The Evil Person

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Note

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Curriculum Vitae

Fergus Duniho was born in Plattsburgh, NY on April 23, 1967. He entered SUNY Plattsburgh in 1985, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and a minor in English Literature. As an undergraduate at SUNY Plattsburgh, he tutored courses in English composition, logic, and philosophy. For one semester, he served as an in-class tutor for *Introduction to Logic* under Charles List. He entered Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1989, graduating in 1991 with a Master of Science in Philosophy. He wrote his master's thesis on the mind/body problem, under the guidance of Selmer Bringsjord. While at R.P.I., he served as a teaching assistant for his first semester, and he taught *Introduction to Philosophy* during his second and third semesters. In 1991, he entered the University of Rochester's graduate program in philosophy. He served as a teaching assistant for several introductory courses in ethics, religion, philosophy, and reasoning. He also taught each of the following courses once: *Contemporary Moral Problems; Introduction to Philosophy; Evil; Computer Ethics;* and *Ethics.* In 1995, he received a Master of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Rochester. He pursued his investigation into the nature of evil under the supervision of Robert L. Holmes.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

This dissertation is on what it means to call a person evil. This is evil as an adjective, describing a person, not evil in any other sense. It considers various theories on what an evil person is. Since many may already have preconceived notions of what this is, the first theories considered are simple theories people may already hold. This gets them out of the way, establishes the need to consider the question further, and leads to the first guideline for recognizing the correct theory, which is that an evil person has an evil character. The next chapter examines four theories of character, those of Richard B. Brandt, Aristotle, John Kekes, and Joel Kupperman. It hybridizes the best parts of these theories, concluding that character is made up of the habits, moral beliefs, psychological capacities, intentions, and motivations that shape one's dispositions in matters of morality or happiness. The next chapter examines some simple character theories in order to establish guidelines for identifying which kind of character is evil. It establishes that an evil character is the morally worst kind of bad character. With this guideline established, subsequent chapters examine different theories of evil. The theories considered include Kekes' theory that an evil character is one dominated by vices, my own hypothesis that an evil character is an immoral and wicked character, Laurence Mordekhai Thomas's theory that an evil person is someone who is often enough prone to commit evil acts, the Christian notion that evil is a form of pride, and a theory, based on the work of Michael Gelven, that evil is a betrayal of what makes life worthwhile and meaningful. The final chapter compares the leading theories, identifies what they share in common, selects the best among them, fixes some problems with it, then arrives at the conclusion that an evil character can be described as an inhuman and monstrous character.

Table of Contents

Preface

This dissertation is on what it means to call a person evil. It is specifically focused on what *evil* means when it describes a person, not how *evil* is used in other contexts. For example, the question of whether natural disasters are evil has no bearing on what an evil person is. Whether an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God can permit evil also has no bearing on this issue. This thesis is focused solely on *evil* as a description of a person, not as a description of anything else. This sense of evil should be thought of primarily as an adjective.

It is a noun only insofar as every adjective has a corresponding noun, namely the abstract quality referred to by the adjective. For example, the adjective *intelligent* has intelligence, *courageous* has courage, and *ugly* has ugliness. There are intelligent, courageous, and ugly people, but intelligence, courage, and ugliness are not particular kinds of things; they are merely qualities. Likewise, regarded as a noun, evil is a quality–the quality of being evil. When evil is referred to as a noun, it will be in this sense. Another way of framing the question is to ask what kind of person is evil. This focuses it on another noun, but that noun is the person who is evil, not evil itself. So we can approach the question as looking into what evil (as an adjective describing a person) means, what evil (as a quality of persons) is, or what an evil person (as a noun) is.

The knowledge to be gained by answering this question can be beneficial or dangerous. It is important to ask it for the right reasons and to use the knowledge in a proper way. One benefit is that it can help us avoid becoming evil. It can help us recognize when we are in danger of becoming evil, allowing us to better avoid the danger. It can also help with general moral improvement. Steering away from what makes one evil can make us better people.

Nevertheless, there is also danger in knowing what an evil person is. The danger is that we may use this knowledge as a weapon to attack other people. Moral condemnation is a form of attack. It should be used sparingly, if at all. When we understand what evil means, we may more readily see its signs in other people and feel the temptation to call them evil. Yet this temptation should be resisted. When we can, it is better to help guide people away from being evil. Understanding what evil means is useful for this.

Despite the danger, knowledge may be better than ignorance for those most tempted to call people evil. People often call others evil without having any clear idea what they mean. The knowledge of what evil means is not what enables people to call each other evil. People do that already–before they even form a clear conception of evil. With accurate knowledge of evil, people will be more inclined to call others evil only when the concept seems to fit. This can help reduce the misuse of the word and the ill will created through its misuse. It may also help people forgive those who have wronged them, for it may help them distinguish evil from more forgivable causes of wrongdoing.

This dissertation will address the question of what an evil person is through the presentation, examination, evaluation, and comparison of various theories. The first theories will be very simplistic theories based on ways people commonly think about evil. Although they will be implausible, it is important to understand why they are mistaken and to sweep them out of the way before considering worthier theories. Doing so will also provide guidelines for evaluating subsequent theories.

The main guideline will be that an evil person is someone with an evil character. This can be rephrased in terms of the other two ways of asking the question of this dissertation. The quality of evil is the possession of an evil character, and to be evil is to possess an evil character. The establishment of this

guideline will be followed by a chapter on character. This will be followed by the examination of some very simple theories on what an evil character is. The purpose behind this will be to sweep them out of the way and to establish guidelines for determining which kind of character is an evil character.

The main guideline will be that an evil character is the morally worst kind of bad character. This guideline will be used for selecting and comparing the more substantial theories. These will include John Kekes' theory that an evil character is one dominated by vices, my own theory that an evil character is an immoral and wicked character, some theories that describe evil as a kind of pride, and a theory based on Michael Gelven's idea that evil is a kind of nihilistic existence. Since *worst* is a superlative, it will take comparisons between theories to determine which describes the worst kind of bad character. The final chapter will include comparisons between the leading theories, and these comparisons will lead to one of two things: selection of the best theory or a synthesis of the best theories.

Nevertheless, there will be one caveat to bear in mind. Comparisons between theories can reveal which is best only among the theories actually discussed. They cannot rule out the possibility that a better theory has gone unmentioned. Thus, I will not be able to assert with absolute conviction that the theory I arrive at is the best theory of evil. I will only be able to assert that it is a very good theory and may be the best one. Nevertheless, this is not a terrible problem. The same problem afflicts science, yet science is not crippled by it. For example, Newton's theory of gravity still proved very useful even though it was eventually superceded by Einstein's theory of relativity. Likewise, a better theory might eventually supercede my own. Still, understanding it should advance our knowledge of evil, perhaps even as much as Newton's flawed theory advanced astronomy, and that is what is really important here.

Chapter 1
Simple Theories

Some commonly held ideas about evil are both simplistic and mistaken. It is important to sweep them out of the way before more seriously considering what evil might be. Otherwise, these simple ideas may linger in the mind, causing one to wonder why we are even looking at more complicated theories. This also serves as a warmup for subsequent investigation into more substantial theories of evil.

1.1 BEHAVIORIST THEORIES

The most immediate indication that anyone is evil is behavior. Some people regularly do bad deeds, and some people have even committed acts that are not just bad but abominable. Sometimes, knowing what someone has done, it is natural for some people to regard the malefactor as evil without any further thought. For example, Roy F. Baumeister reports that "President Clinton called the terrorists who bombed the Oklahoma City courthouse in 1995 'evil' for committing America's worst act of terrorism" (183). This suggests the idea that an evil person is simply a malefactor of some sort. Any theory of this type is a behaviorist theory.

A behaviorist theory about evil understands it solely in terms of a person's behavior. Some examples are: (1) An evil person is someone who does really horrendous things, such as killing her parents with an axe or drowning her children. (2) An evil person is someone who regularly does bad things, such as lying, cheating, and stealing. There is an important difference between these two theories. The first identifies an evil person by the extremity of some of her actions. It picks out a Lizzie Borden[1] or a Susan Smith[2], who may have done only one really awful thing in her life, despite anything else she has done. The second identifies an evil person by the regularity of her actions. Unlike the first, it does not imply that an evil person does really horrendous things. It merely implies that an evil person does bad things, but on a regular basis. These could be petty things that escape the notice of many people. It might pass by Smith, who, let us say, did only one really bad thing but was otherwise well behaved, but identify as evil her children, who, let us imagine, regularly misbehaved and got into a lot of mischief. This isn't to say that these two theories always identify different people. A person who regularly does bad deeds, albeit of a petty nature, and who occasionally does horrendous deeds would be identified as evil by both theories.

