



The Concept of Evil and the Forensic Psychologist

Paul Wilson.⁺

Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University, Australia

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WHY AN INTEREST IN EVIL?

My interest in evil began, I believe, when I finished University and like many others of my generation, travelled to Europe for the first time. My then wife and I visited Munich and went to the Dachau concentration camp, which was preserved as a showpiece of the Nazi atrocities.

The walls of the preserved gas ovens reeked of a horrible past — a past where the corpses of little children, mothers and the elderly still haunt the surroundings. These memories were etched into my mind when we returned to Munich. And, in the city itself we met a delightful middle-aged German couple who generously offered to take us drinking in that city's most famous beer garden.

As the beer flowed we told the German couple about our visit to Dachau and expressed our amazement that the people in Munich did not see the smoke rising from the gas ovens or the hundreds and thousands of Jews who were transported through the city to the concentration camp.

Our hosts at first denied any knowledge of these events and deplored what had happened to the Jews. But as the beer flowed faster it became apparent that our delightful German hosts knew, at the time of the atrocities, that people were disappearing off the face of the earth. After a few more beers, it seemed that they even approved of it.

For years after that experience I have been trying to understand how the Holocaust could have happened and why so many apparently "decent" people condoned it. I am still wondering and indeed, have some sympathy for the many people who have found it difficult to sustain faith in science, reason and progress after the wars, massacres and other horrors that have inflicted the 20th Century.

Early in my career I was a social psychologist and not particularly interested in evil as a concept. But when I became a criminologist — especially one that focussed on violence — my interest in the Holocaust aligned itself with my professional concerns.

Many of my books, such as *Murder of the Innocents* (which is about child murder) or my most recent book on *Tandem Killers* (murderers who operate in pairs) deal with behaviour that some see as the mark of evil.

But what is evil and how do we define an evil person? Let me acknowledge that defining these terms is a very difficult task indeed. But so too, as we will see, is the task of defining Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD) and Psychopathy, terms that many forensic psychologists use as if there was no controversy about them.

To some, like the perceptive British crime writer Brian Masters, the term is an occult one, a substitute for thought and therefore not worth

using. Other commentators like the thoughtful Australian criminologist Deirdre Greig agree with Brian Masters.

Western religions and philosophies make evil a central part of their models. They agree that evil exists and in Christian religion the notion of evil is related to the idea of original sin.

In my view one of the great tragedies of Christian moralists is that they often equate evil and sin with sexual pleasure — the virtuous, in their minds, are people who deny themselves the pleasure of the flesh. This view has probably done more to create sexually unstable men — and women too — who sometimes turn their thoughts and fantasies about sexuality into sexual violence.

Other religions vary enormously in terms of how they see evil. In Buddhism, for example, as Jean-François Revel and Matthieu Ricard make clear in their superb book *The Monk and The Philosopher*, evil is only an aberration, an incorrect perception of reality.

PSYCHOLOGISTS AND THE CONCEPT OF EVIL

Psychologists have played with the concept of evil since the beginning of modern-day Psychology. Recently the Danish Psychologist Preben Bertelsen (1999) in his paper "Free Will in Psychology: In the Search of a Genuine Compatibilism" argues that Psychology should sometimes (but not always) acknowledge crime, immorality and inhumanity as personal chosen acts (rather than as socialization or genetic failures) and that "therefore we are in need of concepts not only of sickness but also of evilness in psychology".

Robert Hare does not use the term "evil" but instead the word "psychopath or psychopathic". According to Hare these are the small minority of the population who commit a disproportionately large share of violent crimes and are narcissistic and have a grossly inflated view of their self-worth and importance. Hare describes them as "intra-species predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs" (Hare 1996).

Of course in Psychology, the concept of psychopathy is a controversial one. The DSM-II described it a bit like Hare did but failed to provide explicit diagnostic criteria for the disorder. With the publication of the DSM-III there was a list of explicit criteria for psychopathy now referred to as Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD).

