spirits, so too here, will we enter the journey into the world of evil generally, evil-intent more specifically, and evil-doings quite specifically, by relying more or less, solely on the psychoanalysts—the presupposed encryption/decryption experts of the psyche. It must be remembered, that evil is not a descendant of a chair or a table. Evil emanates *only* from a person's psyche.

It is in this sense that the challenge of this volume is to identify and reveal the infrastructural elements of evil in order to see such structure in detail, as well as with respect to its origin. Yes, evil as an "entity" has an origin. If the assumption of psychoanalysts as cryptologists of the psyche is a true reference to their identity (composed of education of the psyche along with "the treating of psyches"), and if psychoanalysis is what it claims to be, then this psychoanalytic journey into the very nature of evil and on the basis of such a psychoanalytic meta-psychological investigation, should be an exciting one—and exceedingly valuable.

How the Book is Organized

In Part 1 of this volume, I will review samples of the literature on evil from the vantage point of authors of various disciplines who have ventured into the realm of considering and discussing the nature of evil. This will include philosophers such as Arendt (who actually considered herself a political theorist), theologians such as Augustine, social psychiatrists such as R. J. Lifton, psychoanalysts such as Freud, as well as sociologists such as E. A. Ross. In addition, questions regarding the basis of evil, biblical references to evil and finally the elemental infrastructure of evil will be considered.

In addition, in Part 1 of this volume we will also need to examine various questions that naturally arise in such discussions. For example: Is evil absolute or is it relative? Is an adversary's definition of an evil enemy equal to the enemy's notion (the other's notion) of the corresponding adversary as evil? So, which one is truly evil? Is it one and not the other or is it both, or since if it were related to combat, perhaps is it neither? Is it that the Taliban Islamic Militia of Afghanistan who toppled ancient Buddhist sandstone statues, evil, or is it that they felt the presence of such carvings in itself was evil so that they also believed it was not they who were the evil ones? Rather, perhaps they felt the Buddhists were the evil ones and that products created by Buddhists needed; therefore, to be erased in order to nullify the so-called evil of Buddhism which apparently was perhaps experienced by the destroyers of these statues as an affront to Islam. Yet, in this volume I believe we will see it is possible to solve the riddle; that is, that it is one of the adversaries who qualify as evil, and not the other. We will identify which one it is, and why.

Hint: the Buddhist carvings were not an aggression against anyone nor were they intended to inflame anyone. They were an expression of Buddhist culture which is not based on the defilement of any "other." On the other hand, the Taliban Islamic Militia of Afghanistan who destroyed these sandstone carvings, were not merely doing a Talibanic Islamic modern dance to celebrate its own culture. No, the destruction and deliberate desecration of the Buddhist carvings were aggressive and *against* "those others." One was not an evil act and the other was. Which do you, the reader, think was the adversary committing evil? Another way to see it is in the example of a slave, who in the process of escaping his slavery kills the slave-master who was trying to foil the escape. Of course the question becomes: Is the escaping slave evil because he killed the slave-master? The answer again is No. The slave is not evil because the slave-master was always in the position as the aggressor-master. The key in such examples concerns the dominant one who is the aggressor against the disempowered one insofar as the aggressor's power becomes the arbiter of so-called law—that is, the dominant aggressor's *wish* becomes the arbitrary law.

In addition, in Part 1, we will also consider psychological elements involved in the gestation of evil as for example: clusters of defense mechanisms utilized in the service of releasing impulse, concepts such as psychopathy, punitive superego, sadism, rationalization, projection and projective identification, splitting, empathetic absence, and so forth. We will relate evil to the psychological enumerations embracing the concept of psychological/emotional symptoms and as such, we will dissect the innermost components of evil thinking, intent, and behavior. We will try to accomplish this by analyzing what we will propose as the forces that combine

to create that which we see as "evil": *wishes, anger*, *repression*, and perpetrators whom we shall refer to as the *who*, and all in an attempt to see the inner architecture in the nature of evil. As an analogy, this is akin for example to the translation of Hieroglyphics into modern English; that is, translating an indecipherable so-called antediluvian language into a modern understandable one.

In Part 2, of this volume we will investigate the diagnostic composition of various individuals and societies who have been defined as "nefarious" by many, and have been seen to be evil-doers. We will examine these individuals and societies alike by using available data to gradually accrue a presumed diagnostically relevant analysis of their thinking and behavior. We will examine Hitler of the genocidal Nazi era, Stalin of the genocidal Soviet era, Pol Pot of the Cambodian genocidal "Killing Fields," the Turkish societal genocide of Armenians, as well as the Pakistani genocide against Bengalis, and Rwandan Hutu genocide against Tutsis.