But both are seriously flawed. The first identifies an evil person with someone who does really horrendous deeds. It does not require a person to *regularly* do anything horrendous to be evil. Rather, the intuition behind belief in this theory is that anyone who would do something really horrendous must be evil–even if that person does it only once. Whenever someone does something really horrendous, such as when Timothy McVeigh blew up the Oklahoma City building, there may be good odds that the person is evil. Nevertheless, this is not a sufficient reason for believing the theory. One problem with it is that some evil people may never do anything really horrendous. They might live unhappy lives and annoy

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[1] *"Lizzie Borden took an axe / And gave her mother forty whacks. / When she saw what she had done, / She gave her father forty-one"* (Kurland 42). In 1892, Lizzie Borden was tried and acquitted of the murder of her father and step-mother. Despite her acquittal, it became part of common folklore that she did kill them (Kurland 42-49; "Borden, Lizzie Andrew").

[2] Susan Smith "drowned her two children in October 1994 by strapping them into safety seats in her car and driving it into a lake" (Simon 188).

many people, yet never commit any big atrocities. Moreover, if McVeigh is evil, he was evil before he blew up the Oklahoma City building. His action would be a consequence of his evil, not the very thing which makes him evil. Horrendous actions are at best a sign that a person is evil.

Furthermore, it's possible for someone to do something horrendous without being evil. In his book *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*, Roy F. Baumeister examines the many reasons why people commit horrendous acts. One important thing he points out is that perpetrators and victims of evil have very different perspectives on what has happened. Victims tend to exaggerate the enormity of the action and the maliciousness of the perpetrator, whereas perpetrators tend to minimize the enormity of their actions (19). This observation of Baumeister's gives good reason to question the idea that only an evil person could do something horrendous. This idea has been based on the assumption that the perpetrators of horrendous actions fully realize the enormity of what they are doing. If people can commit horrendous actions without fully realizing their enormity, then it would be better to attribute the horrendous things some people do to their ignorance than to any moral qualities, such as evil.

Another problem is that this theory implies that an evil person will always be evil. Once a person does something really horrendous, such as kill her children, she is forever tainted with evil, and there is nothing she can do to stop being evil. This idea ignores the widely recognized possibility of atonement and redemption. A person who does something really awful may regret and repent of her actions and turn her life around, becoming a different person than she used to be.

The second theory has strengths that the first theory does not have, and it has its own set of weaknesses. Some of the criticisms against the first theory do not apply to this one. For example, it allows for an evil person to turn good. Someone who regularly does bad things may change her ways, so that she regularly does good deeds and seldom does bad deeds. This theory would describe her as a good person who used to be evil. Furthermore, someone is evil on this theory only if her bad actions are, to some extent, in character. They signify evil only if they are part of a regular pattern of doing bad things. This theory still has weaknesses in this area, but they are more subtle than the glaring weakness of the first theory. Finally, this theory will probably describe as evil some people missed by the first theory. Some evil people may have regularly done bad things without ever doing anything really horrendous. These people would be accurately described as evil by this theory even though they weren't identified as evil by the first.

Despite its advantages, this second theory is also false. One problem is that it doesn't weigh the enormity of a person's actions. Someone might do nothing worse than carelessly spread gossip, yet do it often enough to count as evil. This illustrates one advantage of the first theory, which distinguishes those who engage in horrendous behavior from those who regularly engage in bad behavior that is never horrendous. The second theory fails to make this distinction.

Another problem with the second theory is that it misses some evil people. Consider someone who does dastardly things when he can get away with them but refrains from doing too many because he doesn't want to get caught. Suppose that he even gives to charities and does many helpful things to create a public image that people respect and admire. So he is usually doing good deeds rather than bad, yet he occasionally does atrocious deeds, and it is his atrocious deeds, not his faux good deeds, that he really enjoys doing. He is probably evil, yet this theory will not describe anyone like him as evil. So this theory is faulty.

A more subtle problem is that this theory makes no distinction between actions that are in character and actions that are out of character. They all count equally toward whether a person is evil. It might have seemed that bad actions count toward making a person evil on this theory only if they are in character. After all, it seems to be saying that an evil person is someone for whom it is in character to do bad things. But that is not what it says. It merely says that an evil person is someone who frequently does bad things. It does not address why an evil person does anything. Yet this can make a big difference. A person might just be unlucky enough to frequently do bad things, or a person might frequently do bad

things under coercion, or a person might be ignorant that he's doing anything bad. Circumstances such as these would give good reason to think that a person who frequently did bad things was not actually evil. Moreover, a person who frequently does bad things may still do bad things that are out of character. For example, a cat burglar might have scruples that prevent her from killing anyone but don't prevent her from stealing. So it would be in character for her to steal but not to kill. If she killed someone some day, she would be acting out of character even though she was a regular doer of bad deeds.

This creates a subtle but serious problem for this theory. It implies that there is some threshold on the frequency of a person's doing of bad things, above which she should be classified as evil. Suppose that someone does bad things that are in character at a frequency just below the threshold but gets pushed over by doing some bad things that are out of character. On this theory, actions that are out of character have equal weight with actions that are in character. Yet this seems wrong. If an action is out of character, it should not count toward whether someone is evil.

Considering the various problems with these behaviorist theories, it should be evident that they are false. The main problem with all behaviorist theories is that they cannot reveal why an evil person behaves as she does. Behavior, at best, is only a sign that someone is evil. If the concept of evil is to provide any kind of explanation for why evil people do evil, it must be understood as something that can explain behavior. Behavior cannot explain itself. So behaviorist theories explain nothing.

1.2 RELIGIOUS THEORIES

One kind of religious theory identifies an evil person with someone who is made to do evil by supernatural beings, such as gods or devils. This is basically the idea that an evil person is possessed. Although this has the advantage of accounting for why someone would do something evil, it fails to properly ascribe the evil to the person. Instead, it puts the blame on a supernatural power and absolves the person of guilt. Even if possession does go on, a possessed person cannot properly be called evil, because the evil belongs to an evil spirit, not to the person.

Furthermore, the question of what makes a person evil is not limited to human beings. If there are evil spirits, and if evil spirits count as persons, then the possession theory merely pushes the question of evil to spirits. The question of what makes a person evil just gets refocused on what makes a spirit evil. Also, while possession explains why a human does evil, it does not explain why the evil spirit, who may also be a person, does evil. So it ultimately leaves the evil unexplained. Thus, saying that possession by an evil spirit makes a human evil does not adequately answer what it means for a person to be evil.

A related theory is that an evil person is someone who is in league with the devil. While a possessed person may just be an unwilling puppet who isn't responsible for her actions, someone in league with the devil is making a conscious decision to align to herself with the devil. Because of this conscious decision, she bears responsibility for whatever evil she does. Such a person could rightly be regarded as evil, and religious people have commonly recognized an important moral distinction between possession and witchcraft. Exorcism has commonly been used to release someone from possession, whereas people accused of witchcraft have often been put to death, as, for example, during the dark ages.

Ultimately, any theory that defines evil in terms of a relationship to some evil person, whether Satan, Ahriman (the evil god of Zoroastrianism), or someone else, commits a fatal logical error. It defines an evil person in a self-referential manner, leaving the concept ultimately vacuous. It also ignores the requirement that any adequate theory of evil must be equally applicable to mortals and to supernatural beings. Insofar as any supernatural person is a person, the same qualities that make a mortal evil would also make a supernatural person evil.

There is a similar error in defining evil in terms of a relationship to a supernatural person who is not evil, such as God. Such a theory has the advantage of using the same standard for Satan and for human beings. But it has the disadvantage of not giving any content to the notion of good or evil. It makes it impossible for God to do evil, not in the morally commendable sense that God is incapable of

evil, but in the trivial sense that whatever God does is, by definition, not evil. Such a theory would give God no standards to live up to in avoiding evil. God would be free to do whatever he wanted, whatever harm it did to others, and none of it would be evil, simply because evil is rebellion against God, and God would not be in any rebellion against himself.

