
Evil in Historical Perspective: At the Intersection of Religion and Psychiatry

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1.1.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Mankind has struggled since remotest antiquity, and presumably long before recorded history, to comprehend and to deal with – the manifold sources of challenge and threat to our earthly existence. Precisely because the threats to our survival are so numerous, compared with the comforting and healing actions that aid our survival, we have evolved over the millennia with a heightened awareness of the things that can harm or kill us, lower our social status, adversely affect our loved ones, or otherwise rob us of the necessities of life. This has led to the broad distinctions in our language between the positive and the (altogether more numerous) negative influences – captured under the headings *Good* and *Bad*, or in a manner more freighted with religious overtones, *Good* and *Evil*.

Originally, the concept of *Evil* covered a large territory on our mental map: natural disasters such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, plagues, and extremes of temperature; animals that could endanger our lives; and finally – the most dangerous of all our enemies: other humans with hostile intentions. The inescapable death of ourselves and of all living species was often itself regarded as an evil.

Natural disasters, in particular, could be so overwhelming, wiping out great numbers of people, even whole populations, at one stroke, that they cried out for explanation and, if possible, for being brought under our control. But war and violent acts even in peacetime could also reach devastating proportions. These phenomena also cried out for explanation and control.

The religious impulse, which has sprung up spontaneously in all cultures from the beginning of recorded time (if not from the time of our emergence as a separate species), has acquired pride of place among the attempts our ancestors made to explain evil. Mankind has found it both comforting and necessary to invoke the concept of the divine, whether compartmentalized into many deities (as in the pantheons of the ancient Greeks, the Hindus,

the early Egyptians, etc.) or, as in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, manifest in the existence of one God. Many believe that God created us in His image; others, regarding this as an anthropomorphic conceit, assert that we created (the concept of) God in our image. Be this as it may, religion assigns to God (whether in the singular or the plural) supernal powers over our lives and over all Nature. Related ideas include heavenly reward for doing well; heavenly retribution for doing evil. As we shall see, in earlier times the natural disasters were themselves understood as punishment writ large – for violating God’s laws about proper conduct by whole groups of people, even at times by whole nations.

The belief in life after death, adhered to by religious persons of many faiths, brings with it the accompanying notions that those whose lives have been (mostly) good will reap the reward of life-everlasting in Heaven; those whose lives have been (mostly) bad, devoted repeatedly to acts regarded as evil – will earn only a place in eternal damnation, Hell, or its equivalent. The appeal of these beliefs is easy to grasp, given the unhappiness endured by most well-meaning and well-behaved people, and given the outrageous success to the very day of their death, whether in fame, power, or money, of certain undeserving people who, in the estimation of society, were evil. One of the functions acquired by religion, in other words, was the promise of at least *belated* justice via the punishment of bad people, even if it could only be carried out in the hereafter – that the good people had been unable to effect within the lifetime of the offenders.

Looking at the world’s timetable, it is clear that religion antedated philosophy, and that philosophy came before psychiatry. It is not surprising, then, that in seeking an explanation as to how the mysterious and embarrassing existence of evil arose amongst their own kind, men turned first to religion. The first persons to offer explanations about evil were men of religion: either founders of a new religion, or else men schooled in-, and strongly identified with, an already developed religion. Many of these men were of what we would now call a ‘philosophical turn of mind’ – in the sense that they grappled with the larger issues of good and evil, morality, how life should be lived, how death should be confronted, our place in Nature, and our relation to Deity. The next group of men to ponder these issues and to offer explanations, steeped as they were in both religion and philosophy – were the religious philosophers. Only within the past three centuries have we witnessed the emergence of a few philosophers – often raised in deeply religious families – whose approach to the subject of evil is nevertheless more secular in construction and less tied to the tenets of this or that religion.

Until very recently the topic of evil was felt to be the exclusive province of religion, or perhaps of religious philosophy; explanations of evil partook of the metaphysical or the supernatural. To that extent, only for religious adepts: priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, was it permissible to make pronouncements about evil. Philosophers whose thoughts and writings were imbued with religion might also address the subject. But for the vast majority of people – to speak about evil, especially to categorize certain others as evil, was felt as an intrusion on sacred ground, and would often enough invite adverse criticism.

In the twentieth century, however, discussion of evil underwent a sea-change. Many important philosophers were less attached to conventional religion than heretofore. And in the last half of the century, particularly following the Holocaust, but also in recognition of the genocides in Armenia earlier, and in Cambodia, Rwanda, Nigeria, Yugoslavia and elsewhere, along with the Nanking Massacre of 1937, and the mass murders of its own citizenry in Russia and China – the topic of evil could no longer be confined to the

sanctuaries of religious leaders or to the university halls of the philosophers. Two significant developments have, in recent years, brought about a reshaping of our attitudes towards evil. First, we have begun to pay more attention to how the word *evil* is used by the public and by the media. There are certain classes of crime, for example, that predictably elicit the word, whether from people in ordinary life or from writers and journalists. *Evil* is no longer 'off-limits' except to men of the cloth. Second, evil has become an acceptable subject for study by the mental health professions, including general psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, and neuroscience. Rather than relying only on the Bible (of whatever religion) for explanations about the nature and roots of evil, we now look where we should have been looking all along: the human brain.

There has been an inchoate recognition for a long time that *evil is a purely human phenomenon*. For an action on the part of one creature toward another creature to be considered evil, there must be consciousness and also an awareness of death. The consciousness, in this case, would involve the awareness of the suffering that one is inflicting upon another. Awareness of death is a special case of consciousness, the implication being that an aggressor realizes consciously (a) that the death of the victim may be the result of aggressive action, and (b) that the victim would have been vehemently opposed to this result. There is also the matter of *attitude*. Acts that we regard as evil are often preceded by powerful emotions of hatred (whether in the form of contempt, envy, jealousy, outrage over being humiliated, and the like). Born of such hatred are such acts as murder, rape, grievous assault, public humiliation, the depletion or ruin of another's possessions, etc. All these manifestations are unique to our human species (with perhaps a few analogous acts among some of the higher apes). The cat bears no malice toward the mouse, nor the walrus to the fish it devours for its sustenance. For all intents and purposes we are the only members of the animal kingdom of whom it is meaningful to apply the word *evil*.

In reviewing how the concept of evil has evolved over the centuries, we turn our attention first to the men of religion in ancient times, some of whom also became the founders of new religions. We then see how the concept was reworked and understood by men who were at once professional philosophers and deeply religious persons. In the more recent centuries the main commentators on evil were philosophers, often with a strongly religious background and upbringing, but who were not also clergymen. Still more recently, we confront professors of philosophy of a more secular orientation. Finally, commentary on evil is divided between philosophers who are less strongly identified with a particular religion – and persons in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry.

1.1.2 EVIL AS VIEWED BY MEN OF RELIGION IN ANTIQUITY

One of the earliest ideas about evil is to be found in the writings of Yajnavalkya, a Hindu religious adept and ascetic of the eighth century BCE. He spoke of an 'inner person' who existed in two states: one of this world, one in the Other. When we are born and acquire a body, we are joined with evils; when we die, we abandon evils. In the intermediate situation of the dream state we see both the evils of this world and the joys of the Other world – an idea that is incorporated in a religious text: the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad [1]. As for 'evils,' Indian and Buddhist countries believe in the notion of karma, according to which all our deeds, whether good or evil, are rewarded or punished; our ultimate fate is determined by the accumulation of our deeds, extending over our lifetime ([1], p. 40).

A near-contemporary of Yajnavalkya, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah spoke in the tradition of Jewish monotheism, referring to the fallen angel Lucifer (lit.: the bearer of light) as one who had claimed that he would ascend into Heaven and exalt his throne above the stars of God. . . I will be like the Most High [Isaiah 14:12–15]. The prophet asserts that no, Lucifer (called also *Satan*: Hebr. for ‘adversary’) will be brought down to Hell. Lucifer’s sins were those of pride and covetousness – akin to our modern concept of narcissism. But there is a hint in Isaiah’s remarks that the good and evil observed among men is related in some way to the supernatural, celestial battle waged between God and His adversary – Lucifer/Satan.

Prince Gautama Siddharta (623–543 BCE) as he neared 30 gave up a life of riches, wandering in northern India as a poor man, and developing a philosophy that emphasized the renunciation of earthly desires and the state of non-attachment. Having achieved enlightenment, he became known as the Buddha (from the Sanskrit verb to *awaken*). Though he never claimed divine status, rather that of a teacher and guide, he has now become the object of veneration by those who claim Buddhism (and its offshoots) as their religion. Buddha taught that to escape suffering one needed to eliminate desire and to follow the noble Eightfold Path (right view, right speech, right thought, etc). To be avoided were the chief sins – all related to lust or desire; namely, anger, greed, and foolishness. These constitute the same triad of sins embodied in Japanese Zen-Buddhism: *ikari* (anger), *musabori* (greed) and *orokasa* (foolishness).