Many (including Hare) criticised the criteria used because they described only persistent violations of social norms (actual behaviour) and not personality traits. Despite the field studies and experiments that showed the reliability of DSM-III and the epidemiological and other studies that gave APD a great deal of empirical support the DSM-III definition received a huge amount of criticism mainly on the grounds that the criteria used to assess it centered on criminal acts and irresponsible behaviour rather than on personality traits as described by Cleckley or Hare.

Accordingly, attempts were made to bring the original Psychopathy personality traits back into contention first through the DSM-III-R and then the DSM-IV.

However, Hare argues that still not enough has been done. His studies suggest that because APD is largely defined by anti-social behaviour enormous confusion remains. More particularly Hare suggests that although most psychopaths meet the criteria for APD most of those with APD are not psychopaths.

Now I have used both DSM-IV and Hare's PCL-R (the Psychopathy Checklist) in my forensic and criminological practice. And I tend to agree with Hare — namely that there are persons in a forensic setting who can be diagnosed as Antisocial Personality Disorder but are not Psychopaths. To me, Psychopaths are something else and probably very similar to how Hare has described them — human predators who callously exploit others.

The critics of APD and Psychopathy have suggested that these entities do not exist and that both terms are mythological. But I agree with Hare and the DSM that both clinical and empirical evidence provides a lot of evidence for the legitimate use by psychologists of both terms.

However, I would go one step further. I have met in the course of my work criminals who are not only predatory and violent but who also manifestly enjoy the murder, rape or torture that they engage in. Their personality is more than what could be called APD and even more than what Hare would describe as psychopathic. These criminals are qualitatively different from the usual violent killers or criminals that I have come across and would come close to what others — including myself — would call "evil".

In suggesting that there may be a personality type that laypeople, theologians and philosophers have called "evil" I am flying in the face of the so-called "objectivity" that marks a lot of social

science and psychology. Thomas Harris cleverly illustrates this point in his book — turned into a famous film — *Silence of the Lambs*. In the book the serial killer Hannibal Lecter poses a challenge to the FBI profiler and psychologist that goes something like this:

"Nothing ever happened to me, Officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviourism, Officer Starling. You've got everybody in moral dignity pants — nothing is ever anybody's fault. Look at me, Officer Starling. Can you stand to say I'm evil?"

All of this begs the question about how I would define evil. Now any definition of evil is going to be inadequate. If I were a philosopher or theologian I would be obliged to produce a comprehensive and elegant definition of evil. But I am a forensic psychologist and criminologist, and I am attracted to the definitions given by others with a similar background such as Professor Roy Baumeister, whose insightful book *Evil: Inside Human Cruelty* was re-published recently. He defines evil as:

"The intentional serious physical harm of another person or persons."

This definition, like many other definitions in social science and even physical science leaves many grey areas. For example, it would not include — though it covers — the harm inflicted by people in the course of their occupation (i.e., surgeons and dentists) and acts motivated by insanity.

For the purposes of this talk I will define evil in the same way that Baumeister does. However, if I was to define an evil person (as distinct from evil itself) I would describe that personality characteristic in the same way that Baumeister does — but add two important caveats:

"An evil person is one who intentionally inflicts serious physical harm on another person or persons, in pursuit of a personal, ideological or religious goal, and who experiences intense psychological pleasure in doing so".

At another time and in another place I wish to explore in greater detail how my definition of evil differs from APD or Psychopathy. At this stage, however, at least for me, the added dimension of intense enjoyment of suffering is the trait or characteristic that differentiates an "evil" person from these two other concepts.

Those with APD or who are called Psychopaths do not, at least in my experience, necessarily seek or experience that intense enjoyment that characterizes those few human beings who I would describe as evil.

In short, I would say that though most evil people have elements of APD or even psychopathy in their personality make-up only a few of those assessed as APD or Psychopathic are evil.