Yet when Descartes referred to "the supreme goodness of God" (84; Med. VI), and when Augustine described "the Creator" as "supremely and unchangeably good" (240; ch. XII), they were conceiving of a God who put limits on his own behavior. Although God could do anything, he would not, because some things would harm people unjustly. For example, God could create a place of eternal torment and populate it with newly created souls who had never done anything to deserve such treatment. If evil were merely rebellion against God, this would not be evil, but it is. The idea that God is good is supposed to be a reassurance that God does not do such things, but any theory that defines evil in terms of some relation to God erases this reassurance. It replaces it with a blank check to commit any atrocity, so long as it is the will of God.

An adequate theory of evil ought to make it both meaningful and reassuring to say that God is not evil. Any theory that defines evil in reference to God cannot do this. Ultimately, any adequate theory of evil cannot define evil in terms of a person's relationship to any particular person, whether God, Satan, or anyone else. Doing so robs the concept of any content, making it tautologically meaningless that God is good or Satan is evil. If statements such as these are to be meaningful, evil must be defined without reference to God, Satan, or any other supernatural person.

1.3 METAPHYSICAL THEORIES

Some religious thinkers have understood good and evil as metaphysical substances. This has the advantage of not defining evil in terms of a particular person. A good example is Manicheanism, according to which evil is matter and good is spirit. Yet this seems arbitrary unless reasons are given for why matter is evil and spirit is good. But if explanations can be given, the explanations may point to a different understanding of good and evil. For example, what is the difference between matter and spirit? It is presumably that what is made of matter is perishable and subject to various pains and hungers, whereas what is made of spirit is presumed to be pure and immortal. More succinctly, matter is subject to various imperfections, whereas spirit is not. This suggests that it is the imperfection of material beings, not matter per se, which is evil.

The Catholic theologian Augustine abandoned Manicheanism in favor of a nondualistic way of understanding evil. He says,

> **For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present–namely, the diseases and wounds–go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshy substance–the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils–that is, privations of the good which we call health–are accidents. (240; ch. XI)**

Augustine makes a good point. If evil and good were different substances, what is evil could be removed only by relocating it someplace else. Yet disease and injury, which are evils, do not have to be relocated to be removed. When they go away, they go away altogether. So Augustine maintains that evil is some kind of privation of goodness rather than the presence of some special kind of substance.

But if evil is a privation of goodness, how can evil be said to exist? In the passage quoted above, Augustine indicates that evil is an accident. An accident, in the intended sense, is a quality of something that exists. The existence of a quality is dependent on a substance, which possesses qualities, but the existence of a substance is not dependent on its particular qualities. It continues to exist despite changes in qualities, whereas qualities come and go as a substance changes.

In contrast to evil, Augustine seems to maintain that goodness is a substance. He says,

All things that exist, therefore, seeing that the Creator of them all is supremely good, are themselves good. But because they are not, like their Creator, supremely and unchangeably good, their good may be diminished and increased. But for good to be diminished is an evil, although, however much it may be diminished, it is necessary, if the being is to continue, that some good should remain to constitute the being. For however small or of whatever kind the being may be, the good which makes it a being cannot be destroyed without destroying the being itself. (240; ch. XII)

In this passage, Augustine describes goodness as that which constitutes being, and as that which makes something a being. Being is the substance Augustine believes all existence is made from, and he seems to be saying that goodness and being are the same thing. But the bare equivalence of goodness with being cannot account for the existence of evil. If goodness and being are merely the same thing, evil is some kind of absence of being. But everything is being, and there is no absence of being anywhere.

What seems more plausible is that goodness, like evil, is a quality, not a substance. Existence is good, and in this respect, there is goodness in everything that exists. But instead of being a substance that can be decreased or increased in quantity, it is a quality that inheres in beings to a greater or lesser degree.

Consider this. Some kinds of beings are more good than other kinds. For example, a person is a greater good than a statue. A life-size statue has more being in the sense that it is more massive, but the being of a person is more worthwhile than the being of a statue. Goodness, as a quality, is a measure of how worthwhile something is. Any kind of existence is, in and of itself, worthwhile to some extent, but some kinds of existence are much more worthwhile than others.

In light of this, evil could still be thought of as a privation of goodness. But instead of being a substance, goodness would be a quality that all beings have to greater or lesser degrees. Evil would consist in the diminishment or corruption of goodness. As it happens, a person is one of the greatest goods.

But this poses a puzzle. Given that a person is a good, in what sense can a person be regarded as evil? Augustine addresses a similar point. He says,

Now, if a man is a good thing because he is a being, what is an evil man but an evil good? Yet, when we accurately distinguish these two things, we find that it is not because he is a man that he is an evil, or because he is wicked that he is a good; but that he is a good because he is a man, and an evil because he is wicked. [. . .] Therefore every being, even if it be a defective one, in so far as it is a being is good, and in so far as it is defective is evil. (241; ch. XIII)

Given that a person is always something good, no one can be wholly evil. A wholly evil person would lack any goodness at all and fail to be a person. But the goodness of an individual person may be diminished or turned against the person. So an evil person is in some way a corrupt or defective person, not someone whose very being or substance is evil.

1.4 INTENTIONAL THEORIES

Intentional theories about evil say that evil is all a matter of intentions. It is what you intend to do, or don't intend to do, rather than what you do or don't do, that determines whether you are evil. Intentional theories meet the challenge that behaviorist theories cannot, as they provide an explanation for why evil people do bad things. Whereas behaviorist theories can say no more than that evil people do bad things, intentional theories say evil people do bad things because they intend to. This gives intentional theories an edge over behaviorist theories.

One especially relevant aspect of intentions is that they can last over a long period of time, giving shape to a pattern of behavior. For example, a person may regularly carry the intention of being happy, leading him to regularly engage in behavior he believes will make him happy. Likewise, a person could harbor immoral intentions, such as the intention to kill someone, to wreak someone's life, or to instigate and profit from wars.

But there are various problems with intentional theories. One is that the reasons why a person intends something may be relevant to whether the person is evil. Consider the reasons why someone might intend to kill another person. He may hate her; he may want revenge; he may want to rob her; he

may want to silence a witness to a crime he committed; he may want to defend himself; he may be a hired assassin; he may fear her; he may want to end her suffering from a painful and incurable disease; he may find pleasure in killing people; or he might work as an executioner.

This first problem is resolvable. It arises from not distinguishing between partially described intentions and completely described intentions. The intention to kill someone is only partially described. The complete intention may be to relieve someone's pain by helping her die, to protect oneself from an attacker, or to do one's job as an assassin or executioner. When an intention is fully described, it is described not just in terms of an action someone intends to perform but in terms of what the person ultimately hopes to accomplish. Thus, a fully described intention includes both a plan of action and the motivations for following through with it. Any theory that describes an evil person in terms of partial intentions is inadequate, but one that relies on complete intentions is not so obviously inadequate.

But such theories may still be incomplete, because behavior is sometimes determined by factors other than intentions. For example, people sometimes fail to follow through with their intentions. There are at least two ways in which this may be relevant. If someone has good intentions and fails to follow through with them, he is guilty of moral weakness. If someone has evil intentions but can't bring himself to act on them, this may be a sign that he is not evil. This possibility suggests that something is missing from intentional theories.

In general, it seems too simplistic to isolate one aspect of human psychology, such as intentions, and to say that this is all that determines whether someone is evil. Broadly speaking, an evil person will be the sort who is willing and able to commit acts of evil. It seems that no isolated aspect of human psychology can be all that makes this difference. For example, intentions may sometimes be thwarted by unconscious desires, and unconscious desires may sometimes be overruled by intentions. Long-standing values and motivations may play a big role, but so may an ability or inability to control one's passions. To accurately understand what an evil person is, a broader concept is needed.

1.5 CHARACTER THEORIES

Traditionally, good people are distinguished from bad people in terms of character. A good person has a good character, and a bad person has a bad character. Likewise, an evil person would have an evil character. As a quality of a person, evil would describe something about the person, and whatever that is, it would be the main determiner in whether a person is willing and able to do evil. Character is something about a person, and it is normally the main determiner in whether someone is willing and able to do evil. So it seems that an evil person is someone with an evil character. Although other factors can influence how willing and able a person is to do evil, they are normally external factors, such as environment and individual circumstances. These may influence a person in the direction of evil, but they cannot be the factors that distinguish an evil person. Whatever factors do distinguish an evil person must be part of the person, as character is. Morever, there may be nothing internal to a person besides character that has anywhere near the same influence on how willing and able a person is to do evil. So it seems unlikely that an evil person should be identified in terms of anything but character. The working assumption for the rest of this dissertation is that an evil person is someone with an evil character. The next chapter focuses on character itself, and the remaining chapters will focus on various theories about what constitutes an evil character.

