

Badness, Wickedness, Evil and the Death of the Soul

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1. Just as “good” is the most general adjective of commendation, laudation, or approval, so too “bad” is the most general adjective of condemnation, criticism, or disapproval. Just as “good” is a scalar modifier (“good”, “better”, “best”), so too “bad” is a scalar modifier (“bad”, “worse”, “worst”). It is puzzling that the scalar modifiers have a different root than “bad”. Curiously, “badder” and “baddest” are used colloquially by primary school teachers to mean naughtier and naughtiest. Just as there are varieties of (kinds of) goodness, such as medical goodness (the goodness of health, organs and perceptual faculties), instrumental goodness (the goodness of instruments, tools and artefacts), technical goodness (the goodness of skills), hedonic goodness (the goodness of being pleased, of pleasures and enjoyments), and so forth, so too there are varieties of badness. The cousins of *bad* are *weak*, *poor*, *pathetic*, *unsatisfactory*, *inadequate*, *harmful*, *worthless*, *defective*, *deficient*, *detrimental*. Which of these is apt, in any particular case, depends upon the variety of badness under consideration.

It is noteworthy that attributions of badness are *sometimes* privative, i. e. that ascriptions of badness sometimes signify no more than lack of good-making qualities. So, for example, a bad knife is a knife that does not cut well, a bad joke is a joke that is not funny, and one has a bad memory if one cannot remember what others can. But it is by no means always so. Food is bad if it is rotting or infected, pain is bad if it is severe, an examination script is bad if it is full of mistakes or if its conclusions are ill-supported, a painting is bad if it is unskilfully executed, or if it is sentimental, in bad taste, or kitsch.

Just as there are varieties of goodness, so too there are varieties of badness. *Medical badness*, like medical goodness, has as its focal point the health of a being. Someone is in bad health if he is ill, has an infection, injury, or illness. He may suffer from poor health if his condition is chronic. Conceptually linked to the badness of health of a living creature are the deficiencies of organs and faculties. An organ is bad or weak (e.g. bad

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eyes, a weak heart) and a sense-faculty poor (poor eyesight, poor sense of smell), when they fail to fulfil their characteristic function optimally, relative to the kind of being in question (the badness is species-relative: good eyesight in a human being would be grossly inadequate in an eagle). Deficiencies of organs and faculties deleteriously affect the agent's ability to lead a normal life for a being of its kind. Badness of health is a focal point around which are clustered the notions of a substance (stuff) being medically bad, a condition being medically bad, and an activity being medically bad for the health and fitness of a being. So, many kinds of foods (*foodstuffs*) are bad for one or are bad for one if consumed in excess (sugars, fats, alcohol), relative to one's needs and circumstances. Similarly, smoking is bad for one, being overweight (a condition) deleteriously affects one's health, and boxing (an activity) is liable to damage one's brain.

Corresponding to technical goodness, i. e. the goodness of skills, is *technical badness*. Like technical goodness, technical badness has at least four sub-forms: the badness at a craft (tinker, shoemaker, carpenter), vocational badness (e. g. of a lawyer, doctor, teacher), ludic badness [a much-needed new use of "ludic"] (of sportsmen, mountain climbers, game players), and performance badness (of actors, musicians, singers). A professional or a craftsman is technically bad if they are not merely poor in the exercise of their skill, but incompetent. A poor solicitor or dentist, a poor plumber or gardener, may be better than none, but a bad one should be avoided, as their work will probably be sub-standard, and they are liable to do more harm than good. A bad mountain climber may endanger the lives of his fellow mountaineers, and a bad actor may ruin the play or film in which he acts badly. Similar considerations apply to the derivative form of technical badness, namely: the poorness or badness of a technique. A poor technique is lamentable, but a bad one is likely to be positively harmful. So too, artefactual badness consists in the poorness, badness, inadequacy and inefficiency of instruments, tools, and machines on the one hand and of non-instrumental artefacts, such as roads, houses, bridges, airports and harbours, on the other. Their various forms of badness make them dangerous to life and limb, inefficient in subserving the goal for which they were made.