People who fall into my definition of evil include the two soldiers Reid and Luckman who slowly strangled 14-year-old Peter Aston to death by shovelling sand into his mouth. They clearly intensely enjoyed what they had done. When I interviewed both Reid and Luckman they tended to excuse their actions on the grounds that they had "personal problems with their jobs" and that was the reason why they tortured the boy.

They include as well, Henry Lee Lucas, one of the worst serial killers in America's history. He liked to mutilate the bound and struggling victims with a chain saw, chopping off their fingers one-by-one forcing young women to see their own bodies disintegrate before they eventually died, slow and agonising deaths.

It would be foolish to assume that a person defined as "evil" in a popular sense is that way inclined all the time. The perceptive British writer Brian Masters, who has profiled many serial killers, notes in his book on Dennis Nilsen (a serial killer who was convicted of six counts of killing and mutilating six young men in Britain in 1983) that Nilsen often was struck with compassion while strangling young men and would stop murdering them. As one of his potential victims told Masters:

"I don't know if that man was my murderer or my saviour — because he was both."

And how do we explain the history of Ted Bundy who was executed for strangling 23 women. Several years before he began his killing spree, he received a police commendation for pursuing and capturing a purse-snatcher and before that incident he had saved the life of a drowning three-year-old girl.

Maybe, as both theologians and philosophers have noted, there is a bit of both saint and sinner in all of us. Let me illustrate this point by considering our continuing fascination with movies that deal with murder and mayhem.

Serial killer movies are still very much in vogue. The Summer of Sam and The Bone Collector are recent examples of this genre and follow on from Silence of the Lambs and the spate of horror movies that preceded this blockbuster.

Why the fascination with such movies? Part of the reason is undoubtedly our fascination with "evil" as a concept given its importance in Western religion and philosophy.

As well, I would suggest, our fascination with the lurid crimes of serial killers and the anti-heroes of horror films betray a fear that within us lurk the same violent demons. This fear applies equally to men and women though the nature of female fantasies is somewhat different and less likely to be enacted.

But what are these fantasies and demons? Do they have elements of sadism, egoism and sexual weirdness of which in saner moments we are ashamed? How many of us have such emotions and feelings? Most probably there are many more than are willing to admit to them.

However, my experience with serial killers suggests that it is highly likely that the average person's fantasies are not nearly as compelling and perverted as those of serial killers are. It is also true that we only think and dream about the things that psychopathic killers actually plot and then carry out.

I am not suggesting that this dreaming — and by extension, the watching and reading of such tales — becomes addictive turning normal citizens into sexual monsters. Ted Bundy, after all, made portentous comments about pornography being responsible for his murderous inclinations but few of those in academia or law enforcement who have studied Bundy believe his rationalisations.

What I suggest is that movie audiences might pour into films like The Bone Collector or The Summer of Sam both because they are adrenalin-pumping experiences and because they allow us to confront our own demons. But these demons, when confronted, go back into their boxes — and perhaps in the end that is at least one important difference between us and the serial killers who actually act out fantasies.

Indeed, I believe that serial killers are fundamentally different from most of us in psychological make-up. Most have definite psychopathic personalities and fantasy lives that they cannot and do not want to "put back into the

box". They most certainly are not "mad" or psychiatrically ill. As John Douglas, the FBI expert who arrested or studied hundreds of serial killers noted, he never met one who had an irresistible impulse to commit a murder. Neither, I should add, have I.

It is relevant to note here that the same goes for genocide. Craig Etcheson, the manager of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Project who spent decades studying genocidal individuals and organizations puts the point well. The most striking conclusion he came to was that:

"The majority of people who commit mass murder seem perfectly normal."

Now Etcheson is not a psychologist but his assessment does raise several issues for psychologists interested in APD, psychopathy or even "evil". Are people who commit horrible acts of a distinct personality type? What relevance do concepts like APD and psychopathy or even evil defined in a psychological sense have in discussions of popular notions of "evil"?