The religious teacher and prophet of ancient Persia, Zoroaster, was probably a contemporary of the Buddha, though some have suggested he may have lived much earlier, even before 1000 BCE [2]. The religion he founded – Zoroastrianism – postulated the twin brother-Gods, Ahura-Mazda (the God of Light and Good), and Ahriman (the God of Darkness and Evil). There is a close parallel here to the Old Testament story of the twin brothers, the virtuous Abel and the murderous Cain. Ahriman is said to have chosen of his free will to behave in an evil way, creating in the process the phenomena of sin, death, and evil.

The Jewish prophet of the Old Testament, Ezekiel (622–570 BCE), a contemporary of the Buddha, wrote of Lucifer in this way: ‘Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. . . Thou hast sinned: therefore. . . I will destroy thee, o coveting cherub. . . and never shalt thou be anymore’ [28:12–19]. Centuries later, Christian theology could not accept that God created Lucifer/Satan as a wicked creature, since this would amount to God creating an evil. Instead, St. Augustine’s idea (built upon Ezekiel’s understanding) found preference, according to which God had not created Lucifer as evil. Rather: Lucifer, now as Ha-Satan [*the adversary*] via an exercise of his own free will – *chose* an evil path, and was cast out of Heaven (cf. [3]).

1.1.3 EARLY PHILOSOPHERS

Kong Fu-zi [Kong, the Master], whom we know as Confucius [551–479 BCE], albeit a religious man, rarely discussed supernatural phenomena, emphasizing instead a humanistic approach – one that recognized the free will of all people [4].

Confucius taught that the superior man is one who has learned to overcome his *innately evil nature*, through the practice of *jen* [acknowledgment, knowledge]. He also advocated

moderation as a transcendent virtue, akin to the emphasis on the ‘middle way’ in the philosophy of Aristotle. Evil, for Confucius, was not seen as a supernatural force implanted in us, and against which we must constantly struggle, but as an inborn human tendency – against which we must constantly struggle.

Mencius [372–289 BCE], who may have been taught by Confucius’ grandson, Zi Si, was an idealist after the manner of Plato, in agreement with the latter that he believed in man’s innate moral goodness, in contradistinction to Confucius’ belief in man’s originally evil nature.

The comments of Plato [427–347 BCE] on evil have a resonance with those of Confucius. For Plato, God was not the cause of evil; instead, God guarantees the inevitable decree of Fate; namely, that the man who will make the wrong or immoral decision will pay for it, becoming tormented, perverted, and unhappy. God is without blame (ἀνόμιος). The ‘evil soul,’ meanwhile, is that part of the soul *where evil naturally resides*; that is, the irrational part of the soul which is receptive to evil and to ‘unmeasuredness’ – i.e., excess and defect, the sources of unrestrained wickedness and cowardice. One effect of this irrational soul is to make the soul think that whatever it avoids or shuns is ‘evil,’ and whatever it seeks is ‘good’ ([5], Phaedrus 256B 2–3).

Plato’s pupil, Aristotle (384–322 BCE), expressed similar views concerning evil: evil was a form of the ‘unlimited’; good, of the limited. Excess and deficiency are failings; virtue lies in the (golden) mean. As Aristotle mentioned: Men are bad in countless ways; good, only in one ([6], II vi). The mark of virtue was to have the right feelings at the right times on the right grounds toward the right people for the right motive and in the right way. In this regard, Aristotle’s ideas harmonize with those of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path.

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher [341–270 BCE] from the generation after Aristotle, held that the purpose of philosophy was to attain a happy, tranquil life, adding that pleasure is the measure of what is good; pain, of what is bad. He held that the gods neither reward nor punish people, but also counseled against hedonism – remarking that restraint and temperance were prime virtues, much as was emphasized by Plato and Aristotle ([3], 1:20). The philosophical school he founded (Epicureanism) was one of the three then dominant schools of thought, alongside Stoicism and Skepticism. Epicurus is noted for his effort to explain the world without recourse to myth or religion, but through reference to material principles – testable in what we would call a *scientific* way via direct observation. Moral reasoning for Epicurus involved a cost/benefit analysis of pleasure versus pain (the latter included both physical and mental suffering). Mirrored in his philosophy is the Jeffersonian credo, embedded in the American *Declaration of Independence*, asserting that human beings have the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In one of his writings, preserved by the early Christian rhetorician, Lactantius [240-ca. 320 CE], Epicurus casts doubt on God’s responsibility for evil via a method of careful reasoning that we will confront only much later in the works of Pierre Bayle. As Epicurus phrased it: *God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable, or He is able and unwilling, or He is neither willing nor able – or He is both willing and able. If He is willing but unable, He is feeble, but this is not in accord with the character of God. If He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God. If He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble – and therefore not God. If He is both willing and able (which alone is suitable of God), where then does evil arise? And why does God not remove evils?* It will be many centuries before this dilemma is resolved satisfactorily.

1.1.4 COMMENTARY ON EVIL IN THE 1ST MILLENIUM OF THE COMMON ERA

The word *evil*, once the New Testament was organized in its final form by Bishop Irenaeus in the late second century CE, occurs some 106 times (as against 446 times in the Old Testament). The Greek word κακόν is used much as was the Hebrew נָרָא [ra] of the OT – in a variety of ways: *wickedness, hurt, mischief, bad, affliction, adversity, harm, wrong*, etc: that is, both to designate the deed and also its consequence. There is not so much comment on the primal *source* of evil (as in Zoroaster’s Ahriman), as there is an implicit recognition that men are strongly inclined to commit acts which others define as evil – particularly if there is a weakness in their link to God. In this sense, God plays a role more in the center stage of human conflict than is apparent in the philosophy of Plato, where God (or the ‘gods’) are at a greater remove from human affairs, operating more as observer or final judge. Thus the New Testament speaks of the ungodly man: one whose life-course is an injury to himself and to everyone around him; he is morally evil and hurtful. Saul of Tarsus [? to ca. 67 CE], who became St. Paul, famously wrote in the first epistle to Timothy: ‘the love of money [φιλαργυρία] is the root of all evil’ – referring especially to ‘. . . they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish [lit. ἀνόητος ‘mindless’] and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition’ [1 Tim. 6:9 & 10]. Paul here inveighs against the same evils of greed and foolishness that the Buddha underscored. Elsewhere, Paul gives us a brief catalog of evils: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry [lit.: heresy], witchcraft, hatred, strife, envy, drunkenness, revellings, and such like’ [Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians 5: 16–24]. Oddly, the King James version also mentions ‘murder’ [Gal. 5:21] – which would be φόνος/phonos, whereas the original Greek of the Septuagint only reads φθόνος/phthonos – which signifies *envy* or *malice*. Paul does not present these evils in a hierarchical manner; certain ones nevertheless appear to us more malign (such as ἐχθρά: hatred, enmity) than others (such as drunkenness).

Plotinus [205–270 CE] is believed to have been a Hellenized Egyptian, the developer of neo-Platonic philosophy. He himself was not Christian nor did he refer to Christianity in his works. Plotinus’ cosmology influenced subsequent philosophers from many backgrounds, including Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. One aspect of his cosmology centers around his belief that the soul is composed of a higher and a lower part: the higher part – divine, and imparting life to the lower part, which in turn is the seat of the personality with its passions and vices. Evil is linked with matter, in contrast to the Intellect, which is always pure – and which turns away from matter. For Plotinus evil was not irremediable, since it came about through privation: through the soul becoming disconnected from the higher part because of forgetfulness. In this latter state, the soul loses its ability to rule over its inferior part and comes under the influence of matter. The remedy for the soul, by which it can free itself from evil – is through the experience of love.