It should by now be straightforward to articulate the other varieties of badness, such as the badness of the detrimental (as opposed to the beneficial), of the anti-hedonic (the painful, uncomfortable, unpleasant, disagreeable, unpalatable, distressing, repulsive, and the disgusting), and

of the anti-eudaimonic (unhappiness, misery, grief and sorrow). We leave the exercise to the reader.

To be sure, there are many other predications of badness of one kind or another that do not fit readily into the selected varieties. Currency is bad if it is debased, weak, or counterfeit; laws are bad if they are unjust, ill-drafted and so vague or ambiguous; debts are bad if they cannot be discharged; a child is bad if naughty, unruly, rude, and disobedient. And so on.

Precisely because there are varieties of badness, there are equally many different forms of bad deeds, acts that it is wrong to perform and omissions that it is wrong to make. They may be medically, economically, legally, politically, wrong. They may be ill-informed, ill-advised, inefficient, undemocratic. Sometimes their consequences may be appalling (e.g. in relation to a pandemic) and moral culpability may be incurred, even though the motives for doing them may not have been malevolent. In the absence of circumstantial justification or extenuating circumstances, they are wrong, and their agents are blameworthy.

2. With these qualifications, reminders and elucidations, we may now turn to our main theme: moral badness. Our first port of call is lexical. What are the subjects of which moral badness can legitimately be predicated? *Human beings*, people, may be morally bad if they are cruel, malicious, unjust, dishonest, vindictive, or arrogant in their dealings with their fellow human beings. These are *character traits* morally bad people have, dispositions of character that are themselves morally bad, or worse – wicked or evil. They are *vices* – in the more extreme cases, *deadly vices*. Such vices are manifest in bad, wicked, or evil *deeds*, motivated by bad, wicked or evil *motives and intentions*. Bad, wicked, and evil deeds characteristically have bad or evil *consequences*. The deadliest of vices is cruelty to human beings or to animals. Montaigne characterized cruelty as “the extremist of all vices”, Thomas Fuller observed that a man of cruelty “is God’s enemy”. To the cruel man, cruelty “is the highest kind of pleasure” (Walter Savage Landor) and it “requires no motive outside of itself, but only requires an opportunity” (George Eliot). It is bred by fear and stupidity, thoughtlessness and indifference, unlimited power and lust for revenge.

In addition to human beings, morally bad deeds are done by human institutions: international organisations, governments, non-governmental institutions, multinational corporations, banks, local government

authorities, and so on. These wrong-doers will not be discussed here. It is relatively easy to see how to extend our analyses from people to institutions, although it is often difficult to allocate blame to corporate subordinates to the relevant culpable CEO.

To say that someone is a bad person or to say that something is a bad thing to do commonly has the illocutionary force of moral disapprobation, criticism or condemnation. But it is also the crudest and least informative of the triplet, “bad”, “wicked”, “evil”. Often it is positively jejune or grossly inappropriate – as in saying that Hitler was a bad man, or that genocide is a bad practice, or that inflicting pain for fun is a bad thing to do. Wickedness and evil are deep forms of moral offense and wrong-doing. To say of something or someone that they are evil is the most severe form of moral condemnation we possess.

It is striking, and, as we shall see, significant, that “wicked” has both comparative and superlative forms, namely: “wickedder” and “wickedest”, comparable to “bad”, “worse”, “worst”, but “evil” does not. It has only intensifiers, viz. “more evil” and “most evil”. This calls out for explanation. It is surely akin to the comparable grammatical fact that one cannot be better than best. Murdering two million innocent people is *doing* more evil than murdering one million. But someone who murders two babies or infants for fun is not twice as evil as someone who murders only one for fun. If someone has intentionally done evil, then, in the absence of justifying or extenuating circumstances, he is evil. If he does further evil, that does not make *him* more evil – it only means that he has *done* more evil. It involves a deep misunderstanding to speculate or argue over who is the most evil of the great twentieth-century dictators, Hitler, Stalin, or Mao – all one can do is debate which of them *did* most evil. But surely, if evil-doers not only do evil, but also take pleasure in the evil they do and publicly and proudly proclaim it to the world, as did the Hamas murderers on October 7, 2023 who slaughtered Israeli Jews, old age pensioners, men and women, girls and boys, children, and babies in an orgy of sadism and evil joy, are they not more evil than others, who do not proclaim it with pride? No; they are only more depraved, contemptible, and repulsive in their deliberate and gleeful shattering of the moral order of humanity.