Chapter 2
Character

This chapter puts aside questions of evil and focuses on character, because an understanding of character is required to fully understand what an evil character is. Toward that end, this chapter will present and evaluate some theories on the nature of character. It will specifically look at theories offered by Richard B. Brandt, Aristotle, John Kekes, and Joel Kupperman. It will end with a working theory of character. This theory will be used for understanding what an evil character may be, which will be the subject for subsequent chapters.

2.1 BRANDT ON CHARACTER

In an article entitled "Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis," Brandt spells out what he believes traits of character are. He begins with the position that character traits are dispositions, and he rejects what he calls the "summary" view. After arguing that traits are dispositions, he adds that they are relatively permanent dispositions. He then says that they "are relatively permanent dispositions *of a specific kind*" (27). He maintains that they are intrinsic wants and aversions. He further asserts that character traits normally operate in a normal frame of mind. And his last point is that they are wants and aversions with at least a standard level of intensity. To summarize, Brandt regards a character trait as a want, an aversion, or some complex of wants and aversions that is relatively stable at a normal level of intensity or greater and is normally operative under a normal frame of mind. A person's character would, presumably, be the whole set of wants and aversions that make up his character traits. That's Brandt's theory in a nutshell. Let's now look at it in more detail.

2.1.1 Character Traits are Dispositions

Brandt begins with the claim that character traits are dispositions. Dispositions indicate what a person is disposed to do under certain conditions. Understood as dispositions, character traits can be thought of as sets of subjunctive conditionals. For example, we might say of a coward that were he to face danger he would run away.

Although it is natural and common to think of character traits as dispositions, Brandt notes that some philosophers favor an understanding of character traits he calls "the Summary Theory" (25). This comes in a mixed form and a pure form. The pure form asserts that the ascription of a character trait simply means that a person has regularly exhibited a certain type of behavior and may be expected to continue exhibiting it with the same frequency in the future. In contrast to the dispositional theory, this is a purely behaviorist way of understanding character. It spells out character traits only in terms of actual past and future behavior. The mixed form mixes this behaviorist analysis of character with the dispositional view. It asserts that a character trait is a disposition but also maintains that a character trait doesn't exist unless manifestations of it have occurred with some frequency in the past.

Brandt proceeds to present and evaluate some reasons given for the Summary Theory. The first is that we normally ascribe traits to someone only when actual manifestations of the trait are present. This is true but irrelevant, for something generally has to make itself visible for us to notice it. If traits are in fact dispositions, it would still be normal to ascribe certain character traits only to those who manifest them. Besides this, the fact that we normally recognize character traits by their manifestations does not rule out the possibility that there are other ways of recognizing character traits, such as psychological tests and medical examinations.

The second reason given for the Summary Theory is that we can be certain a person has a specific character trait only when we can cite numerous instances of the type of behavior associated with that trait. It is true that this kind of evidence carries a lot of weight in determining whether someone has a specific character trait, and it is also true that other kinds of evidence generally don't carry as much weight. Brandt concedes this much and also maintains that a dispositional theorist can accept that the best evidence for a character trait is a person's past behavior. But he also maintains that a person's past behavior might not be conclusive in determining whether she has a particular character trait. For example, someone could live in isolation from all situations that pertain to a specific trait, or she could have a remarkable change of heart that replaces old character traits with new ones. The dispositional theory allows for both of these possibilities, whereas the pure version of the Summary Theory does not.

The last reason given for the Summary Theory is that "it would be contradictory to say that a person is T (has a certain trait) but has never behaved in a T-like manner" (26). Brandt is not convinced of the truth of this claim. Although we normally attribute character traits to people on the basis of some manifestation of certain traits, this speaks more to what we are willing to rest our convictions on than it does to the nature of character traits. For all we know, character traits correspond with certain biological features, and advances in science and technology might one day give us the means to identify a person's character through biological tests. If character traits really do correspond with biological features, then a sudden change in biology could produce a change in character even before this change manifests itself in behavior. If a sudden change in biology can so affect a person's character, then character should not even be understood in terms of a person's behavior, and it is not contradictory to say that someone has a particular character trait without ever exhibiting it.

In his book *Descartes' Error*, Antonio Damasio describes a case in which a change in biology clearly caused a change in character. A railroad worker named Phineas P. Gage suffered an injury that blew out a good chunk of his brain but left him alive. An explosion caused an iron rod to fly through his head, tearing out a portion of his brain. Damasio notes that Gage's personality radically changed after the accident. Prior to the accident, Gage was temperate, energetic, and shrewd. But after the accident, he was foul-mouthed, unrestrained, animalistic in his passions, and childlike in his intellect. Damasio says that Gage's friends "noted sadly that 'Gage was no longer Gage'" (8). He also says that Gage could not return to his job, and he writes "The problem was not lack of physical ability or skill; it was his new character" (8). The example of Gage, which is real, shows that sudden biological changes really can suddenly change character, implying that character is not behavior but is instead something that underlies behavior.

One more problem with the last reason for the Summary theory, a problem which Brandt does not raise, is that it isn't contradictory to assert that someone has never manifested one of her character traits except within the context of a particular theory about what character traits are. It is contradictory for the Summary Theory, but it is not contradictory for a dispositional theory. So, in asserting that it is contradictory, it begs the question to use it as a reason for believing the Summary Theory.

After showing that these reasons for Summary Theory all fail, Brandt proceeds to argue against the Summary Theory. His initial premise is that we sometimes infer a person's character from a single action. The example he gives is a boy who steadfastly refuses to do what some other boys demand of him even though they threaten him with a beating. Brandt says we would judge from this one piece of behavior that the boy is courageous. Although he concedes that we need collaborating evidence to rule out other possibilities, he believes we can still infer with a high degree of probability that the boy is courageous. The problem for the Summary Theory is that we would be inferring that the boy has frequently behaved courageously in the past, yet, on the basis of one action, we cannot infer the past frequency of actions of that type with as much certainty as we can infer that he is courageous. Therefore, courage, and character traits in general, are not statistical measures of past behavior, and the Summary Theory is wrong.

Or at least the pure Summary theory is wrong. This argument works against the pure Summary theory, but it does not show that a mixed theory is wrong. A mixed theory does not have to maintain that

someone has frequently acted in a certain way in the past. It merely has to maintain that a person has acted in a certain way at least once or perhaps a few times. If we witness a boy's courage once, it is fair to infer that he has behaved courageously before, and perhaps we may infer this with the same degree of certainty with which we infer that he is courageous. So Brandt doesn't provide an argument which shows that the mixed version of the Summary theory is wrong, and his dismissal of the Summary theory is premature.

The mixed view maintains that character traits are partly dispositional and partly behavioral. You have a character trait if you have some sort of disposition and have acted on it. On this view, we could make a distinction between real character traits and quasi character traits. A quasi character trait would be like a real one, except it would have no roots in a person's actual behavior. It would be a disposition that a person has never acted upon. Knowledge of a person's quasi character traits would be just as helpful in predicting his behavior as knowledge of his real character traits would be. Quasi and real character traits would have just as much predictive power, at least insofar as each pertained to the situations the person might find himself in. Our only reasons for relying on real character traits more would be practical. We would have surer knowledge of a person's real character traits, and given that the person has actually exhibited his real character traits, we might reasonably expect that he is more likely to be in situations that call on them. Nevertheless, the predictive differences between real and quasi character traits are due merely to practical limitations of human knowledge, not to any essential difference between the two. Therefore, the difference between them seems artificial, and a theory that forces this distinction is probably false. Furthermore, it seems that any knowledge of a person's character would be incomplete so long as it did not include knowledge of a person's quasi character traits. For this reason, quasi character traits must, on a mixed view, be regarded as real character traits, and the failure of mixed views to do this implies their falsehood.

The only way a mixed view might escape this judgment is by maintaining that quasi character traits cannot exist. This goes back to the claim that it is contradictory to assert that someone can have a character trait without ever having acted upon it. This can be contradictory only if it is part of the very essence of a character trait to require actions of a certain sort. But this is what is in question. So we cannot appeal to it without begging the question. A different claim which may be made is that dispositions (which are what Brandt has identified with character traits) cannot exist unless they have been acted upon. There seems to be empirical evidence that dispositions can exist without being acted upon. For example, a Catholic priest may have a disposition toward having sex with women but remain true to his vow of celibacy. So the mixed view does not escape the judgment of falsehood.