In contrast to the mind-set of Plato or Mencius, the early Christian philosophers tended toward a pessimistic view of humanity, picturing man as sinful, evil as inescapable, salvation as difficult to achieve. This gloomy view was not universal among them, but was characteristic of the most influential thinkers. Consider, for example, the ideas of St. Augustine as contrasted with those of Pelagius. Both were born in the same year [354 CE]: Pelagius in Britain; St. Augustine, in North Africa. St. Augustine, before his conversion to Christianity at age 31, struggled with sexual feelings that overwhelmed him and which he strove to ‘conquer’ after coming under the influence of St. Ambrose in Milan. In his effort to

understand evil, St. Augustine argued that God was good and the things He made were good. Evil, not being attributable to God, came from the sin committed by Adam and Eve in violating God's prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit (which conferred *knowledge*, including, by the way, knowledge about sex and procreation). Because of this hubris, we became corrupted by our own *free will* – the Original Sin of these first two humans being passed down the generations. For St. Augustine this *vitium* (flaw) lay in our passions and desires of the flesh, summed up under the heading of *concupiscentia* (which includes *all* desires – for wealth, admiration, power, not just for sex), the root being Pride (the craving for self-exaltation). In one of his more dour comments, he wrote *Sub Deo justo, nemo miser nisi mereatur*: Under a just God, no one is miserable who has not deserved misery. Yet St. Augustine disagreed with Plotinus, claiming instead that whatever exists on earth (including matter) is good, because it came from God. The one curative that could free our will from its inherited and otherwise irremediable predisposition to sin – was the elusive (and for St. Augustine, not very liberally dispensed) force of *God's grace* [7].

Pelagius' views were diametrically opposed to those of St. Augustine, rejecting the latter's fatalistic and rigid conceptions. Opposing the doctrine of Original Sin, Pelagius proposed instead that Adam was created susceptible of death – whether or not he had sinned; his sin was his alone and not that of all mankind; infants are in the same state as Adam before the Fall; and even before Christ there were some men who were sinless. Each person, furthermore, was free to choose between good and evil. Though Pelagius regarded his contemporary as nearly Manichaeic (and thus heretical) in his picture of Good and Evil as akin to two separate forces, it was St. Augustine who won the day and set the tone for much of Christian philosophy in the years to come. Pelagius emerged, despite his (as we would see it) humanistic philosophy, as the 'heretic.' In fairness to his rival, St. Augustine did recognize (in a manner at variance with Manichaeism) that '... I once thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us (*mihi videbatur non esse nos qui peccamus, sed nescio quam aliam in nobis peccare naturam*). . . The truth, of course, was that it was all within my own self, and that my own impiety had divided me against myself' ([8], V, 10).

1.1.5 ARABIC PHILOSOPHERS IN THE TIME OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

A number of important Arabic philosophers bookended the first millennium, having flourished in the century-and-a-half just before, or just after 1000 CE.

The first philosopher of major significance during this era was Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (ca. 801–873), who was born into an aristocratic family in Kufa (in what is now Iraq). A polymath learned in many academic subjects, Al-Kindī is credited with having introduced Indian numerals (that we now refer to as Arabic numerals) into the Islamic and Christian worlds. In the field of psychology he wrote a treatise on sleep and dream interpretation. As to his philosophic thought, he was influenced by Aristotle and by such neo-Platonic writers as Plotinus and Proclus. In his treatise *The Eradication of Sorrow*, Al-Kindī touches on the broad topic of good and evil, insofar as he speaks of grief as related either to the loss of loved ones or to the loss of personal possessions. Yet one cannot live without sustaining the loss of loved ones nor can one acquire all he may desire. As Butterworth [9] mentions, 'the only way to escape sorrow is to be free from these attachments' (p. 269). In this sense

Al-Kindī argues for the kind of asceticism urged by the Buddha long before him, and by the neo-Platonic philosophers as well – who equated evil with the material world – and with the inordinate quest for material wealth; good – with philosophic contemplation and the pursuit of virtue. Implicit in his recommendation for the virtuous life is something akin to life according to an Aristotelian Golden Mean – where, regarding possessions, one strives to get along with the low side of average; to be satisfied, that is, with ‘just enough.’ This would be the optimal antidote to greed (recall the Buddha’s triune conception of evil: anger, greed, and foolishness) – that was still compatible with a tolerable human existence.

The philosopher/polymath whom we know as Rhazes was born in Persia, in the city of Rayy (whence his name: ‘from the city of Rayy’) in about 854. He became physician in charge of the Royal Hospital in Rayy, eventually moving to a similar post in Baghdad. Among his medical accomplishments were the discovery of sulfuric acid and the medical use of alcohol. Though a prolific writer (one year he is said to have written 20,000 pages, or 55 a day), little has come down to us of his original works. A freethinker whose philosophic ideas were more in keeping with Platonic than with Aristotelian thought, Rhazes did not see creation as a gift or an act of grace bestowed on us by a benevolent deity. Rather, he felt that ‘... in this life, evils outweigh goods,’ in sympathy with the Epicurean view, and also with his physicianly observation that there was a ‘prevalence of pain and suffering over peace and pleasure in all sensate beings’ [10]. Akin to the Judaeo-Christian notion of expulsion from the Garden of Eden because of sin, Rhazes pictured our bodily existence as representing a fall from the life-giving principle of the Soul – a fall that can be broken by the gift of intelligence. The fall was not so much imposed on us by God as permitted by a tolerant and all-seeing Wisdom [10]. There is a hint here of man having free will, despite the omnipotence of an all-knowing God – leaving us free to pursue good or to descend into evil.

In a manner analogous to Pelagius’ departure from orthodox Christian belief, the Persian-born Islamic philosopher, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī [870–950], the founder of Islamic Neo-Platonism, questioned the authority of the Qur’an and rejected the notion of predestination. He felt reason was superior to revelation – a heretical idea for a Muslim [11]. Al-Fārābī may have been influenced in this direction by his (heretical) teacher ‘Īsa al-Warrāq (died 909 CE). Dividing the cosmos into three worlds: the First (independent of matter; the realm of intelligible forms and higher spirits); the Second (the heavenly spheres); and the Third (material entities), Fārābī posited that evil was excluded from the first two, and could exist only in the third realm. Even there, in the domain of willful action, good and evil can be found, and depend on either the proper use, or else the misuse, of material means. Voluntary evil is associated with wrong choice, as when, for example, the rational faculty is oblivious to the supreme good and is directed instead toward an inferior good such as pleasure or profit ([11], p. 97). There is no simple correspondence, in other words, between *Pleasure and Good* versus *Pain and Evil*, since certain pleasures are obviously associated with vice and with harm to others. Rhazes before him had cautioned that pleasure is to be pursued only in a manner that brings on no greater pain or harm ([9], p 271). As with Pelagius, and in opposition to St. Augustine, God and the supernatural are no longer primary elements in Al Fārābī’s conceptualization of evil and its origins. Even though he invokes God as the ‘Lord of the Worlds,’ God, in Al Fārābī’s view, does not act directly on the sublunary world (Rhazes would agree with this postulate), and is thus more remote than the God of St. Augustine.

Abū 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina, whom we know as Avicenna, was born near Bukhara (in Central Asia) in 980. He died in 1037 CE. A polymath like the previously mentioned Islamic philosophers, Avicenna is better known today for his voluminous medical writings than for his essays on other topics. In his philosophical work, he was interested primarily in creating a coherent system that dealt with man's place in the world in a way harmonious with Islamic religious doctrine. His earliest works were influenced by Al-Fārābī, and include his *Maqala fi'l Nafs* (Compendium on the Soul) in which he argues for the incorporeality of the soul, though without adopting the Neo-Platonic notion of its pre-existence [12]. As with medieval philosophers in general, Avicenna used the philosophical mind-set in the service of religion, positing that God, as one pure Good could produce only a cosmos that was orderly and good. But this raises the vexatious question: if God is pure Good, whence Evil? Avicenna's answer was that there was no Pure Evil (like the Zoroastrian Ahriman) on the other side of the balance. Rather: in our world there are particular evils, best understood as 'accidental consequences of good' ([12], section 5). Still to be explained: moral evils among human beings, as opposed to natural evils such as earthquakes and floods. Here Avicenna posited that God knows the things that exist, but not individuals. This drew fire from a later Islamic philosopher, Al Ghazali (1058–1111 CE), for whom Avicenna's denial that God had knowledge of particulars, as well, was heretical. In the area of psychology Avicenna's religion-inspired views existed side by side with his practical medical knowledge. In a prelibation of Descartes' seventeenth-century theory, he believed that the soul is independent of the body, even going so far as to enunciate an argument, similar to Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, that a blind man, were he suspended in the air, would be unaware of his body, yet still possessed of self-awareness – because he could still think ([12], section 7). But in his great compendium, the *Canons of Medicine*, Avicenna described various 'down-to-earth' psychological (we would say *psychiatric*) conditions, such as melancholy and mania – along with recommendations for their treatment. Avicenna's views on the temperaments (Sanguineous, Phlegmatic, Bilius, Melancholic or 'Atrabilius'), and their connections to the four elements: air, water, fire, and earth, respectively, derive from ancient Greek sources (particularly, Galen). We still use the corresponding temperament terms *manic, phlegmatic, melancholic/depressive, and irritable* even today, as did Kraepelin in the early 1900s. But Avicenna hardly confined himself to psychological issues, and though he touched on psychiatric conditions, he cannot in any meaningful sense be called a psychiatrist.