3. We now turn to the etymology of “evil”. It is revealing and suggestive. The English “evil” is derived from Old English *yfel*, Middle English *uvel*, and Old Frisian *evel*. It is related to Old High German *ubil*, which

is the source of modern German's *übel*. The root meaning is “exceeding the measure” or “overstepping proper limits”. It is striking that although Latin (like the later romance languages) has a large toolbox of forms of badness, e.g. *malus*, *nequam*, *nefas*, *improbus*, *pravus*, *perversus*, *turpe*, *corruptus*, *vitiosus*, it has no single expression that corresponds to “evil”. Similarly, ancient Greek has no single expression that corresponds exactly to “evil” – *kakós* signifies bad, wicked or evil indifferently, as well as spiteful and mischievous. Like Latin, it has a rich vocabulary of opprobium, e.g. *kakia*, *aischros*, *diephtharmenos*, *fáulos*, *parephtharmenos*, *ponēros*, *mochtheros*, but no single word that corresponds precisely to “evil”. Even ancient Hebrew has to make do with *ra*, which signifies bad, wicked and evil indifferently, although it has many other terms of opprobrium, e.g. *pesha*, *khet*, *avon*, *zadon*.

Germanic languages in general, and English in particular, are fortunate to have at hand a direct means to distinguish between the most extreme form of moral iniquity from moral badness and wickedness. *Evil* signifies what is beyond the pale. It belongs in the same toolbox as *demonic*, *diabolic*, *devilish*, *fiendish* – which is hardly surprising given general archaic beliefs in supernatural evil, and sits side by side with *depraved*, *degenerate*, *corrupt*, as well as *vile*, *foul*, *odious*, and *repulsive*, *despicable*, *repugnant*.

The most important clue we take away from this short etymological and comparative foray is that evil-doers, in some sense that demands explanation, set themselves irremediably beyond the pale.

4. It has long been customary to distinguish between super-natural evil, natural evil, and human evil. The idea of super-natural evil is widespread in religions, both monotheist and duo-theist. Gods may be evil, as is Ahriman according to Zoroastrian beliefs; fallen angels may be evil, as are the Devil or Satan in Catholic beliefs; demons, the super-natural servants of Satan, are evil, as are humans who have sold their souls to the Devil. This belongs to the religious mythology of evil.

Natural evils are natural catastrophes that destroy human life, property, crops, and means of livelihood. They may be floods or droughts, earthquakes or tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and avalanches. Biological natural evils are plagues and epidemics. The evil of natural evils consists in their results, not necessarily in any conscious agency, although in the case of global warming, the natural catastrophes are caused by human

beings, governments, and corporations. They are conceived to be evils because they cause the deaths, often agonized deaths, of thousands of human beings, and because they destroy the means of human livelihood. In pre-scientific eras, it was common to explain natural evils by reference to the gods or to God. No other explanation was available for such catastrophes. Polytheism provided ready explanations in terms of strife between gods (e.g. Zeus and Hera) or the interference of one or another god in human affairs (e.g. Apollo and Athena). Dualist religions, such as Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism, offered explanations in terms of cosmic dramas between non-omnipotent forces of good (e.g. Ahura Mazda) and forces of evil (e.g. Ahriman) in which humanity is caught up. Monotheist religions understandably had more difficulty explaining natural evils and in trying to explain the ways of God to man. Since a benevolent God could not be faulted, the fault must be humanity's. Guilt was imputed where no guilt was met.

Human evil consists in the morally depraved, wicked, vicious, corrupt, and above all, cruel. Human agents may be evil (evil-doers), human deeds may be evil (evil-doing), and the upshot or results of human deeds may be evil (evil done).

