

There's Another Thing

GOOD AND EVIL

1. A Philosophical Principle: Evil Itself Doesn't Exist

Something absolutely evil would be a contradiction in terms, because even to exist is good; so nothing that exists can be absolutely evil. Insofar as something exists, it *is* good.

Evil therefore can't be thought about *in itself*; but only in terms of the opposition to goodness, the lack of goodness, the distortion of goodness, or discordance between goodnesses, goodness out of place. "Do-gooders", for example, mean no harm, and yet cause it. Absolute Good, by contrast, *does* exist: it is identical with God. We can't think of God as reaching, or fulfilling, some abstract degree of goodness existing outside himself. Rather, he is good *absolutely*, he is Good Itself, and all other things are defined as good insofar as they reflect or resemble God.

2. The Great Question

How are we to think of God's goodness - which must be almighty, if it is absolute good - allowing the contradiction/negation of goodness - evil - into the cosmos? Does he *want* it there? Impossible; it isn't positive, but negative, and therefore *in itself* cannot be desired. On the other hand, God must be responsible for whatever brings it about (because whatever exists, exists by his creating power and his sovereign will). This implies that God is potentially on trial.

So we need to think out some grounds for the possibility of evil which do not imply God as a great cosmic criminal, unworthy of our worship. (Here we can draw a distinction between sin, which demands a human act, and evil, which appears to be inherent in the cosmos - eg accident, illness, natural disaster etc. Suffering from such blind forces may implicate humans: eg, why build your house on a fault-line, and then blame God when your family die in an earthquake?)

3. Evil as an Apparent Reality - Sin

Sin means the *deliberate* denial, or contradiction, of what is good. It is conscious of itself - not therefore a thoughtless accident, but something willed. There has to be a wilful refusal of good. I have to turn down the good choices and choose the evil one.

This results in a contradiction. In *positively choosing* evil, I have to call it good, more desirable than the good I've turned down. I have *positively chosen* a negative. I've got to say of the evil: "That's how it should be!" Even if we simply decide to be evil for its own sake, we must think it is good to revolt, to oppose the good. And if we cave in to evil, half-unwillingly, we are actually seeking some kind of peace and quiet; we are tired of resistance, we want to be done with struggle; so making peace with evil seems preferable, and therefore good. Habitually, the destructive and the negative only *come into being* when they are wedded to good, real things

Here are two statements which distinguish the good from the evil will:

"*Because this is good, I want it.*" (good will)

"*This is good because I want it.*" (evil will)

A Theologian's view of free will A biblical example would be the state of mind of Eve before and after dialogue with the snake. The will of a creature (like our will) is itself made by God, a free act of his creative power. God's choice is irrevocable, unconditional. So he has deliberately included in the cosmos something which he chooses to set free. Undoubtedly this is a free decision on his part. God gives human beings the power to shape their own lives, choose for themselves what they will be. The possibility is therefore that they may choose to live in isolation from their Maker, to go bush. In this they would be choosing *against the will of God*, and *against their own nature* - which is ultimately to be God's creatures, open to a loving sharing of their lives with him.

This is a great bloody paradox. It is *essential* (written in our *being*) that we should use the freedom God gives us to choose him. That would be *to live a good life*. But our choices may go against this destiny, so that we use our freedom to choose other things, or specifically to refuse God. That would be to close down the possibility of a good life, and admit evil into the world.

4. Creator vs. Creature

Our free will, as (finite) creatures, is thus different from the free will of God, the (infinite) Creator of people and of their free will:

: his will for me has already defined *what I could, and should be*;
: my will has, to some extent, *what I shall be* in its power.

My *good* consists in the aligning or harmonising of my (conditional) will with God's (unconditioned) will; and this unity with God is what I must freely choose in order to live a good human life. It isn't a simple *overriding* of my independence, but a creative, active interpretation of God's will in my world, which causes *the world God wants* to come about, and gives it a shape and a form in my individual life. I can then say of my choices, not only "For my part, this *shall* be so!" but "This truly *should* be so! This is the will of God, and it is mine too."

5. What makes up Evil?

Evil will destroys, deforms, distorts, denies, cancels good. At the same time, in order to exist at all, it has to replace the good it excludes with some other thing (and every thing that *exists*, remember, is good!) Even the evil will, therefore, has to will *some kind of good*, even if it's distorted, deformed, misplaced, or whatever. Without that, the evil deed would be *totally* negative - i.e., it couldn't exist. Even muggers, or rapists, or genocides are after something they *think* will be *good*, at least for themselves.

But it is a good that doesn't accord with the good willed by the Creator, and therefore shares a heavy, or even predominant, measure of evil - of negation. It is the presence of really good things like power/energy/accuracy/efficiency/strength/competence that give the utterly negative (evil) a positive presence. Evil has to have some competence, some purchase on reality, it has in some way to incarnate itself. We *give up our reality* to evil - which can't exist as such - and it can thus be embodied in the world. This is why there can be something attractive about a crook, or a weird fascination about a stylish criminal; if people can get obsessed by evil, that is because it is necessarily married to something human, and therefore partakes in human loveliness. That is how it makes its way into the world, and why the education of our moral tastebuds is such a vital part of becoming what we should be. We might suggest that the theory that we are *fallen*

lets us understand love of goodness as the primeval *acquired taste*.