The most prominent successor to Avicenna, Abū 'l Walīd ibn Rushd (our Averroës), born in Islam's western-most area, in Cordoba (1126–1198), is famous for his commentaries on Aristotle. Ibn Rushd was in touch with Christian and Jewish philosophers in Islamic Spain, including Maimonides (also from Cordoba), who greatly admired him. As with many philosophers, from the Greeks to the time of ibn Rushd, the attainment of intellectual excellence was considered a 'prerogative of the privileged few' ([13], p. 301). The masses, in contrast, could aspire at best to a level of moral excellence through leading a life of virtue (according to the wisdom and recommendations of the philosophers). Moral uprightness was a potential for them, even though a comprehension of the essential truth lay beyond their grasp. A philosophical posture vis-à-vis good and evil is implicit in this view, though ibn Rushd focuses less on the topic of evil than did some of his Islamic predecessors. Dante knew of both Avicenna and ibn Rushd, whom he situated in the limbo of *Inferno* – where lay the unbaptized and the virtuous pagans (whereas another prominent Aristotelian, St. Thomas Aquinas, was in *Paradiso*). Toward the end of Canto IV (ll. 142–144) of the

Inferno, Dante wrote:

*Euclide geomètra e Tolomeo, Euclid the geometer and Ptolemy,
Ippocrate, Avicenna e Galieno, Avicenna and Galen,
Averroès che 'l gran comento feo. Averroès who made the great Commentary. [14]*

1.1.6 RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHERS OF THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The humanist Jewish philosopher Maimonides [1135–1204] transmitted Aristotelian rationalism, which had been kept alive through the Arabic sources of the previous four centuries, to later Christian theologians like Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas. Maimonides accepted the Platonic view that earthly matter was the source of evil and saw the *Imitatio Dei* of St. Augustine as a way of freeing oneself from the ties of matter [15]. He also saw the imagination as tied to material things, one manifestation of which was the anthropomorphism and belief in a *corporeal*, as opposed to an abstract, God [16]. He advocated, in a manner akin to asceticism, minimizing one's attention to bodily functions and impulses (food, drink, sex...), recognizing how they underlay the 'evil impulse' [יצר-הרע] yetzer ha-ra]. Yet his realism was such that he understood that the evil impulse was not irredeemably evil: later rabbis would argue, in fact, that without a measure of the impulse, one would not marry, have children, build a house, or engage in business. What was crucial in Maimonides' argument was that the impulses that govern sex and the desire for mastery can go overboard (beyond, in effect, the Aristotelian mean) and end up as evil actions.

For St. Thomas Aquinas [1225–1274?] the main theological struggle was that of *theodicy*: how to explain the existence of evil, given an omnipotent God who was thoroughly benign and good – an echo here of the earlier lament of Boëthius: 'If there be a God, from whence so many evils?' ([17], xix). The resolution lay for him in the concept of free will. Only God had a free will that was at the same time incapable of sin. But St. Thomas considered it impossible for God to create human beings having both a rational nature and free will – who would always choose what was right and never commit a fault or a sin. As to why it should be that God could not have gone the extra distance and engineered our free will in such a way that we too could not commit sins – St. Thomas does not hazard an explanation. He does conclude, however, that the root of all vices lay in the inordinate love of self [Question VIII, art. 2, reply 19] – a comment in line with our modern conception of narcissism (Aquinas St. Thomas [71]. For further explication of the views of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the reader should consult the excellent summary of Carlos Steel [72].

Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola [1463–94] hoped to put to rest, as had Pelagius before him, the belief still held by some – that evil was born of two distinct sources, one representing the Good; the other, Evil, as posited by Zoroaster and the similar-minded third-century prophet, Mani – from whose name the Manichaean heresy derives.

Writing in the early Renaissance period, St. Ignatius Loyola [1491–1556], the founder of the Jesuit order, expressed a mixture of views: some that pay homage to traditional Christian theology; others that have a more modern ring. He mentions (in the traditional vein) that the Devil, studying the nature and traits of each man, suggests splendor to the ambitious, gain to the covetous, delight to the sensuous, etc. But he avoids the trap of theodicy in stating that one cannot define Good and Evil in absolute terms, and that evil is an emergent property that grows out of a particular context, dependent also on the mind-state of the person(s) in question [18]. Stressing the important role played by our free will – by which we may choose to turn away from God's loving desire (and thus commit evil acts), Loyola lays less emphasis

on God as omnipotent and all-good, which so bedeviled, or rather confounded, those who grappled with theodicy. Similar views were expressed by Loyola's contemporary, Juan Luis Vives [19]. As a Jew who converted to Catholicism under the impact of the Spanish Inquisition, Vives was perhaps more ready to think along less conventional paths, contending that the Will is essentially spontaneous (and not always subject to Reason), and is at liberty to choose to do evil things as well as good things, God notwithstanding.

1.1.7 THEOLOGIANS AND PHILOSOPHERS OF THE RENAISSANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Among the prominent theologians and philosophers of the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the subject of evil is treated more and more as a human affair, with God or the Devil playing less active roles from the standpoint of causation. There is an increasing tendency to picture God in a more abstract, less anthropomorphic, manner. Most of the philosophers are believers; many come from families where the father was a clergyman. But the dominant explanation concerning the origin of evil relies on concept of free will, albeit a free will that was granted us by the deity.

The German Protestant religious mystic, Jacob Boehme [1575–1624] argued, in a way that would have been considered quite heretical earlier, that God was 'underneath' rather than 'above.' In what amounts to a prelibation of Spinoza's philosophy, Boehme stated that Nature rises out of God, and that we 'sink into him' [20]. He also posited two triads of forces, one of which was composed of the elements: Soul, Body & Spirit – corresponding to which are Good, Evil, and Free Will. In his later writings Boehme envisioned evil as the direct outcome of the wrathful side of God, adding that the object of the world's life and history was to exhibit the eternal victory of Good over Evil; Love over Wrath.

For Thomas Hobbes [1588–1679], the son of a Protestant vicar, God was one Substance, of which there could be more than one Persons (or Representatives), such as Moses, or later, His own Son, Christ ([21], p. 520). But Hobbes' comments on Good and Evil reflect his sociological/political understanding of these attributes. Portraying human life as involving a universal desire for self-preservation, Hobbes argued that because Man is in the state of nature anarchic and greedy, a social or civil order soon evolves – as a means of avoiding a war of all against all. In his famous comment about our life as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short' ([21], p. 186), Hobbes states that the remedy for this is the appointment of a sovereign, who saw to it that men exchanged a degree of personal freedom in return for personal safety. Good, Evil, and Justice had no meaning, in Hobbes' schema, until men curbed their desires and entered into a social pact ([21], Ch. XIII).

The comments on evil of Descartes [1596–1650] resemble those of Vives: in his *De Passionibus* he asserted that 'All good and evil in this life depend on the Passions alone' [CCXII]. For Descartes the passions (we would call them the *emotions*) are the products of Nature; their use is to contribute to actions that preserve or improve the body. Yet the Will must at times oppose the Passions with '...firm and determined judgments touching the knowledge of Good and Evil, according to which the Soul has resolved to conduct its actions' [CXXXVII]. What Descartes does not make clear is how we know what is Good and what is Evil to begin with.

Sometimes called the last of the medievalists, Baruch Spinoza [1632–77] had a conception of evil as identified, in neo-Platonic language, with privation or 'absences

which express no essence.’ He also thought of God in a way reminiscent of Boehme: God is ‘immanent in the world’ and individual things are themselves modes or modifications of God. The one reality is ‘God or Nature’ [23, 24]. This equation of God with Nature earned for Spinoza an excommunication from his Jewish coreligionists, but also later even from the Calvinists – both groups regarding such an unexalted view of God as heretical. Spinoza argued, in regard to evil, that there is no evil in the nature of things: the same object may be good in one set of circumstances and evil in another. Whatever advances man toward a more perfect nature is a true good; evil could be seen as a criticism of God’s goodness. *À propos* free will, we may know a thing to be (good or) bad, yet not find in ourselves the power either to do the good or to abstain from the bad.