There has, in recent decades, been a scientific trend to explain evil away, in effect to deny that evil exists, to aver that human beings are not *really* evil. The scientism has its roots either in determinism (Laplacean or Marxist-historical) or in the medicalization of responsibility (psychological or psycho-analytic; behaviourist; cognitive neuro-scientific). Such forms of scientism argue that human evil is merely a surface phenomenon, since in truth science has shown that we are all victims of forces beyond our control, such forces being the economic system and poverty, the social system and social class differentiation, the political system and alienation, colonialism, the unconscious mind, the workings of the brain, and so forth. Accordingly, we are not free moral agents and are neither answerable nor responsible for what we do. In a period of glorification of victimhood, as the Anglophone world is now undergoing, this has powerful appeal. Such scientism needs robust refutation – some of it is an exaggeration of truths applicable only in special cases. The general abnegation of human responsibility is in effect the abnegation of humanity. If we are not answerable for our deeds and responsible for what we do, we are not free beings with two-way powers to act or refrain from acting in a given circumstance (liberty of indifference) and we are not able to

act for reasons (liberty of spontaneity). If so, we are not rational beings at all, merely pawns on the chessboard of fortune or cogwheels in the machinery of causation.

It is important that we face the truth about ourselves. We *do* have capacity-rationality, however weak it may be in times of crisis. We *have* eaten of the Tree of Good and Evil – that is to say, we *do* have the capacity knowingly to do evil as well as good. We are rational beings – we *can* reason; we are moral agents; we are language-users; we are not only thinkers and talkers, but, as Marx insisted against Hegel, also tool-makers; but we should not forget that the main tools our remote ancestors made were weapons, arrow heads and war-hammers.

5. Evil is the deliberate infliction of death, severe bodily harm, or extreme suffering on another innocent human being or sentient creature without adequate warrant or in excess of what is required for the attainment of a justifying or excusing goal. This is not a definition, but a characterization of paradigm cases. To be sure, such a characterization requires amplification. For there are bound to be disagreements about what counts as a warrant, as justification or excuse, and what counts as “being in excess”. This area of disagreement constitutes the “borderlands of evil”. It is not so much a fuzzy borderline, characteristic of vague concepts, but a broad grey area of unavoidable dispute from case to case. The disputes turn on the performance of *necessary evils*. The term is misleading, since what it signifies is, roughly speaking, doing harm in order to prevent greater harm. A surgeon who removes a patient’s eye in order to prevent spread of cancer is not doing an evil. Adequate warrant for the deliberate infliction of extreme suffering may be given by medical necessity: to save a life, or to cure a patient in dire circumstances, when no analgesics are available. Killing another may be warranted by self-defence, or by saving someone from an agonizing but unavoidable death (a driver trapped in the cabin of a burning lorry). It may be excused by the necessities of a just war (World War II), by the duty of legitimate governments to preserve the state from destruction (Ukraine in 2022), or the duty of the state to protect its citizens from savage slaughter (Israel in 2023). What should not be open to reasonable dispute is the existence of pure evil – cruelty, the deliberate and patently unwarranted infliction of suffering on an animal (pouring petrol over an animal and setting it alight for amusement); or on another innocent human being (a wide range of horrific examples

of cruelty to children is given by Ivan Karamazov in discussion with his brother Alyosha in Dostoevsky's novel).

Being evil is not a vice, any more than being virtuous is a virtue. They are not character traits. Rather, evil is the general form of deadly vices, just as virtue is the common form of the moral virtues. An important distinction can be drawn between wickedness and evil. Such a distinction is perhaps explicative: cutting the ragged edges of ordinary usage for an elucidatory purpose. Just as there are borderlands of evil in which disputation about warrants, justifications, and excuses take place, so too there is not a sharp borderline between wickedness and evil, indeed, not even a vague borderline, but a broad borderland in which casuistry finds its space.

6. The natural roots of moral goodness lie in feelings, in particular in our disposition to care for others, and in maternal care for offspring, which evolves into one paradigm form of love, namely motherly love, and into compassion. We do, mercifully, have a natural disposition for sympathy and empathy (not to be confused: the former is a form of feeling, the latter a form of understanding). To be sure, our natural disposition to care requires refinement and transformation by family life, moral education, social life, and reflection. Whatever innate propensity to sympathy we have is not equally distributed. It is easily crushed by adverse circumstances and brutalization. Women tend to be more compassionate than men, for obvious biological reasons. Family life varies greatly from family to family, from society to society and epoch to epoch. Moral education is equally variable, dependent upon a multiplicity of factors, and so too are the standards of public behaviour, both with regard to small morals and courtesy, and with respect to public morality and criminality. It is patent that not only does social morality vary greatly in different times and places, but the degree to which any given society lives up to its own moral standards is similarly variable. The struggle between right and wrong is part of the human condition.