And what about the collective examples of "evil" that we see all around us in the examples of genocide and war crimes? East Timor, Rwanda, Kosovo, the Congo and a dozen other places around the world bear witness to thousands of people not keeping their fantasies inside their heads (or "boxes" to use my serial killing analogy) but allowing them to actually take place. How do we explain the contemporary war crimes and reprehensible historical events that have marred and permanently scarred the history of humankind?

Answers to these questions are difficult and go well beyond psychology. Indeed, I firmly believe that the forensic psychologist, in trying to understand extreme violence (whether we call it "evil" or something else) has to consider the sociological and cultural elements of how violence is formed as well as the purely psychological processes involved. And, that is what I unapologetically have done when considering the origins of evil.

SLIPPING INTO EVIL

How do so many of us slip so easily into acts of evil? Why is it, as a new history by Joanna Bourke asserts, that ordinary men and women find pleasure in killing? Bourke, an award-winning British historian asserts that excitement, joy and satisfaction in slaughter are every society's dirty secret. Incidentally, I don't believe that Bourke's position is necessarily correct because it ignores the

substantial historical literature and psychiatric experience that shows how war traumatises many of those who participate in it.

Criminological theory can help us to explain many individual acts of violence but not necessarily collective acts. For example two highly respected criminologists, Gottfredson and Hirschi produced a book in 1990 called *A General Theory of Crime*.

In the book they make a persuasive argument to suggest that the available empirical evidence points to low self-control as being the major cause of crime for individuals. Most crimes, they argue, are the result of a lack of inner-discipline and restraint among individuals. A great deal of recent research would seem to confirm this observation.

Their argument is that criminals do not tend to be ordinary citizens who resemble everyone else in most respects. Rather, they show a lack of self-control in both legal and non-legal aspects of their lives.

Such arguments, however, do not explain the mass-madness that marked East Timor or Rwanda. It would be churlish to suggest that the murderers in genocide are simply individuals with poor self-control. Far more complex forces are at work.

Roy Baumeister the social psychologist whose book on evil I mentioned earlier suggests that even those with good self-control will "slip" into acts of evil. One common way of doing this in war is to obey the commands of a superior. If a soldier is told to "shoot a prisoner" there are all sorts of excuses for him to use to fulfil his obligation and to deny his guilt or participation in an evil act. Maybe the prisoner is a terrorist who has killed scores of colleagues. Maybe the enemy has also killed scores of captured prisoners including perhaps a best friend?

The great Christian thinker St Augustine once argued that soldiers do have a moral obligation to carry out all commands, wicked or not. If Christian philosophers can think this way, why not ordinary soldiers?

Obedience is one of the fundamental mechanisms that facilitate evil. The psychologist Stanley Milgram, in one of his famous experiments, was able to show that when students were told to deliver painful electric shocks to student subjects, they did, even up to levels of shock that could theoretically kill their student subjects.

Milgram's experiments have, of course, been viciously criticised as Ian Parker, in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend Magazine* points out. The objections were on two grounds: Firstly for ideological reasons — especially when he generalised from his research to observe that Americans now had to see themselves as potential murderers and that the Nazis were "no more unusual than any New Haven guy in a check shirt" (where his experiments were conducted).

Secondly, though, other psychologists, particularly Ross and Nisbett, argue that what Milgram and other researchers show us is that people tend to do things because of the situations they are in and not because of their character traits. According to Ross, "don't assume that people who commit atrocities are atrocious or people who do heroic things are heroic" (*Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend Magazine*, December 2, 2000 p 59).

As a criminologist and forensic psychologist I am a great believer in situational theories of behaviour and have often used them in crime prevention work. Indeed, later in this talk I mention three social and cultural situations (an emphasis on materialism; a threat to one's ego; and gross idealism) that increase the chances of evil being committed.

