

## **Modern Questions--Old Backgrounds**

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The two questions that are continually asked, but not always answered, by philosophers and theologians are "Why is there something, rather than nothing?" and "Whence comes evil?" Both of these have their origins in religious circles. But the one that has more of a universal attachment to the problems of the world is "Whence comes evil?" It is also the question that we have the hardest time wrapping our minds around. It is difficult to get at the heart of the matter. In the last twenty years it has not only been philosophers probing the rational solutions to these questions, but now psychologists have entered the game of trying to get to the bottom of this question. Scott Peck, for instance, has entered the long list of thinkers to attack the question of evil, in a book entitled, "People of the Lie." As one of the psychologists who debriefed soldiers coming back from Vietnam, he was assigned to interrogate Lt. Calley, who was the person in charge of the Mai Lai Massacre, that left over a hundred women and children slaughtered. In his book he recounts how Calley was emotion-less through the whole interview. He was matter of fact about the killings, and showed no remorse. It was then he began to see a pattern in people with this same psychological proclivity, which became known as Narcissistic Personality Disorder. His book, which is about evil, weaves a common thread of understanding evil as related to this disorder because of its potential to cruelty and indifference to others. What he found in his research through therapeutic sessions was the great capacity for destruction these individuals pose for society.

One story that stands out in the book is about a young man who is depressed, with little desire to live. One factor was that his brother committed suicide by shooting himself just a year prior to his first session with him. After hours of conversation he asked the young man after Christmas, "What did you get for Christmas this year." The young man said, "A gun." Dr. Peck thought this was incredibly insensitive to give a gun to a young man, especially after his brother's suicide by shooting himself. As he talked further with the young man about the gun, he discovered a shocking truth. It seems it was not just a gun that was the same make as his brother's, it was the gun itself. They had kept the gun until he turned thirteen so they could give it him. The parents had no clue how this would make him feel, or the shock it would bring to him psychologically. After many more conversations the young man finally admitted to Dr. Peck what he was really thinking and feeling. He said, "I believe they wanted me dead."

The parents, like Lt. Calley, had no feelings toward the action of giving their son a gun. In fact, when questioned, they said, "We thought he would like to have it, so he could remember his brother." The parents simply had no clue about their son. The reason they didn't is because they were absorbed with themselves. They were a blackhole of need and want, which left them indifferent to their son's need. They were completely indifferent and clueless to his wants and dreams. They stood alone in the world, taking only what they wanted, offering nothing to anyone else. They didn't know it but their actions were cruel, and bordering on evil. They had destroyed their one son's life, and were about to destroy their other son. This is not to say that when a young teenager takes their life, it is because of the indifference of their parents. There are many mitigating circumstances that come into play, when a young person takes his or her life. This is obviously an extreme case, but one that has been played out many times.

Dr. Peck sees evil in the psychological deficiencies locked away inside a person. Others have approached the question through a study of society. Terry Eagleton, that amusing Irish scholar who tears apart literature and the institutions of society to get at the basis of some understanding of the human condition, has offered some useful insights. In his book entitled "On Evil", he makes a remarkable discovery. He says, "Here, then, we arrive at an insight which seems central to the idea of evil. It has, or appears to have, no practical purpose. Evil is supremely pointless. Anything as humdrum as a purpose would tarnish its lethal purity." I must say that I am very drawn to this insight on evil. Evil is not something that creates or thinks up plans in order to wreak havoc in the world. Just the opposite. It moves from within its own self, with no purpose other than taking in the meaninglessness of the world, and themselves. Satan is not a character that has a purpose, his only purpose is within himself. Watching the pointless meanderings of human beings trying to find meaning in God. Eagleton continues, "The world is mere pliable stuff, which the all-sovereign individual will can shape however it pleases. And this also applies to oneself. Human beings are self-fashioning, self-creating creatures." This is how he describes someone in the throws of self-absorption, which makes them a candidate for creating evil in the world. In the end, he is describing just someone that doesn't care, and therefore having any purpose of superfluous to living.

We cannot deny that there is evil in the world. Some may want to see the cruel deeds of others as just bad parenting, chemical imbalance or just someone that was born on the wrong side of the tracks. Often when discussing this subject there is a hint of inevitability about it. A person is going to be who they are. You cannot do anything about it. Some people just do bad things. But this just trivializes the tremendous destruction of human life at the hands of those that show no affection or care of others. Therefore, they are set loose to do whatever they wish. How can we trivialize the great destruction of Jewish lives in the Holocaust? How can we not say that Hitler was evil? If we negate these conclusions then our understanding of the world sinks to the inevitable---life has no meaning.

It was Jesus' gift to us, that he gave back to people the hope that life has meaning. The cruel things done in the name of righteousness can be overcome by addressing injustices with the sacrifice of love for others. To combat evil is to put on the clothing of love. If we cannot do this, then we must conclude with the cynic that the death of Jesus had no purpose. Therefore, life has little meaning. Evil is in the world; it moves within the shadowy world of people that believe life has no purpose. Then they try to convince everyone else of the same tragic reality.

Christians are different. We say, "Life is unfair, but we stand with those who have come under its sledgehammer." The person who stands with the cynic, the self-absorbed, the narcissist and indifferent of the world, says, "Life is not fair, so why should I care. Life has no meaning." This is defeat. Jesus conquered. Love is the only cure for indifference in this world. It stands above those that willfully stand before the world and say, "I don't care, do you?" Yes, we do.