What, then, are the roots of the morally bad, of the wicked and evil? They are individual, social, religious, and ideological. As we have emphasized, it is characteristic of our species, especially, but not only, of the male of the species, to be highly competitive, aggressive, single minded in pursuit of goals, to have a strong desire for wealth and possessions, and a lust for power. We have a natural tendency to selfishness and indifference

to the sufferings of others that constrains and limits our natural sympathies. We have a powerful sexual drive, an inclination to sexual possessiveness, with a corresponding disposition to jealousy.

Consequently, individual motives for doing evil and the motives that characterize evil-doers are manifold, wonderfully depicted in great works of literature and drama: envy and resentment of the status, power, and wealth of another (Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*); jealousy of another who has taken the love that one feels is one's due (Othello); unrestrained hedonism (Wilde's *Dorian Gray*), boredom (Hedda Gabler, in Ibsen's eponymous play); sexual lust (Tarquin, in Roman legend); lust for power and ambition (in Shakespeare's *Richard III*); sadism and natural malevolence (Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd*); hatred and revenge (Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*); and greed for wealth.

The social roots of the morally bad lie in our natural tribalism, the correlate of which is xenophobia. Our need for a sense of identity, i. e. for an awareness of what we stand for and to what group we belong and identify with, is greatly strengthened by finding an object to hate, either external to our own society or nation state, or within our society or state. This is greatly exacerbated by religious and ideological systems of beliefs that encourage bigotry, prejudice, and self-righteousness.

Much evil that is done is group behaviour. Group evil-doing is an outlet for human aggression. It provides camaraderie in violence and destruction both in war and in peace, and it strengthens a weak sense of identity. When directed at weaker groups in society, it gives evil-doers a sense of superiority. Being a form of collective action, it relieves the individual of any sense of personal responsibility. If a leader is involved, loyalty to the leader unites the group and abrogates the burden of decision-making. A unifying ideology or religion, driving violent and destructive action, gives meaning to what may otherwise be dull or empty lives. Human beings, when their evil propensities are unleashed, enjoy destruction and violence as well as loss of identity in mob behaviour. In warfare, it commonly offers aggressive males the temptations of booty and rape.

7. Questions about motivation of unquestionable evil need to be raised. Can evil be rational? If this question means: is reflection, planning, and effective instrumental reasoning involved in doing evil? – then the answer is obviously often “Yes”. There can be spontaneous evil, as often occurs in the course of riots and demonstrations, in which a demonstrator is

swept away in the excitement of the mob and fatally injures someone. In such cases, evil is often done in a frenzy of destructiveness, in which an agent has no motive. To be sure, that does not relieve the evil-doer of responsibility. Similarly, evil is often done in an explosion of anger, in which the evil deed, perhaps killing someone with a blow, is the form in which the rage is manifest. But much evil is deliberately planned well in advance and involves rational deliberation. On the other hand, there can be no legitimate justification or excuse for doing evil, in as much as, other things being equal, that something is evil gives the best possible reason for not doing it.

Can doing evil be reasonable? No; being reasonable involves taking into account the legitimate concerns of other people and is linked to an appreciation of values, such as fairness and justice, as well as the demands of duty and obligation. That is precisely what doing evil precludes. To do evil is to become and be evil, and that is to be in bondage to all the baser and destructive instincts and drives of humankind.

Can evil itself be a motive for action? No, for that something is evil provides the best possible reason for not doing it. “Because it is evil” is not an intelligible answer to the question “Why did you do it?”, since its being evil is the most extreme form of condemnation. One cannot intelligibly do something “for the sake of evil”. Milton’s Lucifer’s and Verdi’s Iago’s, “Evil be thou my good!”, strictly speaking, makes no sense. This, one may well say, is a version of the ancient doctrine that all fully intentional action must be done *sub specie boni*, that the agent must see at least *some* good in what he is doing.