In both Parts 1 and 2 of the book also will be considered how the psychoanalyst can describe, or actually construct the compass that might potentially get us out of the "confused woods-of-evil" provided we actually use the directional opportunity such a compass possibly offers—and then ask the truly important question: Do we as a people, as Homo sapiens, have the energy to walk out of this "confused woods-of-evil" following the specific directionality offered by the compass—this metapsychological compass?

This "walking out of the confused woods-of-evil" means never again to follow the trajectory of evil to its eventual dreadful destination. In addition we will consider some of the various expressions of nefarious, self-serving, exploitative behaviors that comprise a cluster of processes that together, form a taxonomy of evil. Various of these processes are provided by Aragno's paper: *The Devil Within: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Evil* (2013, pp. 102–103), and include: "talionic responses, scapegoating, sibling rivalry, tribalism, the *wish* for dominance and power, greed, prejudice, extremism, exploitation, and, *uniquely* human, the pleasure in causing pain." As can be seen, Aragno has her sights set on understanding evil in all its nuances including "sibling rivalry" and the issue of "retaliation" as defined by "talionic responses." In addition, we will be perusing the psychological mechanisms of defense such as projection and projective identification, denial, reaction-formation, splitting, and so forth, as well as the proximal, or even intimate relation of defenses to the operation of emotion—with a focus on the few primary emotions and the few basic defenses implicated in the formation of evil behavior.

The specific components of the infrastructure of evil indeed will be identified with an attempt to have each component thoroughly explained. In this sense, the promise here is that identifying such an infrastructure may have the power to unveil and thereby divulge the lurking secrets of evil.

It becomes rather clear, that in discussing evil it would be impossible not to consider the vicissitudes of destructiveness. In this sense, if the objective in life is to do good things and not to hurt people, then what we are up to here is to understand the story of how the Serpent managed to slip into Paradise—to then display its ghastly arsenal of despair.

Or did it slip in?

Language Usage Note

In order to sustain the focus throughout this volume on the entire issue of the nature and structure of evil, certain constant terms will be consistently capitalized (upper case letter), while others will be consistently *italicized*; that is, in all instances, special "attention must be paid" to these terms by assigning them particular importance—that is, spelling certain terms with an upper case letter while consistently *italicizing* others.

The terms capitalized with an uppercase letter include:

Serpent; Paradise.

The terms consistently *italicized* include:

wish; *repression*; *anger*; the *who*.

Acknowledgments

Books by the Author

Authored Books

The Psychoanalysis of Symptoms
Dictionary of Psychopathology
Group Psychotherapy and Personality: Intersecting Structures
Sleep Disorders: Insomnia and Narcolepsy
The 4 Steps to Peace of Mind: The Simple Effective Way to Cure Our
    Emotional Symptoms.
    (Romanian edition, 2008; Japanese edition, 2011)
Love Is Not Enough: What It Takes To Make It Work
Greedy, Cowardly, and Weak: Hollywood's Jewish Stereotypes
Hollywood Movies on the Couch: A Psychoanalyst Examines 15 Famous Films
Haggadah: A Passover Seder for the Rest of Us
Personality: How It Forms
The Discovery of God: A Psycho/Evolutionary Perspective
A Consilience of Natural and Social Sciences:
    A Memoir of Original Contributions
The Making of Ghosts: A Novel
There's No Handle on My Door: Stories of Patients in Mental Hospitals
Anatomy of Delusion
Psychoanalysis of Evil: Perspectives on Destructive Behavior

Coauthored Books (with Anthony Burry, Ph.D.)

Psychopathology and Differential Diagnosis: A Primer
    Volume 1. History of Psychopathology
    Volume 2. Diagnostic Primer
Handbook of Psychodiagnostic Testing: Analysis of Personality in the
    Psychological Report. 1st edition, 1981; 2nd edition, 1991;
    3rd edition, 1997; 4th edition, 2007.
    (Japanese edition, 2011).

Edited Books

Group Cohesion: Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives
The Nightmare: Psychological and Biological Foundations

Coedited Books (with Robert Plutchik, Ph.D.)

Emotion: Theory, Research, and Experience
   Volume 1. Theories of Emotion
   Volume 2. Emotions in Early Development
   Volume 3. Biological Foundations of Emotion
   Volume 4. The Measurement of Emotion
   Volume 5. Emotion, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy

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