Given that the Summary theory is false in both forms, the only theory that remains standing, among those Brandt has presented, is the dispositional theory. In its favor, it seems natural and correct. But Brandt does not argue for it as rigorously as he argues against the Summary theory. He seems to be relying on the process of elimination. Although this may seem unsatisfactory, the choice so far has only been between identifying character with behavior and identifying it with something that can account for behavior. Brandt has not used the process of elimination to prove his own particular dispositional theory of character. He has used it only to show that the correct theory of character is dispositional. Between behaviorist and dispositional theories, there don't seem to be any viable alternatives. It wouldn't make sense to say that character is something that has nothing to do with behavior, yet that is the only remaining alternative. So if character cannot be identified with a person's behavior, it must be identified with something that accounts for behavior. Thus, the correct theory of character, whether or not it is Brandt's own theory, must be a dispositional theory.

2.1.2 Character Traits are Relatively Permanent

After justifying his opinion that character traits are dispositions, Brandt begins to distinguish them from other dispositions. The first distinction he mentions is that they are relatively permanent dispositions. He also adds that character traits "do not undergo cyclical modifications like the 'needs' for food or water or sex; it is not as if, having acted sympathetically (assuming being sympathetic is a trait) at noon, I shall have a desire for more sympathetic action at six o'clock and not before" (27).

Brandt is correct that character traits must be relatively permanent, for the relative permanency of character traits gives them their predictive value. But character traits such as lechery and gluttony, which are among the seven deadly sins, suggest the possibility that Brandt is taking the idea of a relatively permanent character trait too strictly. These two vices are associated with our needs for food and sex and might be cyclical insofar as these needs are. It is possible for a disposition to be both cyclical and relatively permanent. If it is cyclical in a regular way, this is a relatively permanent feature of a person. For example, it is a relatively permanent feature of humans that they need to eat. No one needs to eat all the time, and there are normally times when people don't need to eat at all, but this need periodically pops up with very predictable regularity. So there could be character traits that are both cyclical and relatively permanent. But this possibility is a strong objection to Brandt's claims only if it can be backed up with actual examples of cyclical character traits.

This objection is based on the assumption that gluttony and lechery are cyclical traits. According to Brandt, these are examples of self-indulgence, and his theory can account for self-indulgence. He says:

> Let us now turn to temperance or self-control, in the sense which contrasts with self-indulgence. Philosophers have sometimes thought of this as having to do, at least primarily, with the bodily appetites, especially for food, drink, and sex. This is too narrow. A man is self-indulgent if he spends time watching football games on television when he should be devoting it to his studies. We can put it generally: a person exhibits temperance or self-control when he foregoes immediately enjoyable experiences which he knows conflict with his long-term welfare, or when he engages in immediately unpleasant activities (like doing push-ups) when his long-term welfare calls for it. Now, what kind of person is apt to behave in this way? The answer seems to be: a person who has a strong aversion to impairing his long-range interests for a good life. The self-controlled man is one whose aversion to risking these is sufficiently great to overcome very considerable attractions of immediate enjoyment and the irksomeness of unpleasant activities. His aversion is strong enough so as to bring to mind the relevance of present activities to them, and to control his behavior when this relevance has been brought to mind. (35)

So, according to Brandt, gluttony and lechery are not characterized by cyclical patterns of hunger or sexual desire. They are examples of self-indulgence, which comes from not having a strong enough aversion to impairing one's long-term interests. Because they lack this aversion, self-indulgent people too easily give in to momentary temptations of the present. So lechery and gluttony do not make good counterexamples against Brandt's claim that character traits are not cyclical.

2.1.3 Character Traits are Defined in Terms of Wants/Aversions

After asserting that character traits are relatively permanent dispositions, he asserts that they "are relatively permanent dispositions *of a specific kind*– the kind that wants and aversions are" (27). Unfortunately, Brandt clouds things by assuming on the one hand that wants and aversions are dispositions and asserting on the other hand "that 'want' and 'aversion' are not, strictly speaking, disposition terms" (29). Since these conflicting claims inhibit a clear understanding of his theory, we should resolve them before going any further. Here is what seems to be going on. Brandt believes that wants and aversions are not dispositions but also believes that they are so intimately tied up with dispositions that it's a convenient shortcut of language to refer to them as dispositions. Here is why. A disposition, in the strict sense of the word, is a subjunctive fact about a person, which can be defined in terms of a set of subjunctive conditionals about what the person would or would probably do under certain circumstances. In contrast to this, wants and aversions are psychological attributes of a person.

The same thing cannot be both a psychological attribute and a subjunctive fact. These are just two very different kinds of things. Nonetheless, wants and aversions bring about the existence of various dispositions. For example, an aversion to dishonesty can bring with it a disposition to tell the truth. Character traits are ultimately psychological attributes, not subjunctive facts, but they are so closely linked with various subjunctive facts that Brandt often takes the shortcut of calling them dispositions.

This difference comes out when he contrasts his motivation theory with another dispositional theory, which he calls "the Direct Disposition Theory" (31). This theory holds that character traits are dispositions in the strict sense. It defines a character trait as a mere disposition to certain types of behavior. The motivation theory has an immediate advantage over the Direct Disposition theory. It explains intentional behavior in terms of character traits. The Direct Disposition theory cannot explain intentional behavior. For example, cowardice might be understood as an aversion to taking risks. If we know that someone has an aversion to taking risks, that goes a long way toward explaining why he acts like a coward. All the Direct Disposition theory tells us about a coward is that he is likely to behave cowardly in various situations. This tells us nothing about why he chooses his behavior.

Nevertheless, this is just a prima facie reason for preferring Brandt's motivation theory, and there are a few objections to it which must be met. The first says "that trait-ascriptions obviously do not imply any particular goals" (32). The second says "that one may exhibit a given trait (e.g., act considerately) from very different motives so that having a given trait could not be identified with any particular want/aversion" (32). The final objection, which Brandt brings up only after he has dealt with the first two, is "that the motivation theory has some plausibility for traits like generosity, considerateness, etc., but very little for others which are important and universally recognized as traits of character" (34). Here is how Brandt responds to each of these objections.

2.1.3.1 Objection 1: Character Traits Imply no Goals

To answer the first objection, that character traits obviously do not imply any goals, Brandt considers the examples given by an author he quoted as making the objection. These are considerateness and punctuality. Brandt maintains that punctuality "is not a character trait at all" (32). He just says this and moves on without explanation. Yet this does not mean that punctuality cannot be understood as a character trait on Brandt's theory. Brandt may have merely failed to think of how it can be accounted for. It seems reasonable to think of punctuality as an aversion to being late. If punctuality can be described in this way, then Brandt's theory can account for it. If punctuality is just a pattern of arriving to places on time, it describes nothing but a pattern of behavior, but it does not imply that regular dispositions do not account for this pattern. People who are good at arriving places on time usually make it a goal to arrive on time. So the example of punctuality does not work against Brandt's theory.

As for considerateness, Brandt points out "that concern for discomforts, embarrassments, etc., of other person's precisely is implied by use of the term" (32). Furthermore, if such concern were absent, we would not rightly describe someone as considerate even if he assiduously followed all the rules of etiquette. For example, a sycophant may be very polite to people out of a concern for his standing with people who hold positions of power. This may lead him to engage in the same behavior as a considerate person would. But his behavior would not be enough to make him considerate. His considerate-like behavior would really be an act of sycophancy, not an act of being considerate. This is because a considerate person cares for other people in a way that a sycophant does not. Since the concern that a considerate person has for other people is a goal implied by consideration, some character traits do imply goals, and the charge that they obviously do not is wrong.

2.1.3.2 Objection 2: Multiple Motives may be Behind the Same Character Trait

The second objection states that character traits cannot be defined as wants or aversions, for the behavior associated with character traits can be due to very different motives. One example is courage. M. H. Mandelbaum, whom Brandt quotes on this matter, says that courage may be attributed to such motives as ambition, emulation, and even the fear of being disgraced. Brandt acknowledges this, but he also

explains why this isn't a problem for his theory. It does not simply assert that character traits are wants and aversions. If it did, the example of courage would be a good objection. What it actually asserts is that character traits can be defined in terms of wants and aversions, and this is an important difference. Brandt points out that the opposite of a want or aversion is simply its absence, not another want or aversion. He also points out that the opposite of a character trait is also a character trait. For example, honesty and dishonesty, which are opposites, are both character traits. He proposes to characterize honesty as the aversion to certain things, such as deceit and stealing. Given this understanding of honesty, dishonesty is understood as the absence of this aversion.