In the same way that Spinoza’s family fled to Holland to avoid religious persecution, Pierre Bayle [1647–1706], the son of an impoverished Calvinist minister in southern France, fled to Holland – because of his unconventional ideas that ran counter to the Catholicism of Louis XIV. Picking up where Epicurus left off two millennia before, Bayle contended that it cannot be the case that Evil exists and that God is both omnipotent and benevolent [25], for if God were both willing and able to remove Evil, then where does Evil come from? To strengthen his point (meanwhile alienating the religious orthodoxy of his day), Bayle challenged the accepted wisdom that belief in divine reward promotes morality – given that many religious believers are not deterred from evil acts, including cruel and destructive behaviors, whereas many atheists are not immoral, even though they stand in no fear of divine retribution for their non-belief. Instead, as Bayle emphasized, people’s conduct is determined primarily by secular sanction and by character structure: those who are cruel will act cruelly, whether or not they believe in God or the Hereafter. People who are kind will distance themselves from cruelty, even if they do not believe in divine punishment [26].

Bayle’s contemporary, the Baron Gottfried von Leibniz [1646–1716] is known more for his co-invention of the calculus than for his theodicy [27]. Bayle, the incurable pessimist, viewed a God who could have made a world where there were fewer crimes and sufferings – yet chose not to do so – as something of a criminal on a grand scale. Leibniz, the incurable optimist, argued that, *au contraire*, this was the best world that could have been created; any alternative world would have been worse – a view savaged by Voltaire in his famous parody, *Candide*. Leibniz did define three categories of Evil; namely, the metaphysical, the physical, and the moral. The ‘metaphysical’ related to the degeneration inherent in the substance of which the world was made (since only God is perfect). The ‘physical’ concerned the pain and suffering we experience in the world, whilst ‘moral’ evil amounts to the crime – for which physical (or ‘natural’) evil is the punishment. It was this latter notion that came in for Voltaire’s ridicule: how, for example, were the 60,000 victims in Lisbon on that fateful day in November, 1755 – any more ‘deserving’ of the earthquake than were the citizens of some other city? The Lisbon earthquake was in fact a turning point, much as the Holocaust or 9/11 in our day, that forced men to rethink the concept of evil, and to rid themselves of the idea that natural disasters were somehow or another ‘God’s punishment’ for our sins. As Voltaire wrote, with timeless eloquence:

*What crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother’s breast?
Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
Than London, Paris, or sunlit Madrid?
—(from Poem on the Lisbon Disaster [28])*

In Bayle and Leibniz we have the paradox of two men, both Protestant, both born within a year of each other: one still wedded (though not exclusively) to the metaphysical view of evil; the other, rejecting the metaphysical in favor of a more down-to-earth (and down to the individual person) conception. Perhaps the answer lay in the fact that Bayle was poor and was exiled; Leibniz was rich and honored in his own country.

The empiricist Scottish philosopher, David Hume [1711–76], though raised in a Calvinist background, removed God from the equation concerning good and evil, claiming that what ought, and what ought not, to be the case cannot legitimately be derived from the ideas of a deity. He argued against the notion that Reason alone enables us to make moral distinctions. Rather: morality is concerned with such non-ideational entities as Passions, Volitions, and Actions. It is only when we are able to attend to our own feelings that we are able to distinguish Virtue and Vice; between moral good and evil [29].

In the same way that Bayle and Leibniz emerge at the conceptual antipodes regarding the origins of evil, the postulates of Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712–88] are diametrically opposite, regarding the original state of man, to those of Thomas Hobbes. In his *Second Discourse* (1762) Rousseau claimed that the human condition derives from society, whereas in the ‘state of Nature’ Man was free and independent, healthy, happy, and innocent. Once a social condition develops, there was, Rousseau supposed, a fall from Nature, and with it a corruption of the once ‘noble savage.’ Here Rousseau was mistaken, for there is not a shred of anthropological evidence to support his claim. But there was certain grandeur to his error: scientifically mistaken, but politically correct – for his time. It was not hard to see evils (social evils, in this case) in Rousseau’s France, on the cusp of the up-coming revolution – if one contrasted the lot of the common man with that of the aristocracy. Hobbes may have been right about society in general, but Rousseau was right about the society in particular with which he was familiar. At all events, Rousseau deserved great credit, as Susan Neiman pointed out ([30], p. 41), for being the first to treat the problem of evil as a philosophical (one might even say, sociological), as opposed to a theological problem. Rousseau took the problem out of God’s hands and ‘put it squarely in ours’ ([30], p. 43). Evil did not require reference to supernatural forces, which meant in effect that evil is not a metaphysical problem; it is a human problem.

Immanuel Kant [1724–1804] also rejected the notion of Original Sin – as an affront to our moral freedom [31], but retained a place for religion, given that religion underlines our duty to uphold moral values as divine commands. Christianity focuses on pride as the primary sin, which Kant regarded as ineradicable by human means. Kant distinguishes between self-conceit (*Eigendunkel*) and Self-Love (*Eigenliebe*), as the latter can be good insofar as it is controlled by ‘practical reason.’ He understood the evil that arises in the human heart as stemming from the subordination of what he called the Objective Law of Duty to (mere) happiness. Evil becomes one of the choices open to us via our free will. Man has a propensity [*Hang*] to evil (akin to Maimonides’ *yetzer ha-ra*), which must be combated through our becoming our own ‘moral sentries.’ Kant made a distinction between *Böse* [evil] and *Übel* [bad, though it is the cognate for the English word *evil*]: *evil* actions are those which aim at the violation of the humanity of another person (such as murder, rape, torture). Whereas *bad* actions are those that might be harmful or disagreeable to one’s general well-being (e.g., delayed payment of a debt or failure to honor some other type of promise). While neither Kant nor other philosophers give detailed descriptions of individual case-histories embodying evil actions, he was aware that terrible crimes occurred, and remarked that ‘great crimes are paroxysms, the sight of which makes one whose soul is healthy to shudder’ [32].

Here is a comment that presages our contemporary, more *emotional*, use of the word *evil*, as pertaining to acts that are (to those who witness or experience them) breathtakingly inhuman.

Georg Hegel [1770–1831] became famous for his dialectic triad of *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis* – inspired in part by the French Revolution. Hegel felt the latter movement could be understood as a burst into freedom for the masses (thesis), that then ushered in a reign of terror (antithesis) that led finally to a better post-revolutionary form of government based on freedom and equality (synthesis). As for his comments on evil, these are mostly to be found in his *Philosophie des Rechts* [33] – the German word conveying the meanings both of ‘right’ and ‘law.’ Hegel sought to establish a groundwork for morality centered on each person’s free will and humanity – within the context of our life as members, inevitably, of a social entity. The social entity, in turn, needed to be regulated by a superordinate morality, which for Kant (more so than for Hegel) necessitated the acceptance of God as the embodiment of that higher morality. What makes a person evil in Hegel’s view is the choosing of natural desires in opposition to the good ([33], section 40). Though Hegel does not give ‘case histories’ of evil, he does assert that there is an important distinction between crimes that attack the entire manifestation of one’s Will (i.e., of another person’s freedom and humanity), as in the instance of murder, slavery, or religious compulsion – in contrast to lesser crimes that invade less of the life-space of another person [34]. As for the matter of ‘free will,’ it is noteworthy that Hegel felt that the success of America (along with England and France) in the nineteenth century related in large part to the large numbers of Protestant dissenters who ‘created a tradition for a people who aspired to create libertarian societies’ ([35], p. 172). The point here is that the dissenters exercised greater freedom to think for themselves and to stress their individuality – in contrast to those who adhered to monolithic systems of thought and belief, like the Catholics and Muslims.

For Arthur Schopenhauer [1788–1860], irritable, embittered, pessimistic, this was, in his 180° turn from Leibniz, the *worst* of all possible worlds – where pleasure was the exception in human life; pain, the rule. As he concluded in his most important work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* ([36] *The World as Will and Representation*), the Will is equated with effort and desire, which is ultimately painful and ‘evil.’ Pain arises from the *desire to have* – and then not having. After a brief satisfaction with one’s desire there is momentary pleasure – and then the emergence of new desire and new pain. Selfishness or egoism (narcissism, in our language) was for Schopenhauer, universal: the egoist seeks his own advantage and is ready to strike down those who oppose him. His *Weltanschauung* resonates in this way with Hobbes’ ‘war of all against all.’ Schopenhauer recognized that the attachment to life that characterizes all living forms makes understandable our horror in reaction to murder – as the maximal violation of our inherent will-to-live. Toward the end of life Schopenhauer embraced Buddhism, by virtue of its preaching deliverance from Self – unlike the egoist: the malicious man who thinks only of himself.