But situation is only one part of explaining human behaviour and throughout my career I have been struck by how much character traits and basic personality dimensions influence situations. Some people will torture, rape or murder a person while others will resist or refrain in the same situation. APD and even Hare's psychopathic personality has a great deal of cogency for me, personally, but so does, as I have indicated, that extra dimension that I have called "evil".

Regardless of whether you call it evil, APD, psychopathy or just violence, the emphasis on "obeying superiors" also leads to a state of mind where the technique of carrying out an act of intentional harm or genocide overwhelms the horrible consequences of the act itself. Peter Luckman, the soldier who helped torture a young boy to death complained to me that he kicked Peter Aston because he was "ordered to" by his co-killer Robin Reid. He went on to complain about the pain he had inflicted upon himself by kicking the young boy so hard on the skull that he damaged his leg — never mind the sickening violence that he inflicted on the young victim.

A friend of mine who does human rights work in Cambodia tells me that the notebooks of Khmer

Rogue torturers often mention how their technique of killing their victims could be improved. Sloppiness, inefficiency and a failure to reach "targets" (which means body counts) were often the major criticism of Nazi concentration camp guards by their superior officers.

In the process of engaging in violence, desensitisation takes place as well. Just look at those African children whom mercenaries forced to execute a member of their own family in order to neutralise their concern about other murders that they might be asked to commit.

Some of the Serbian fighters in Sarajevo said that killing had become so normal to them that they found it hard to imagine doing anything else. When asked whether they would pull the trigger if one of their former Muslim friends appeared in their sights they replied that they would not hesitate to do so.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF EVIL?

Antisocial Personality Disorder (or else Psychopathy), lack of self-control, obeying commands and desensitisation all help to explain individual acts of evil, in the way that Baumeister defines the term. But, as noted earlier, they do little to help us understand collective evil as in the genocide that we have seen in scores of places around the world.

Psychologising can only take us so far and we have to turn to cultural and social causes to advance our knowledge of what collective evil is all about. The problem here is that it is very difficult to find evidence that certain groups or societies are more favourably disposed towards violence than others. A theory centred on the view that there is a sub-culture of violence does not gain great credence when you look at the evidence.

For example, in my book *Black Death White Hands* I point out that indigenous Australians have a rate of murder and violence ten to twenty times greater than the rest of the population. The process of colonising this country was, I argue, largely responsible for this huge rate of violence. Many Aborigines were displaced from their homelands, torn from their families and placed into reserves where alcohol, unemployment and personal despair became the mark of their existence.

But the real point here is Aboriginal people are repelled by the violence that surrounds them and hold no positive attitude towards it. There may well be a sub-culture of violence in some Aboriginal

communities but it is certainly not one that most of the community endorse.

What there may well be, however, is a sub-culture that allows individuals to lose control, to acquiesce if you like to the triggers that provoke anger and rage. As Roy Baumeister has put it people acquiesce in losing control whether it is breaking a diet, going on a drinking binge or, I would suggest engaging in genocide. Here the situational context of the Milgram paradigm comes into play and interacts with the personality dimensions so crucial to Hare and advocates of psychopathy.

What people do is to give themselves the right to let go of their impulses, to engage in a "me generation" super-indulgence, where they rationalise their actions by saying that they are overwhelmed by an irresistible impulse to engage in the overeating, drinking or violence. We live after all, in an age where all demands can be instantly gratified.

I have never met or read about a serial killer that was so overcome by an irresistible impulse that they could not stop the killing they engaged in. Similarly, I would argue that genocidal mobs are not so overwhelmed by crowd hysteria that they do not know when to stop.

Baumeister gives the example of the mobs in Rwanda in 1993. When the International Commission on Human Rights began to investigate claims of violence the violence stopped immediately. However, when the Commission left two weeks later, the violence began again.