Since dishonesty is understood here as the absence of an aversion, we may expect acts of dishonesty to be motivated by various causes. For example, a dishonest person may lie to con someone, or to make someone look like a fool, or to cover his tracks, or for many another reasons. There is no common motive behind acts of dishonesty. But, by defining dishonesty as an absence of an aversion, the motivation theory can account for dishonesty. Courage, Brandt maintains, is the absence of cowardice. Thus, acts of courage, like acts of dishonesty, should also be attributable to a variety of different motives. According to Brandt, cowardice is "the aversion to death, bodily injury, or damage to fundamental features of one's position" (33). Courage is the absence of this aversion, or at least the absence of being ruled by it, since any normal person has some aversion to these things. When a person isn't ruled by his aversion to death, harm, and injury, he is free to act on motives that would otherwise be overruled by cowardice. This explains why acts of courage can be attributed to various motives, and it also explains why we may reasonably expect a courageous person to display courage in various circumstances and for various reasons.

2.1.3.3   Objection 3: The Motivation Theory may not be Comprehensive

The final objection concedes that the motivation theory works for some character traits, such as courage and consideration, but that it does not work for others that are important and universally regarded as character traits. Brandt responds by briefly stating how the motivation theory handles many character traits he hasn't touched on already. He says

> **Callousness is a lack of sympathy. Honesty is an aversion to deceit and/or the appropriation of the property of other persons. Conscientiousness is an aversion to failure to do one's duty. Unselfishness is a relatively high interest in the welfare of other persons. Kindness is aversion to causing any kind of distress in others. Truthfulness is aversion to deviation from the truth, or to the kind of interpersonal relationship which results when one party indulges in deception. (34)**

Brandt also mentions some character traits which may not so easily be construed as wants or aversions. These include courage, temperance, prudence, reliability, and modesty. Of these, Brandt discusses only courage and temperance, intending these to be representative examples of the rest. We have already looked at Brandt's understanding of courage. As for temperance, he describes it as the opposite of self-indulgence, which he understands to be about more things than just giving into bodily appetites for food, drink, and sex. It is giving into what is immediately enjoyable at the expense of long term self-interest. For example, it is self-indulgent to play video games excessively when there is work to be done. A temperate person resists self-indulgence and acts in his long term self-interest. The sort of person who does this, says Brandt, "has a strong aversion to impairing his long-range prospects for a good life" (35).

Brandt does not discuss prudence, reliability, and modesty. Modesty seems to be an easy one. It may be understood as an aversion to boasting and shamelessness. Reliability might be understood as an aversion to letting people down by breaking one's word. But prudence is a tough one. One part of prudence might be framed in the motivation theory, as an interest in what is truly in one's self-interest, but prudence also implies a kind of self-interested wisdom. Wisdom cannot be defined merely in terms of wants and aversions. Prudence involves knowledge and ability, and these are not the same as wants and aversions. If prudence is a character trait, as many people believe it is, then the motivation theory seems

incomplete. Although it may accurately describe a large class of character traits, it leaves out those that involve any amount of skill or discernment.

According to Robert B. Ashmore, in his Ethics text book *Building a Moral System,* *"Practical wisdom* (sometimes called prudence) is the intellectual virtue perfecting our deliberations about the means to happiness" (137). Ashmore describes Aristotle's distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, which is something Brandt neglects to say anything about. We will be turning to Aristotle's conception of character after we finish with Brandt's. But this distinction is relevant here, because it seems that Brandt's conception of character works better for moral virtue than it does for intellectual virtue. If moral and intellectual virtue are both types of character, then Brandt's theory fails as an all-encompassing theory of character, for it fails to adequately describe intellectual virtues such as wisdom and prudence. Nevertheless, it might be a suitable theory of moral character. So it is worth continuing with for the time being.

2.1.4 Character Traits are Defined in Terms of Intrinsic Wants/Aversions

Not just any wants and aversions will do for defining character traits on the motivation theory. The wants and aversions must be intrinsic. An intrinsic want or aversion is one that is not, or at least to a significant extent is not, an expression of some other want or aversion[3]. For example, my aversion to garter snakes is an expression of my aversion to snakes in general, and it is not itself an intrinsic aversion. Intrinsic wants and aversions are such things as fear of death, sexual desire, lust for life, love of luxury, and compassion for your fellow man. They are the stuff that other wants and aversions are made of.

If we think of traits such as courage, temperance, and compassion, they do indeed have something to do with intrinsic wants and aversions. Furthermore, when people have different wants and aversions of a non-intrinsic order but share the same wants and aversions at an intrinsic level, we assign them the same character trait. For example, if Betty can't control her passion for Archie, and if Reggie can't control his passion for Veronica, their passions are different at a non-intrinsic level, but we would characterize them both as intemperate.

2.1.5 Character Traits Operate in a Normal Frame of Mind

Although wants and aversions are not themselves dispositions, they imply them. If a person has a character trait, he will have a disposition toward some kind of behavior. Nevertheless, a given character trait won't automatically lead to specific sorts of behavior under certain sorts of circumstances. Brandt says, for example, that we do not necessarily withdraw our judgment that someone is a sympathetic person just because he fails to act sympathetically under circumstances that would normally evoke sympathy in him. If he were experiencing great pain or anguish over a loss of his own, for example, failing to respond sympathetically to someone else's problems wouldn't be a sign that he isn't normally a sympathetic person. When we attribute a character trait to someone, it is understood that there may be abnormal frames of mind under which the character trait doesn't operate. As Brandt puts it, "emotional disturbance may affect the influence any need/aversion may have on action" (35). Therefore, an emotional disturbance may sometimes block the connection between needs/aversions and behavior. Thus, during emotional disturbance, the needs and aversions which are character traits could remain but be inoperative.

However, this matter is not as simple as giving someone carte blanche to do anything during times of emotional disturbance. There are degrees of emotional disturbance, and this implies that there are

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[3] There are two ways something can be an expression of a want or aversion. One is by being a means to an intrinsic want or aversion, and the other is by being a particular instance of a more general want or aversion. For example, I desire money, because money is a means to getting many of the things I want. In contrast to this, my desire to play chess is a particular expression of my desire to play games. Neither one of these will count as intrinsic wants or aversions.

degrees to which we should expect character traits to remain operative during emotional disturbance. For example, if a woman drowned her children while under stress, we would have good reason to think that she wasn't really a loving mother. But if a woman got angry at her son and slapped him after being verbally abused by her husband, we wouldn't be so quick to withdraw the judgment that she was a loving mother. We may think that she is just under severe stress and doesn't normally behave this way.

2.1.6 Traits are Defined in Terms of Wants/Aversions at a Standard Level of Intensity

Brandt's final point about character traits is that the wants and aversions we understand them in terms of must be at a standard level of intensity. For example, a very mean person may have an occasional kind thought toward his mother, but that isn't enough to make him a kind person. If kindness is the "aversion to causing any kind of distress in others" (34), as Brandt says, then we should expect that this aversion is fairly strong, not just with respect to his mother, but with respect to other people too. Indeed, we don't normally apply character traits unless someone has more than a passing fancy or momentary aversion. We would otherwise attribute contrary character traits to people on a regular basis, calling the same person both courageous and cowardly, kind and mean, wanton and temperate, etc. Character traits are understood by the motivation theory in terms of those wants and aversions that are regularly at a high enough level to make some difference.

2.1.7 Conclusions

The motivation theory is a strong theory. It explains character traits in a way that lets us understand how character traits affect behavior. Even if it isn't the best theory, Brandt is right to favor it over the Summary theory and the Direct Disposition theory. But Brandt's theory may be incomplete, for it leaves out an adequate understanding of intellectual virtues. Nevertheless, it is a good theory of moral character. Brandt's reasons for it make good sense. If it has any serious flaws as a theory of moral character, they will show up best in comparison with competing theories. Let's now turn to some of these.

2.2 ARISTOTLE ON CHARACTER

In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between passions, faculties, and states of character, regarding these as three separate kinds of things we find in the soul. By passions, Aristotle means "appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain" (956; 1105b:21-23). Some of these, such as fear, hatred, and longing, seem to be the same sort of things Brandt identifies with wants and aversions. On that basis it seems that Aristotle and Brandt disagree on the very nature of character traits, with Brandt identifying character traits with passions and Aristotle identifying them with something else.