The year before Schopenhauer’s death coincided with the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Darwin, though of course not a philosopher, gave new meaning to the kind of existential struggle for survival alluded to by Hobbes and Schopenhauer. Putting this struggle on a *scientific* footing for the first time, Darwin drew attention to natural selection. Herbert Spencer five years later used the term ‘survival of the fittest.’ Some took this to mean that brute force triumphed over weakness, applying the idea to our species as well as to the other animals. But Darwin was not arguing that evil won out over the good, particularly as he held that the ethical life (among men) is different from the life in (the rest of) Nature. It is the

ethical life that brings us out of the state of all-against-all warfare and leads us to peace. In our own generation it has become clear through the work of evolutionary psychiatry – that as a group species we also harbor genes that promote compassion and altruistic behavior. As James Wilson has put forward [37], we would not have survived as a species if we did not possess, alongside our aggressive tendencies, other innate, gene-driven tendencies that promote moral sentiments: *sympathy*, *fairness*, *self-control*, and (here, James cited Kant) *duty*. Viewed in this light, *evil* can be seen as an exaggeration of our aggressive tendencies; *good* – as a manifestation of our adherence to the moral sentiments outlined by Wilson. In this schema religion no longer has any *explanatory* value vis-à-vis evil, though it retains its value as a promulgator and advocate of the moral sentiments by which our lives should be guided.

Darwin's new theory did not sweep away all at once the religion-based explanation for evil. Søren Kierkegaard [1813–55], for example, though born after Darwin, died before the *Origin* was published. Still ensconced within traditional Christianity, he understood sin as rooted in Willing. Sin (and hence evil) occur when a person refrains from doing what is right even though he understands what is right [38].

For Friedrich Nietzsche [1844–1900] God played no role in the causation of evil, which, he argued, was to be understood in purely human terms. 'Being evil' was 'being not moral,' practicing immorality, resisting tradition – however reasonable or stupid tradition might be. Nietzsche recognized that 'harming the neighbor,' however, was felt to be preeminently harmful in all the moral laws of different ages ([39], #96). Though Nietzsche endorsed the idea of the *will to power* as the basis of human nature (a view in sympathy with that of Schopenhauer), he also spoke of 'resentment' as a key emotion in those whose quest for power was denied them. This resentment, Nietzsche saw as resulting from the 'corruption of human nature' that was encouraged by religion in general, specifically by Christianity ([40], p. 262) – a pretty radical departure from beliefs of Nietzsche's Lutheran father, grandfathers, and great-grandfather. His much-misunderstood concept of the *Übermensch* ['Superman,' or 'Overman'] was totally unrelated to the notion, as hijacked by the Nazis, of a superior race. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was the creative artist who lives 'beyond good and evil' (as popularly conceived): the powerful man, that is, who has mastered his passions and risen above the mediocrity of everyday existence [41]. At all events, Nietzsche took the concept of evil far away from the religion-based explanations (the theodicies of Leibniz and others), adopting a much more relativistic notion of what constituted evil. Apart from harming one's neighbor, that is, certain acts or tendencies might be regarded as evil in one culture or one context, but not so in another culture or context.

1.1.8 MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF EVIL. THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHIATRY & NEUROSCIENCE

During the last century the ways of defining and understanding evil have been left less in the hands of theologians and philosophers; much more, in the hands of experts in psychology and psychiatry, including those in the field of neuroscience. There has been increasing recognition that evil is a purely human phenomenon, and that the place to look for its site and origins is not in the heavens but in the human brain. Even the question 'what is evil?' is recognized as an erroneous question, since it presupposes there is some ineffable substance that corresponds to the substantive [i.e., the noun] 'evil,' or that there is some one-size-fits-

all definition that is universally acceptable. Instead, a more meaningful approach is to adopt the standard proposed by the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein [1889–1951], who took the position that *the meaning of a word is its usage* [42]. Viewed in this light, we look to the way in which people in ordinary life, as well as the ways in which journalists and others in the media, employ this term. It turns out that we reserve the word ‘evil’ in everyday life for actions that evoke the emotion of horror: acts that are breathtakingly horrible because of the intense suffering to which the victims are subjected, the outrageousness of the acts, their heinousness or depravity – especially if the acts were prompted by scheming (malice aforethought) of a ‘diabolical’ nature (implying the intention to hurt in a particularly cruel and sadistic manner). Thus, a man who kidnaps a child, whom he then violates sexually, and afterwards strangles and dismembers – is readily identified as having committed an *evil* act. And if he has committed a string of such acts over time, with every intention of repeating such behavior if given the opportunity – people will often apply the word *evil* to the man himself: he is an *evil person*. Perhaps the only philosopher to draw attention to this way of thinking about evil: as that which is breathtakingly awful – is Susan Neiman [30].

Persons who are apprehended by the authorities for having committed acts of these kinds will usually be incarcerated in prisons or, if mental illness had been a key factor in the commission of the act, will be mandated to a forensic hospital for observation and treatment. In either situation, a forensic psychiatrist may be summoned to evaluate the offender – as to whether he or she is mentally ill, or is instead in the grips of a personality disorder, such as antisocial or psychopathic personality. It is uncommon for people to use the word *evil* in reference to crimes (such as financial swindles) that do not involve violence or intense psychological harm (as by extreme humiliation, subjugation, or unlawful imprisonment). Furthermore, one seldom refers to a *person* as evil (in contrast to particular acts of violence), unless the person has engaged habitually and for an extended period of time in acts of unusual cruelty. Many men committing serial sexual homicide, and some repeat-rapists, fall into this category, especially where there is an element of torture of the victim(s). Descriptions of such persons can be found in numerous books and articles by forensic psychiatrists and psychologists [43–46]. Buss, writing from the perspective of evolutionary psychiatry, focuses on those brain mechanisms that subserve aggression and defense against threats to one’s survival: mechanisms that under certain circumstances can operate in a grossly exaggerated manner – leading to extreme acts of violence of the sort to which the public will apply the label ‘evil.’ Egger, Stone, and Ward et al. enumerate the background factors in men committing serial sexual homicide, some of whom subject their victims to prolonged periods of torture, earning thereby the label of ‘evil person.’ The background factors conducing to violence in general: genetic predisposition to psychopathy, parental neglect or cruelty, hormonal factors, head injury with unconsciousness, drug abuse, etc. – have been discussed in detail by Debra Niehoff [47]. In an outstanding book written by a survivor of an attempted murder by an axe-wielding psychopath, Terri Jentz [48] defined as an act of evil: ‘when an act ruptures all categories of comprehension’ (p. 516), elsewhere describing her ‘belief in the existence of utter evil as a modern revision of Manicheanism,’ based on her study of gratuitous cruelty in the twentieth century (p. 512). Even more poignantly is her comment about her would-be assassin, whose sadism was in no way confined just to her and her friend (who was blinded by this axe wielder): ‘I was astonished at the many searing memories this one man had ignited in so many people. . . *Was this evil’s strategy, to perform breathtakingly brutal acts that so shocked the nervous system and*

overwhelmed the brain that these traumatic events were not integrated into consciousness, but left disturbing, damaged mosaics of unassimilated memories?” (p. 509).

The inadvertent spokesman for the general public and its use of the word, Jentz has left us with as accurate a depiction of *evil* as we are likely to find in the lay literature. In the psychiatric literature the term *evil* occurs very seldom. Freud, when writing of his celebrated case, the *Wolf Man* [49], mentions the patient’s dissatisfaction with God, leading to his own strange theodicy, according to which: ‘*If He were almighty, then it was His fault that men were evil, wicked and [that they] tormented others. . . He ought to have made them good; He was responsible for all the wickedness*’ (p. 62). In his *Introductory Lectures* [50] Freud speaks of our dream-life – in which *the Ego, freed from all ethical bonds, finds itself at one with all the demands of sexual desire, even those which have been condemned by our ethical upbringing; lusts we think of as remote from human nature show themselves. . . . These censored wishes appear to rise up out of a positive Hell*’ (p. 142).