In this example, as in East Timor, it is hard not to escape the conclusion that the mobs knew just how much they could allow themselves to lose control. There was no "irresistible impulse" operating that drove them relentlessly towards genocide.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SUPPORTS FOR EVIL

There are four basic social or cultural supports for the promulgation of evil and I have already mentioned the first — a cultural norm that allows people to acquiesce to their inner impulses of rage and anger.

The second is the desire to gain material benefit. Everyone wants material gain but what distinguishes people who commit extreme violence (evil, if you like) from most of us is that they are prepared to use what I have defined as evil as a means to gain the goal of money or material gain. And, I would have to make the observation that in the current social climate where materialism and

the hedonistic pursuit of money and goods are paramount, we can expect more evil to occur.

The third social or cultural support for evil is the strong sense of ego that permeates contemporary society. This in turn leads to threatened egoism. You don't have to be a criminologist or forensic psychologist to know that violence springs from many situations where a person is subjected to insults that threaten self-esteem or honour.

A colleague of mine, Professor Ken Polk from Melbourne University's Criminology Department, has shown that about 30 percent of all murders and serious violent incidents in Australia, arise from situations where the partner in the home directly challenges a male's ego — or in a pub, or out in the street. Polk suggests that threats to the male ego cause a greater proportion of violence in this country than in any other western country.

A fourth and the final support is unflinching, ethnocentric, idealism. When, for personal, religious, racial or nationalistic reasons, individuals and groups strongly believe they are on the side of good and righteousness and the world would be a better place if their creed or ideology prevailed, war crimes, genocide and brutality are likely to take place. Rwanda, Chile, East Timor, Bosnia and a score of other places demonstrate how much righteous idealism plays in the creation of evil acts.

MORE EVIL IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM?

So what is the prognosis for evil in the new millennium? Unfortunately, I would suggest that we would have more, rather than less evil than we had in the last century.

It is relevant to note here that the four decades after the end of World War II saw 150 wars and only 26 days of world peace — and that is not even counting internal wars and police actions. Baumeister notes that the Nazi genocide was surpassed by the body count during the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s; that the Cambodians of the 1970s destroyed a larger percentage of the population than the Chinese had; that the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s killed people at five times the rate of the Nazi death camps even though the country is a great deal smaller.

All of the root causes of evil are alive and active in the new millennium. Materialism has become the new religion of the 21st century and the obscene gap between the rich and the poor is widening

rather than reducing. Australia is a classic example of this pattern. As the gap grows expect to not only see more serial killers but also more wars and the genocide that invariably follows such divisions.

Egoism — and the potential of threats to those who prize it — has replaced spirituality and the search for meaning in life as the new religion of the last decade. The "me generation" has well and truly overtaken altruism and a concern with creating healthy communities. The rise of egoism and the "irresistible impulse culture" rationalises out violence as an acceptable means to pursue the goals of egoistic rewards.

So too will the rise of idealistic violence. Though Islam is often seen as the major source of this type of violence, eclipsing the ideological violence that Christianity perpetrated in the past, recent events in Indonesia and Nigeria suggest that Christians too could again become proponents of ideologically based violence in the future. Certainly, the way in which right wing groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the extreme American fundamentalist groups indirectly and directly promulgate violence against others should make us wary about pointing the finger only at extreme Islamic sects.

DEALING WITH EVIL

There are no magical cures but let me suggest a couple of ways of trying to deal with how evil manifests itself. The first way may not directly concern forensic psychologists as professionals although, presumably, as intelligent citizens they should be at least interested in the suggestion.

To begin with, I believe we have to place those who commit, or who have probably committed, acts that by law are categorised as "evil" on trial. It is not a matter of punishment but more of asserting that we, as humans, will not tolerate evil. As the Dalai Lama has put it:

"We must forgive but not forget."

The way that Australia deals æ or more correctly does not deal æ with the many war criminals in our midst is appalling. Konrad Kalejs stands as a living testament to the ineptitude of the Australian authorities when dealing with people who, based on a great deal of evidence, could well have slaughtered thousands.