It is therefore no coincidence that evil-doers find other reasons for their evil deeds. They may insist that what they are doing isn’t *really* evil, that their victims are not *really human* – they are just plague germs (Enver Pasha speaking of the Turkish genocide of Armenians), bacillae of racial tuberculosis (Hitler on the Jews), parasites (Stalin on the Ukrainian kulaks during the Holodomor), a cancer in society that must be eradicated (a favoured anti-semitic trope). Strikingly, one of the characteristic features of genocidal evil is the strenuous effort to dehumanize the victims. There is always an existential tension between holding the victims not to be human, but germs, bacillae, and cancers, and striving to humiliate them – for only human beings can be humiliated. Genocidal evil characteristically involves the gross maltreatment of the victims, the rape and murder of women before the eyes of their husbands, forcing women

into sex slavery, demeaning and humiliating torture, forcing men to kill their friends. Most significantly, genocidal evil destroys the very souls of the victims by making them destroy what is most sacred to them (for example, a Nazi officer forcing an elderly rabbi to spit upon the scrolls of the Torah, and when he could spit no more, spitting into his mouth to make him continue, an episode recorded in Chaim Kaplan's *Warsaw Diary*).¹ Our horror at this goes beyond horror at the infinite humiliation of the victim. It is equally a response to the assault upon the moral order of humanity (something similar was manifest in the Hamas atrocities perpetrated upon Israeli Jews on October 7, 2023). This analysis has deep conceptual and moral consequences.

8. Any history of human evil makes it evident that evil doers, in destroying the humanity of their victims, set themselves irremediably beyond the pale of humanity. For they deliberately and *gleefully* shatter the moral order of humanity. It is here that we can differentiate between evil and wickedness. The wicked are sometimes capable of redemption. If they come to recognize the wrong they have done, regret doing it, feel genuine remorse and try, in whatever ways possible, to make good the harm done, they *can be forgiven*. But those who have done evil have no conscience and typically show no remorse. The only senior Nazi at the Nuremberg Trials to avow remorse was Speer, who blatantly lied to escape hanging, as was demonstrated by his biographer Gitta Sereny.²

Forgiveness is a problematic notion. The nature of forgiveness is unclear. The *agents of forgiveness* are human beings. People forgive others *for* their misdeeds and wrong-doings. Is forgiving *an act*? Is it voluntary or involuntary or neither? To say "I forgive you" is a voluntary quasi-performative that commits one to abandon holding a wrong-doer to account and to cease resenting his behaviour. The offender's blameworthy deed is no less wrong as a result of forgiveness – it is the wrong-doer that is forgiven, not the wrong-done. But one may forgive an offender without any speech-act. So is forgiving *an event* that happens to the forgiver? No. Forgiveness for wrong-doing may take time, sometimes a long time, as the injury done heals, ceases to be an object of awareness, and no longer perturbs one. It is then neither voluntary nor involuntary. Nevertheless, one

¹ Quoted in Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: an Absolute Conception* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 1.

² Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (London: Picador, 2017).

is answerable for forgiving someone when one should not have forgiven, just as one may be answerable for believing someone when one should not have believed. And one is answerable for not forgiving, when one should have forgiven, as one may be answerable for not believing when one should have believed. One may be under an obligation to forgive someone (for example, for the sake of the love one bore his parents), and one may be under an obligation not to forgive (if, for example, one swore an oath not to forgive, as Hannibal Barca swore to his father Hamilcar not to forgive Rome for the First Punic War). But an obligation to forgive cannot be *to* the wrong-doer, since no one has a right to be forgiven. One may beg for forgiveness, but one cannot demand it. The evil-doer does not deserve forgiveness, since the evil done puts him beyond the pale. He may not beg for forgiveness, but only for mercy.