À propos Freud, the interconnections between religious thought and the development of his psychoanalytic theories are discernible, albeit subtle and complex. Among his ancestors were rabbis and Hasids, but his father, Jakob, broke away from the stricter practices and traditions of his forebears, while retaining great pride in his Jewish heritage and his familiarity with Yiddish and Hebrew. Sigmund grew up still less familiar with Jewish observance, though retaining throughout his life a ‘Judaism without religion’ ([51], p. 6). Toward the end of his life, Freud wrote his controversial *Moses and Monotheism* – which angered both observant Jews and Christians (as Spinoza had managed to do, years before, with his equation of God with Nature). Freud likened Moses to the first Messiah, and saw Christ as reborn as a resurrected Moses – transfigured as the Son in the place of his Father ([52], p. 114). Freud’s biographer, Peter Gay, tells us that Freud spoke with his friend, Lou Andreas Salomé in 1935, mentioning that ‘The figure of Moses . . . had haunted him all his life,’ adding that Freud had compared Jung to Joshua – ‘who would take possession of the promised land of psychiatry while he, Freud, the Moses, was destined to glimpse it only from afar’ ([52], p. 605). So far we have commented on Freud’s complex relationship to his Jewish origins. But the impact of his religious background upon his practice of psychiatry is less readily detectable. There is some fairly compelling evidence for a more direct influence, however, in two related areas. Two of the ‘pillars’ of psychoanalysis are *free association* and *dream analysis*, both crystallizing in Freud’s mind in the 1890s. David Bakan [53] makes the case that Freud’s exposure to the Hasidic and Kabbalistic background of his grandparents’ generation set the stage for his discovering the value of ‘free association’ as a method of gaining access to deeper layers of reality. Freud may well have been aware, for example, of his thirteenth-century coreligionist – the Spanish-Jewish mystic philosopher from Saragossa: Abraham Abulafia. As part of his method of achieving a trance-like state in which he felt in closer touch with God, by *unsealing the soul and untying the knots which bind it* (Bakan, p. 76) was through the practice of *k’fitsah* [קִפְסָה] – which meant jumping or skipping from one thought to another, till he was able to escape the quotidian, and reach ever more lofty and spiritual levels. Abulafia induced this state in himself in the quest of a religious goal. Freud appears to have transformed this method in the quest of a psychiatric goal; namely, that of gaining access to hidden layers in the psyche of his patients, with the ultimate goal of liberating them from their neurotic conflicts. The second pillar – dream analysis – represents an interest of long-standing in Jewish tradition, as noted in the Old Testament story of Joseph (Genesis 41: 1–37), and in the *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide to the Perplexed) of Maimonides. But dream-interpretation before Freud tended, with a few

exceptions, to stereotyped and sterile; the results, unconvincing. Dream dictionaries were popular, in which common dream elements were said to have certain specific meanings. Aside from the genius of the poet, Pushkin, who gave his heroine, Tatyana, a dream which had the effect of warning her against marrying the 'gloomy and dangerous crank,' Evgeny Onegin (a full 60 years before Freud's *Traumdeutung/The Interpretation of Dreams*) – there was almost nothing in the earlier dream literature that hit upon the *psychological* meaning of the dream, unique to each dreamer. It was Freud's genius that paved the way to unlock these highly individual meanings – via his patients' own free associations to their dreams. Granted there are culturally determined, rather common symbols: bottles are often female genitals; snakes are often penises – *but not always*. In the dreams of one of my analytic patients from many years ago snakes kept cropping up. From her associations it became clear the snakes did not represent her boyfriend's organ; instead, they led her to think about his sister – an intrusive and highly critical woman who kept trying to interfere in their relationship. None of the old dream-dictionaries would have led one to this conclusion.

The relationship of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) to religion was quite different from that of his erstwhile mentor, Freud. Jung's father was a Swiss pastor; Jung himself throughout his life was preoccupied with mystical themes, astrology, and spiritism (the latter prompted by the spiritistic trances he witnessed in his 15-year-old maternal cousin, Helene, when he was a young man). During his youth, Jung once saw an eighteenth-century carriage, and imagined that he had a memory of it in a previous life ([54], p. 664). During the period of the Great War, Jung became intrigued with Gnosticism, not only for its emphasis on knowing, but on its interest in the problem of evil ([54], p. 719). Equally interested in dreams as Freud was, Jung, once he became a psychiatrist, developed a different technique. He took to writing his dreams down, then telling himself stories stimulated by the dream images, and encouraging fantasies to arise in his mind, as an outgrowth of these mental pictures. Next, Jung would draw the resulting images on paper. He began this practice in 1913. It was out of these exercises that his theory of *archetypes* emerged. He believed that there existed a set of universal, primordial images – the archetypes – embedded in the unconscious of every person. Various coincidences convinced Jung of this proposition, such as the similarity of a hallucination (of a phallus suspended from the sun, that produced the wind) mentioned to him by a schizophrenic patient – to an early Greek text that spoke of a tube hanging from the sun that set the winds in motion ([54], p. 705). These impressions led Jung to speak of a 'collective unconscious.' He later used the terms *collective subconscious* and then the *objective psyche*, by which he referred to what he believed was a reservoir of the experiences of human beings as a species – by virtue of its being common to everyone. Practitioners in contemporary psychoanalysis and psychiatry, apart from those who are adherents to Jung's psychology, do not accept the notion of a collective unconscious. There is another concept that Jung developed that relates to the subject of evil. The set of personal characteristics that a person wishes to conceal from others, even from himself, Jung called the 'shadow.' Jung further postulated that the more someone tried to keep this shadow hidden, the more the shadow becomes active, predisposing to evil actions. Further, Jung imagined that the shadow could, especially under the influence of alcohol or other mind-altering agents, become the predominant force in the individual, leading to hitherto unsuspected levels of evil. Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 classic, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, may be understood as a parallel in novel-form to Jung's shadow. Consistent with Jung's beliefs in archetypes, collective unconscious, shadows, and the like – is his religious faith. Toward the end of his life, in a 1955 interview with a journalist, Jung stated that 'God is

the voice of conscience speaking within us,' adding that he had an 'unshakable conviction of the existence of God. . . I do not take His existence on belief – I know that He exists' ([54], p. 726). It is easy to see why Freud and Jung eventually parted ways, given that the religion-based views of Jung, expressed rather in poetic than in scientific language, were quite alien to Freud, who retained his biological foundation and his antipathy to organized religion to the end, even while pursuing similar psychoanalytic pathways as did his younger counterpart. Jung's psychology, in this respect, offers analogies to whatever it is in us that leads to evil action, but does not have the kind of explanatory value that would give it purchase in the field of science, including in the domain of forensic psychiatry.

What contemporary psychiatry can now provide by way of explaining the phenomenon of evil, as defined in popular usage – is the following: (a) commonalities can be discovered when one looks at a large number of detailed case histories of persons whose acts have been described as 'evil,' (b) study of the brain, via functional magnetic resonance imaging and other techniques, can reveal differences in the brains of such persons, when compared with the brains of ordinary persons. I refer here only to evil acts committed in peacetime, since it is well known that in wartime many ordinary men suddenly find themselves capable of cruelties which would be most foreign to their lives before and after their participation in warfare.

As for the commonalities among persons with a penchant for committing evil acts, there are two in particular that stand out. One group consists of serial killers intent upon torturing their victims. From a diagnostic standpoint these persons (the vast majority of whom will be men) exemplify the confluence of psychopathy and sadistic personality. The main personality *traits* of the psychopath, as defined by Robert Hare and his colleagues [55] are glib speech (insincerity), grandiosity, lying, manipulateness, callousness, lack of empathy and remorse, and inability to take responsibility for one's actions. The main traits of sadistic personality as outlined in DSM-III-R [56] consist in the enjoyment of another's suffering, humiliation, and subjugation of others [57]. Another group consists of persons, outside the domain of serial homicide, who scheme ('with malice aforethought') to subject another to extreme pain and/or death – as witnessed in the cases of certain men who stage the death of their wives in order to make their deaths appear accidental, or who make plans to hide their bodies in hopes of rendering their death an uncertainty (as in the case of Scott Peterson, who killed his pregnant wife and threw her body into the ocean [58]).

Neuroscientists do not use the word *evil* in their reports, but considerable research has recently been carried out on brain activity in persons whose violent crimes have inspired the word *evil* in everyday discourse. Much of this research has been summarized in the book about psychopathy of James Blair and his colleagues [59]. One common underlying factor concerns brain-differences in psychopaths that diminish their capacity for empathy; specifically, for feeling compassion for the suffering of others. Absent this capacity, the possibility of inflicting torturous suffering on others becomes greatly enhanced. This is reflected in the commission of acts that the public experiences as 'evil.' Specific regions of the brain that communicate with one another in determining what behaviors emerge in response to particular urges or stresses have been outlined by Kalivas and Volkow [60] in their paper on pathways relevant to addiction. Their model is pertinent as well to other maladaptive behaviors, including those related to violent crime. The key regions in this schema involve a memory system, subserved by the amygdala, in touch with prior experiences (including those of harm done to the individual by early caretakers). This region communicates with another – the dopamine-dependent nucleus accumbens – that