But that is merely how it may seem. In truth, neither Brandt nor Aristotle has identified character traits with passions. Passions are emotional phenomena that rise and fall, whereas Brandt maintains that character traits are relatively permanent. Thus, wants and aversions can give rise to passions but are not passions themselves. Confusion may arise because we sometimes use the same or related words to describe wants and aversions as we do passions. For example, I am afraid of snakes. But my heart is not racing right now, and I am not cowering in fear or running away from a snake. In other words, I am not experiencing the passion of fear right now. Nonetheless, I have a fear of snakes. In one sense, fear refers to an aversion, and in one sense it refers to a passion. When I encounter a snake, the aversion gives rise to the passion. So the distinction Aristotle makes between passions, faculties, and states of character does not entail any disagreement with Brandt's theory of character.

Aristotle is fairly clear when he is describing passions and faculties, but he is somewhat cryptic when he describes character. A passion is the actual manifestation of an emotion, and a faculty is the capacity to have certain passions. He describes states of character as "the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other

passions" (956-57; 1105b:25). The point he is trying to make is that character traits are the things we are praised or blamed for with respect to our passions.

If we are to be praised or blamed for anything with respect to our passions, it would be for something within our control. If our passions are entirely outside our control, then we cannot be praised or blamed for anything with respect to them. But according to Aristotle, our passions are within our control. Aristotle distinguishes between a rational and an irrational element of the soul. The irrational element has two parts: one that can be influenced by the rational element, and one which can't. The one which can't is vegetative and is concerned with growth and nutrition. The other irrational element is the seat of our passions. Our passions do not originate through the exercise of reason. We are naturally inclined to feel various passions regardless of any exercise of reason. Nevertheless, reason may temper and shape our emotional faculty, so that we come to feel emotions appropriately instead of haphazardly.

Aristotle distinguishes between moral and intellectual virtue, but he considers only moral virtue a matter of character. He says, "For in speaking of a man's character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good-tempered or temperate" (952; 1103a:5). So, although he regards wisdom and prudence and the like as virtues, he does not regard them as matters of character. This is worth mentioning here, because it was a possible objection against Brandt's theory that it did not account for intellectual virtues. Although Aristotle makes the distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, he does not contradict Brandt's theory here, for he regards only moral virtue as a matter of character.

Intellectual virtues, such as wisdom and prudence, are chiefly excellences of the rational part of the soul. Moral virtues, such as courage and temperance, are excellences of what may be described as the appetitive or emotional part of the soul. Whereas intellectual virtues pertain to knowing, moral virtues pertain to feeling and acting. Aristotle maintains that various passions can be felt too much or too little, and for each person in whatever situation he's in, there is a measure of the passion that is most appropriate. The same is true, he believes, with respect to actions. Thus, the morally virtuous person avoids excesses and deficiencies in action and feeling, acting and feeling appropriately to the situation he's in. Since moral virtue is excellence of character, character for Aristotle has to do with the ability to regulate our feelings and actions in appropriate ways.

Since the irrational part of the soul operates independently from the rational part, it is not so simple a matter as the rational part dictating to the irrational part how it shall feel and act. Instead, the rational part, which can better discern what is appropriate, has to guide the irrational part into habits of feeling and thinking. These habits are what Aristotle identifies as character traits. Virtues are habits of right feeling and action, and vices are habits of excessive or deficient feeling and action. In recent times, the emotional aspects of virtue have come to be known as emotional intelligence (see Goleman).

The final part to understanding Aristotle's conception of character is to understand what habits are. The idea that character traits are habits is not the same as the Summary theory, which Brandt has shown to be inadequate. The Summary theory states that someone has a character trait if he has done some sort of action relatively frequently. Aristotle's theory differs from the Summary theory in two important respects. First, it includes feelings as well as actions under its purview. Second, it requires more than mere frequency. A habit is a mode of feeling or acting that a person has grown accustomed to through repetition. When a person grows accustomed to feeling or acting in a certain way, it becomes easier and more natural. When a person has acquired a habit, he has acquired the ability to feel or act in a certain way without thinking about it beforehand, and he has acquired a sense of familiarity with this way of feeling or acting that makes it feel right and natural. This combination of ease and familiarity, which comes with a habit, creates a disposition toward feeling or acting the same way in the future. Thus, Aristotle's theory of character is, like Brandt's, an indirect dispositional theory. Neither identifies character traits with direct dispositions, but each does portray character traits as creating dispositions.

2.2.1   Objections

Having now presented Aristotle's conception of character, it is time to consider objections.

2.2.1.1 Aristotle's Theory Presupposes Souls

One facile objection is that Aristotle's conception of character presupposes that there are souls, i.e. some sort of immortal spirits that survive the death of the body. To this objection, it merely needs to be demonstrated that Aristotle is not speaking of the same thing Christians do when they speak of souls. What Aristotle means by a soul is the form of a living being. By form, Aristotle means what something is, as opposed to the material it is made of. For example, two Susan B. Anthony dollars share a similar form but are made from different material. For a living being, its body is what it is made of, and its soul is what it is. Thus, by virtue of actually being something, every living being has a soul in Aristotle's sense. Aristotle's understanding of a soul in no way presupposes the existence of anything supernatural or immaterial. So atheists and materialists will have no quarrel with Aristotle on the mere grounds that he speaks of a soul.

2.2.1.2 Virtues Cannot be Habits

Another objection is that virtues cannot be habits, for habits result in rote, mechanical behavior, whereas it is best to remain flexible and adapt your feelings and behavior to fit the circumstances. This objection reveals a simplistic understanding of habits. Certainly, many people do make rigid habits out of simple activities, but people are also capable of developing complex habits out of complicated activities. For example, typing is a moderately complicated activity that mirrors in some ways how virtues work on Aristotle's understanding of character. A beginning typist will type by hunting and pecking, but an accomplished typist can type very fast because her fingers know right where to go on the keyboard. Typing is a complicated activity, because it requires the fingers to move in endlessly different combinations of keystrokes. An accomplished typist can type many different sentences, which she has often never typed before, with great alacrity. Thus, typing requires flexibility, yet it is also done automatically by the most accomplished of typists. Virtues combine flexibility with automatization in much the same way.

Consider the virtue of courage. Aristotle describes courage as "a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence" (974; 1115a:7). He elaborates on this, saying,

> **Now the brave man is as dauntless as man may be. Therefore, while he will fear even the things that are not beyond human strength, he will face them as he ought and as the rule directs, for honour's sake; for this is the end of virtue. But it is possible to fear these more, or less, and again to fear things that are not terrible as if they were. Of the faults that are committed one consists in fearing what one should not, another in fearing as we should not, another in fearing when we should not, and so on; and so too with the things that inspire confidence. The man, then, who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and in the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave; for the brave man feels and acts according to the merits of the case and in whatever way the rule directs. (975-76; 1115b:10-20)**

As Aristotle describes it, courage is a complicated balancing act. To be brave, one must estimate various factors and make judgment calls about when, how, and of what it is appropriate to feel fear or confidence. The best analogy would be an actual balancing act, such as riding a bicycle or walking on a tightrope. Through training, such behavior can become both automatic and flexible. And what is required for courage should be contrasted with cowardice or foolhardiness. Both of these can be rote and mechanical, unlike the more discriminating virtue of courage. For example, a coward may automatically feel fear at the prospect of any kind of danger, or automatically lose confidence at the prospect of anything more challenging than his day-to-day chores. Likewise, a foolhardy person may automatically feel overconfident whenever any challenge or danger presents itself.

2.2.1.3 Not All Habits are Character Traits

Another objection is that not all habits are character traits, so character traits are not habits. There may be habits that are not character traits, but this will not invalidate Aristotle's theory of character.

Aristotle is not claiming that every habit is a character trait. He regards as character traits only those habits which concern passions and actions for which there is an excess, a mean, and a deficiency. A virtue is a habit of hitting the mean, and a vice is a habit of missing the mean, by either exceeding it or coming short of it. So a character trait is a habit of hitting a mean, exceeding a mean, or coming short of a mean. Put another way, a character trait is a habit with respect to a mean.

2.2.1.4   Some Virtues are not Means

The answer to the last objection leads to another objection. This new objection says there are character traits that do not concern a mean of any sort. For example, if Christians are to be believed, love for others can know no mean, for more love is always better, and the infinite love of God is best. Aristotle would probably disagree, saying that even love has a mean. But let's be clear on what is meant by a mean. In one sense, a mean is a virtue that stands midway between two vices. One vice is the deficiency of something, the other vice is its excess, and the virtue is a balance between these that gets the right amount. In this sense, the virtue of love, as understood by some Christians, is not a mean. It is not a mean, because it does not stand between a deficiency and an excess. Although one may have a deficiency of love, there is no excess in even infinite love, for more love is always better.