It is not only the nature of forgiveness that needs elucidation. There are further deep questions concerning who has the right to forgive, what deeds warrant forgiveness, what are the limits of forgiveness, and what are the consequences of forgiveness. It is evident that the forgiver must have an appropriate *locus standi*. The victim may forgive, but the friend of the victim cannot. The parents of a murdered child or the children of a murdered parent may forgive the murderer in appropriate circumstances, but others cannot. Justifying or extenuating circumstances may warrant forgiveness. Beyond that, forgiveness for wrong-doing can be judged only in relation to the character and history of the wrong-doer, the available alternatives in the circumstances, the intentions and purposes of his deeds, the goals and motives he had in view. Any decision must be ideographic, rather than nomothetic, save in the case of *evident* evil-doing.

Self-forgiveness is as unlike forgiveness of others as self-love is unlike the love of others, or as self-deception is unlike the deception of others. To forgive oneself, one must first have lost one's self-respect, feel deeply ashamed of oneself for what one takes to be a profound wrong one has done. To forgive oneself is to cease hating oneself, to stop despising oneself, and to desist from self-contempt.

9. Wickedness can, in certain cases and certain circumstances, be forgiven. The person who has knowingly and intentionally done a wicked deed in the absence of justifying or extenuating circumstances, may nevertheless be redeemed by his honest acceptance of responsibility, his sincere regret and remorse, and by his striving to make amends for his

wrong-doing in whatever ways possible for him. Evil doers, by contrast, have set themselves apart from humanity. To deny the humanity of other human beings and to strive to destroy their humanity, to slaughter the innocent, to inflict unbridled suffering on them as has been done by countless *genoçidaires*, is not only to destroy the humanity of one's victims, it is to do evil, to do what is unforgiveable. The very idea that human beings *could* be forgiven for evil deeds is unclear. Who could possibly have the right to forgive the German genocide of the Hereros in German South-West Africa; the genocide of the Armenians, first by the Ottomans and later by the Ittihadists; who could have the right to forgive Stalin's mass slaughter of kulaks and subsequent genocidal murder of Ukrainians in the Holodomor; the Nazi genocide of the Jews; Pol Pot's genocide of his own people; the genocide committed in Rwanda, East Timor, Nigeria, and so on and so forth? One who intentionally does evil to another human being or to a group of human beings, to a tribe or a people, *have destroyed their own soul*.

10. We need the concept of the soul no less than we need the concept of the mind, and for similar reasons.

The concept of the mind is in effect a way of presenting the rational and volitional powers of human beings and the exercise of those powers. The mind is not an immaterial substance connected via the pineal gland with the human body (as Descartes supposed). Nor is it identical with a material substance, namely the brain, lodged within the skull of a human being. For one's mind does not weigh three pounds and is not seven inches high either. In short, the mind is not a something – it is not an “entity” of any kind and so neither an immaterial substance nor a material one; but it is not a nothing either – human beings really do have a mind (after all, they are not mindless).

We speak of a thought's crossing our mind (something's occurring to us), of bearing something in mind (being aware of some fact), of turning our mind to some subject (focusing our attention on a certain topic). Similarly, we talk of calling something to mind (recollecting something) and of committing something to mind (memorising something). So too we speak of making up our mind (deciding), changing our mind (revising our decision), being in two minds whether to do something (being indecisive), and of having half a mind to do something (being inclined or tempted to do it).

We speak of someone having a mind as sharp as a razor (being an incisive thinker), of having a dirty mind (being inclined to think sexually indecent thoughts) and of having an original mind (able to come up with novel ideas and solutions). But in so doing, we are not speaking of some *thing* that is sharp, dirty, and original. We are speaking of a human being with distinctive powers of ratiocination. Our talk of the mind is best thought of as a *form of presentation* or form of *representation*. It is a useful form of pseudo-entification. We represent the mind as if it were a kind of object – but, of course, it isn't. We present the mind as if it were an *agent* of thought: that within us that thinks and reasons (as both Thomas Reid and J. S. Mill suggested) – but it isn't. *My mind* is not the agent of my thoughts, memories, intentions, and decisions. For to be sure, it is not my mind that makes up its mind (my mind does not have a mind) any more than it is my mind that is in half a mind to V (to do something) – it is *I* who am tempted or inclined to V.