On an international scale the Augusto Pinochets of this world must be pursued at all costs. The struggle will be a difficult one: of the 120 nations that agreed to establish an international criminal court

only a minority have so far ratified its statue. As Geoffrey Robertson wrote recently after the Pinochet debacle, the only consolation that can be offered to Pinochet's victims is the certain knowledge that for tyrants "the future is not what it used to be".

The second way is, I believe of direct relevance to the forensic psychologist. We can — and should — argue over APD, psychopathy and the additional concept of a trait or characteristic of "evilness" that have raised here.

But no matter what name we give to the people who commit horrendous acts we know that extremely violent people — whether they are torturers or serial killers — are the product of brutal parenting practices, abuse, neglect and indifference. A great deal of research points to the fact that the most effective way to reduce the number of human missiles we let loose in the community is through effective crime prevention schemes. Indeed, my colleague, Professor Ross Homel, has clearly demonstrated that effective parenting schemes and social programs that offer physical and financial support for struggling mothers, are many more times more cost-effective than more prisons and police.

Yet though the research data unequivocally demonstrate this point the reality is that most governments lack any real commitment to such programs. Politicians find it more electorally palatable and easier, to pour money into prisons and police forces — the former of which just create more evil people and the acts that follow them.

Ultimately, of course, the issue of evil requires all of us to morally condemn the terrible acts that evil people engage in. On this score despite the setbacks, I am becoming more optimistic as my quote from Geoffrey Robertson suggests. The international community is increasingly condemning the acts genocide and war crimes despite the seemingly endless examples of these forms of evil that we have seen in the last few years.

But what really is required is a change in our cultural mindset. For too long we have seen our aspirations for the good life couched in terms of material progress and improvements in health and science. But there is an increasing awareness that these improvements have a downside. Science, for example, has led to great problems of pollution including the contamination of what we need to survive like good soil and clean rivers and oceans.

Science has also led to nuclear weapons and a continuing threat of our world destroying itself.

Nor, judged by all the public opinion surveys and the economic evidence have social ideologies like Marxism or unbridled multi-national capitalism led to personal happiness and a reduction in evil acts.

Personally, I believe that Jean-François Revel and Matthieu Ricard are right when they say, in their book *The Monk and the Philosopher* that both personal happiness and the reduction of evil will occur only when we acquire wisdom and more understanding about the meaning of life in both a spiritual, philosophical and I would hope, psychological sense.

This means, I think, something different than what most traditional religions have offered us in the past. Indeed the religious sense of sin is probably the greatest obstacle to moral decency because it hinders clear thinking, encourages a reliance on retribution and punishment for disbelievers and leads to a belief in certainty rather than careful thought.

Indeed, that great humanitarian Albert Schweitzer was so alarmed by dogma and the blind cruelty of his fellow men that he wrote in regard to the roots of cruelty and evil that:

"The time must come when inhumanity protected by custom and thoughtlessness will succumb before humanity championed by thought."

Maybe, given my own more pessimistic scenarios about evil in the future, this might be a good place to end — except for one more comment.

I have always strongly believed that social scientists — including forensic psychologists — have an obligation to explore the nature of what Baumeister has been called evil. As psychologists you do not have to believe in APD, psychopathy let alone my concept of a trait of evilness to do this. Violence, especially extreme violence, has long been the object of psychological assessment and research without any reference to any of these terms.

But I would also go one step further. I firmly believe that both as human beings and as forensic psychologists, we have a stronger obligation to not only study and assess these processes but also to condemn those psychological, social and cultural processes that lead to evil acts.

In recent years the APS, as a professional body, has shown an increased willingness to publicly comment on the causes and solutions to violence and cruelty.

And that is the way it should be. If the so-called intellectual and organisational leaders of our profession cannot condemn what Baumeister has called evil, why should the rest of the population be concerned about the perpetuation of extreme interpersonal violence, war crimes, genocide and those other terrible acts that we have discussed here.

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