weighs the salience (degree of desirability) of various behavioral options. Both these regions are important parts of what is often called the 'bottom-up' brain mechanisms, and concern our basic drives [61]. Final decisions regarding action (that is, what we actually end up doing in any given situation) are the function of the 'top-down' mechanisms. A control-mechanism mediated by the anterior cingulate gyrus exerts either a weak or a strong control upon the various options being considered. Finally the orbitofrontal cortex, integrating all this information, either allows the most favored option to go forward into actual behavior – or decides against it, thwarting the behavior. A man struggling with the temptation to kidnap and rape a child (which would end up as an evil act, if consummated) may think of how that child might feel, or might think about the consequences of getting caught and arrested – and then decide against this 'desired' behavior. Or his desire may be so strong as to override the 'braking' mechanisms; his impulse-control may be so weak as to fail to inhibit the behavior. In these scenarios, the crime (the 'evil' act) will occur.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, judgments about which acts are considered evil are made more easily in peacetime – by individuals and by the public – than is the case in situations of group conflict (as in riots or between gangs) or of full-scale war. The witness of inter-group strife, so characteristic of our species, reminds us of our origins as *members of small tribes* numbering perhaps 100 or 150 persons. Our brains have evolved over the approximately four million years since we split off from bonobos and chimpanzees to become hominids, gradually emerging as what Carl Zimmer has cleverly called (because we can talk and read) the *gossiping ape* [62]. To meet the multitudinous threats to survival in our early days, our brains became 'wired' for group affiliation and for aggressive defense against those who would harm us—whether the predators were saber-tooth tigers or (more commonly) other people. Religion sprung up in every human society, presumably answering to vital needs and impulses peculiar to a distinctly *social* species such as our own. We cannot do without each other, and (all too often) we cannot get along with one another – especially when goods necessary to survival are scarce and when the conditions that make life secure and comfortable are seriously compromised. During times of adversity religion can play contrary roles: religion unifies and strengthens the bonds among members of a religious group, offering hope, and emboldening group action that fosters survival. But therein lay the rub. For at such times, religion may be used by one group to rally forces against a competing group, fomenting a war that is justified (in the eyes of the adherents of the warring group) against those who do not believe in the 'true God' of the group that has taken up arms. This conceit – that God stands behind only *our* group – helps explain the paradoxical situation in which the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, quickly separate into tribes (albeit large ones) in times of trouble. The followers of Jehovah, Christ, and Allah are suddenly at each other's throats. This phenomenon becomes particularly acute during times of drastic change or drastic shortage. If the crisis is local, we see the emergence of religious cults, some of which are led by fanatics of remarkable cruelty. The Reverend Jim Jones in Guyana, David Koresh in Waco, Texas, and Jeff Lundgren, the breakaway Mormon leader in Kirtland, Ohio are examples. If the crisis involves whole nations or religious memberships, we see the emergence of religious armies, with a charismatic leader at the helm, poised to conquer another group or nation. If the army is strong, there will be war; if it is too weak to conquer outright, there will be terrorism. The red thread running through all these religion-inspired actions is *fundamentalism*. Two chief characteristics of such fundamentalism, as mentioned by Vamik Volkan in a recent address on psychoanalysis and religion [63], are a list of unchangeable doctrines adhered to by the believers, and their

opposition to non-believers or to 'lukewarm' believers. By no means is fundamentalism regularly associated with violence. But under particular circumstances a group of believers may be energized by a charismatic and hate-filled leader, such that religious fundamentalism becomes the force by which violence is unleashed. Kernberg [64] made the point, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, that the internal tensions of the jihadists (bemoaning the decline of Islam since the defeat in 1683 at the gates of Vienna, and the relative impoverishment in Dar al-Islam (the countries where Islam is the dominant religion) compared with the Western industrialist countries – are now displaced toward the outside, toward, that is, the 'infidel' West. Volkan has striven to create a bridge between the psychology of the individual, as emphasized in traditional psychoanalysis, and the psychology of the group – stressing how children are raised as fledgling members of a social group – with which they strongly identify, at the same time they develop, during the same formative years, a sense of personal identity. The admonitions and information imparted to children in their first half dozen years, creating both the individual and the group identities, become 'hard-wired' into brain circuitry, fostering automatic, unconscious responses. In certain groups, these responses may include such convictions as *we the faithful of religion X are better than you people of religion Y and we are thus, through God's favor, more deserving of the good things of the world than you. . .* Like all thought-habits of long standing, these automatic responses are not easily overturned. The topic of religious fundamentalism and its psychology has been previously explored by René Girard [65] and summarized recently in the admirable article by Lord Alderdice of Northern Ireland [66]. Alderdice makes the point that the jihadist terrorists that figure so prominently in the current geopolitical scene are heavily indoctrinated, but are not mentally ill. The fundamentalist environment in which they were enveloped was one that predisposed to violent solutions. Many were educated in madrassas, memorizing the Qur'an, with its many references to the infidel and to the dire fate that awaited them (as in the long passage in Sura 5: 35–66). Saturated in a Good/Believer versus Evil/Infidel atmosphere, the step toward violence, when under the influence of a paranoid leader during socially disruptive times – is not a long one. One may note in contrast that in the Old Testament 'infidel' does not occur; the word is used in the New Testament just twice (2 Corinthians 6:15, and 1 Timothy 5:8). In neither reference is the (Christian) believer abjured to harm or to kill the infidel; merely to avoid association with the infidel.

Psychiatry, as it turns out, has much of value in helping us to understand the mind-set of fundamentalists, as well as of those who become terrorists. But psychiatrists at the vanguard in this arena, such as Jerrold Post [67], Vamik Volkan, Otto Kernberg, John Alderdice, and also the historian-philosopher, René Girard, convey their excellent points to like-minded audiences; in effect, they preach to the converted. The fundamentalists, and the terrorists among them, do not listen. The most militant and disaffected among them continue to regard those who disagree with them as infidels and evil-doers. We are then apt to see a perversion of religion: religious leaders sanction actions that, ironically, the rest of the world regard as evil. Examples are legion: the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland bombing each other's houses, the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq bombing each other's mosques, Hindus and Moslems in India destroying each other's holy places, the jihadists bombing the Twin Towers and cafes in Tel-Aviv, or slitting the throat of journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi (February 1st, 2002) – because he was a Jew. The date is of interest to me: I was in Karachi 20 years earlier to the day, living as a Jewish psychiatrist in the home of Moslem psychiatrist colleagues, lecturing on my topic of 'borderline personality,'

and attending many Moslem weddings. It was a different time. When religion is hijacked and made into a pretext for war and atrocities, we may, as psychiatrists, correctly diagnose that calamity as a sign that a large group of people has come to feel humiliated, disenfranchised, dealt out of the chance to have the good things of life: dignity, adequate food, satisfactory work, the pursuit of happiness. Military action may be necessary as an unfortunate first step. Ultimately the excesses of fundamentalism, and the terrorism it may spawn, can be corrected only politically: by helping in whatever way possible to improve the lives of the group whose cause was spearheaded (literally) in the first place by the fundamentalists and their terrorist cohorts. In this great task, psychiatry can play only an advisory role, helping to educate political leaders as to what the social 'disease' had been, and what might be its most likely cure. Equally important as an antidote to religious fundamentalism, when it has gotten out of hand, is the voice of the 'lukewarm' believers, the moderates, who show, instead of paranoid hatred and fanaticism, tolerance and the warm acceptance of others. More such voices are beginning to be heard. An outstanding example is that of the Moslem writer, Irshad Manji. She has shown the courage to criticize the jihadists within Islam in her widely read *The Trouble with Islam Today* [68]. And Salman Rushdie has outlived the fatwa leveled against him by Ayatollah Khomeini. I was privileged to hear Rushdie address a large audience two years ago, where he could speak freely, and where it was not even necessary for the public to pass through metal detectors. There is hope.

In summary, religion and philosophy no longer have a meaningful role in explaining the *causes* of evil, though they of course retain an important role in setting forth the guidelines for appropriate moral values and acceptable behaviors. For clues concerning causation, we must turn instead to psychiatry, psychology, and neuroscience. Age-old conundrums as to whether humans are inherently good or inherently evil fall by the wayside, as we become aware that our genetic givens and our brains are equipped with the mechanisms for *both* altruistic/cooperative interactions – and for narcissistic or aggressive interactions. This position was already championed long ago by the Moslem empiricist historian of culture – ibn Khaldun [1332–1406]. Unhappy with the abstract and metaphysical arguments of theologians and philosophers, ibn Khaldun relied on what he could actually observe in societies. He recognized that 'evil qualities' existed in man – such as injustice and aggression, which were 'natural' to human beings, yet compassion and affection were also part of our human nature – in such measure that we were more inclined to the good than to the bad [69, 70]. Which behaviors are favored, as we now realize, are dependent upon a host of factors: heredity, constitution, gender, early rearing, culture, brain damage, involvement with drugs that lower impulse-control, etc. When aggressive actions pass a certain socially-acknowledged boundary-line and pass into the grotesque and the heinous, we have entered the realm of evil. As one of their functions, religion and philosophy *deplore* such actions. To *understand* evil actions – is the domain of sciences that explore the workings of the human brain.

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