All our talk of the mind is an oblique way of speaking about human intellectual powers and their exercise. This *form of representation* is useful. It enables us to compare different human beings' intellectual and volitional abilities and their exercise in a compact, convenient, and picturesque way. It meets a patent need in our thought and talk about ourselves.

11. But we stand in just as deep a need of a form of representation of our moral powers and our moral sensibility. We speak, rightly, of there being *darkness in the soul* of a human being – a lack of moral sensibility; we speak, correctly, of *genocidaires as lacking a soul*; we may remark with Martha Gellhorn, commenting on Adolf Eichmann, that we must *guard our own souls in the face of evil*; Kurtz, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, peers into his own soul as he is dying and can find nothing there but horror. We speak, perfectly intelligibly, of those who take material advantage of evil done by others (e.g. by witch-hunters in Salem or East Anglia in the seventeenth century or by *Einsatzgruppen* in the Ukraine and in Poland in World War II) by expropriating the property of the victims, as people who have *allowed their souls to wither*. Raskolnikov is described as a “lost soul”, and Coleridge's ancient mariner is a “damned soul”. We describe people as having a “beautiful soul”, a “noble soul”, or a “gentle soul”. We speak of some forms of labour as “soul destroying” – a dulling of sensibility by drudgery. Here too one's soul may be said to wither, although it would be more accurate to speak of the *withering of one's spirit*. For it is

one's liveliness, responsiveness to experience, engagement with one's fellow human beings, and capacity for joy that are being crushed.

Socrates sapiently remarked

There is a part of us which is improved by healthy actions and ruined by unhealthy ones. If we spoil it by taking the advice of non-experts, will life be worth living once this part is ruined? The part I mean is the body ...

What about that within us which is mutilated by wrong actions, and benefited by right ones? Is life worth living with this right part ruined? Or do we believe that this, whatever it maybe, in which right and wrong operate, is of less importance than the body?³

The medical analogy is surely profound. We care a great deal about our physical integrity and our good health. Loss of a limb is a great misfortune in as much as it deprives us of our ability to function as a normal human being. Moreover, since opportunities are correlative to abilities, we may also lose many of the opportunities available to those more fortunate. Are there then not features of our non-bodily nature that can be damaged, even irremediably damaged, by abuse and misuse, namely by doing evil? With such loss of our moral powers are human possibilities for doing, becoming, and being not foreclosed? Is Plato not wise to challenge us: should we not care for our soul at least as much as we care for our physical constitution and health?

We need a secular concept of the soul no less than we need the concept of the mind. For we need a way of presenting our moral sensibility. It is noteworthy that just as we are prone to contrast the mind with the body, so too we are prone to contrast the soul with the flesh. This is not surprising, as the appetites, which we share with animals, are bound to our physical nature, needs, and cravings. The appetites may hold us in bondage if egotism, self-indulgence, and hedonism rule our lives. Alcoholism, gluttony, and concupiscence may enslave us. But these are not somatic characteristics: it is not one's body that is gluttonous, given to alcoholism, beset with the priapic afflictions of a Don Juan or the insatiable lusts of a Messalina. That is why the soul is not to be contrasted with the body, but with the flesh.

That human beings have a soul thus conceived is not an empirical statement. It is a constitutive one. It characterizes the nature of mankind,

³ Plato, *Crito* (47d-e).

as does the statement than human beings have a mind. It can be said to be a logico-grammatical statement, since it draws our attention to what it makes sense to say. Of humans, but not of other animals, it makes sense to say that they have lost their soul, destroyed their own soul, that their soul is damaged, twisted or scarred, either by their own evil actions or by what they have been forced to do or to have undergone. Like the mind, the soul is not an “entity” or thing of any kind. The pivotal question is not “What is the soul?”, but rather, “What is it for a creature to possess a soul?”, i.e. what has to be true of a creature for it to be said to have a soul? The answer, in rough outline, is that it must be a language-using creature, it must have a mind, it must know the difference between good and evil, have a moral conscience, be susceptible to remorse and guilt for wrong-doing, and possess moral powers and moral sensibility.⁴

⁴ I am grateful to Hans Oberdiek and Claire Parker for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I am indebted to John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and idem, *Hard Questions: Facing the Problems of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 7.