One possible response to this is to deny that infinite love is best and maintain instead that the right amount always lies somewhere between an excess and a deficiency. This has been the response of Objectivists, who regard themselves as Aristoteleans. Here is what Leonard Peikoff, the successor to Ayn Rand, has to say about Christian love in *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*:

> **We should, Jesus tells us, love our neighbors regardless of desert, apart from their character and even because of their vices. This is love not as payment for joy, but as self-sacrifice; not as recompense to the good, but as a blank check to the evil; not as an act of loyalty to existence, but as the deliberate rejection of man's life. Those who claim to want this Christian response—to want causeless love, love "for themselves" as against their thoughts, actions, character, or works—are staging a fraud. They demand that love be divorced from values, then struggle to reverse cause and effect, pretending that love, the effect, can create in them personal worth, the cause. But causeless love would be meaningless; it would represent no acknowledgment of virtue. (289)**

Based on what Peikoff is saying, the right amount of love must be proportional to a person's merit. Infinite love would be excessive, because no one has infinite merit. So he would maintain that the right amount of love is finite. But before giving Peikoff the final word, let's consider what a Christian has to say. In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis distinguishes between affection, friendship, eros, and charity. As he understands affection, friendship, and eros, each is a response to a person, and this response should be proportional to the qualities of the person who evokes the love. Affection is a response to those we are familiar with, such as family; friendship is a response to such things as common interests and values; and eros is a romantic response to someone you want to share your life with. Of these four kinds of love, only charity might lack any kind of excess.

Although Peikoff raises some good points, it seems that he does not address charity specifically. Instead, he conflates charity with other kinds of love. If Lewis has made a valid distinction, then charity does not require us to like, befriend, admire, or fall in love with someone lacking in merit. But what is charity if not any of these? Charity is caring about others. Caring about our enemies, for example, does not give them a blank check to do evil. For example, I can care about Adolf Hitler at least to the extent that I am saddened by the waste he made of his life. With respect to someone like Hitler, the response of charity is to try to reach out to him and help him become a better person. Charity is not admiration in the absence of anything to admire. It is not admiration at all. It is merely the response to the inherent worth of being a person, no matter how much a person might self-destruct and do terrible things. The difference made by charity is that it sees an evil person as a tragedy, whereas someone who lacks charity sees an evil person as something of no consequence to be either dismissed or destroyed. In light of this, the notion that charity has no mean cannot be dismissed by attacking the notion of charity itself.

A different response to this objection is to say that charity is good in the right measure but too much charity is a vice. But what would an excess of charity, if such a thing is possible, be like? One possibility is that too much charity will overshadow a person's sense of justice, leading the person to treat people more generously and more mercifully than they deserve. Yet the real vice here is that charity is out of balance with justice, not that the person feels too much charity. This imbalance might be better addressed by strengthening one's sense of justice. Another effect of exceeding charity may be a weakening of self-interest, as one constantly feels compelled to take care of others. Again, the real problem may be with an imbalance between charity and self-interest. None of this proves that charity can't be excessive, but it makes it hard to come up with a good example.

A third response to the objection concerning charity is to allow that it has no mean but point out that even Aristotle maintained that some things had no mean. Aristotle says:

> **But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean.** (*959;* 1107a:9-26)

So it's possible that charity is merely a virtue, such as temperance and courage are virtues, and as such has no mean. Nevertheless, courage and temperance are means, according to Aristotle, and the reason why they don't have means is that there can be no such thing as a mean of a mean. So if charity has no mean, it would be because charity is itself a mean, excess, or deficiency. It's not a deficiency, because an uncharitable person is deficient in whatever it is that distinguishes a charitable person. If charity is a mean, it is probably a mean with respect to caring. An uncharitable person is too uncaring, and the extreme would be someone who is too caring. But can someone be too caring?

Someone could be caring beyond what is required to get him to do what is right. But that would be merely superfluous, not excessive. Something is superfluous if it is more than enough, whereas something is excessive only if it is too much. Someone's caring would be too much if, perhaps, it increased his disposition toward wrongdoing. One possible example of a person who cares too much is the person derogatorily known as the bleeding heart liberal. This is a person who cares so much for the unfortunate that he wants to help them with the money of those who are better off. Even worse would be someone who cares so much for ugly people that he wants to destroy the beauty of the beautiful so that ugly people will feel better about themselves. This is some kind of excess of caring, and it is not the virtue of charity. Charity cares about the person but does not go to the extreme of placating envy or other vices.

This example shows that there are limits on charity. Charity is not unlimited, indiscriminate caring. Rather, it seems to be caring about people in the right way, for the right reasons, about the right sort of concerns, etc. Charity appears indiscriminate only because it doesn't discriminate on the basis of merit. It focuses instead on the inherent worth of personhood, which is common to all people. But it focuses its concern on what is worthy in people, not on what is unworthy in them. Charity is ultimately concerned with realizing people's potential for goodness, not in catering to the whims and pettiness that give some people pleasure. Therefore, Aristotle's understanding of character can account for charity, a.k.a. Christian love, as a mean between an excess and a deficiency. The deficiency is being uncaring, and the excess is caring even about petty matters. Infinite charity, a.k.a. God's omnibenevolence, is analogous to

something like infinite courage or infinite temperance. It is just the supreme perfection of a virtue, not an example of a virtue that is not a mean.

Another example someone might raise is hatred, maintaining that any amount of hatred is excessive and there is no such thing as a deficiency of hatred, causing there to be no such thing as a mean with respect to hatred. This just seems wrong. Hatred is sometimes appropriate, even if it is just hatred of evil rather than hatred of individuals. It is certainly appropriate to hate what the Nazis did to the Jews during World War II. It may even sometimes be appropriate to hate individuals. For those who are oppressed, for example, hatred of their oppressors may help provide them with the will power and self-respect they need to stand up for themselves.

Although love and hatred are not good counterexamples, refuting them does not refute the possibility that there is a good counterexample. Refuting these counterexamples merely adds reassurance that Aristotle's theory is a good one. Just in case there is a good counterexample, it is possible to refute it and all other counterexamples by slightly shifting what is meant by a mean. A mean may be understood merely as that amount of something that is neither deficient not excessive. Aristotle has assumed that everything with a mean has both an excess and a deficiency, but this assumption does not seem crucial to the understanding of virtues as means. If the right amount of something were zero, the virtue would be in avoiding it altogether. If something remained good even in unlimited amounts, there would still be virtue in achieving it to some sufficient degree, even if an unlimited amount were beyond human reach. So a mean might sometimes be zero or infinity. A zero mean implies the absence of a deficiency. An infinite mean implies the absence of an excess. For any other mean, there will be both excess and deficiency. Aristotle may not have thought of means in this way, but it is a matter of semantics whether the existence of a mean always implies the existence of both an excess and a deficiency. The heart of a theory does not stand or fall on a mere matter of semantics. Therefore, examples of an absent excess or deficiency, even if some can be found, do not hurt Aristotle's theory of character.

2.2.1.5   Not all Means are Virtues

Another objection is that skills, such as a skill at diamond cutting, are habits with respect to a mean but not character traits. In diamond cutting, you have to strike the diamond hard enough to cut it but not so hard that you shatter it. Thus, there is a mean with respect to how hard you should strike a diamond to cut it. A skilled diamond cutter has developed the habit of hitting this mean. Yet skill at diamond cutting is not a moral virtue, and diamond cutting is not a character trait. Therefore, concludes the objection, character traits are not habits with respect to a mean. To answer this objection, it merely needs to be pointed out that Aristotle is not asserting that every habit with respect to a mean is a character trait. He says, "virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success" (958; 1106b:20-25). If failure to hit the mean counted as a form of failure, there would be a virtue for nearly any type of activity. For example, suppose I said I am thinking of a number and want you to guess what it is. Since guessing too high or too low would be a failure to guess the number, counting this kind of failure as failure would allow us to speak of character traits with respect to guessing the right number. Of course, there are no character traits with respect to success at this game, and this implies that Aristotle does not count as failure the mere failure to hit a mean. When Aristotle says that excess and defect are forms of failure, he has in mind a different kind of failure than the mere failure to hit a mean. This is presumably some kind of moral failure, such as a failure to flourish. Therefore, there may be means, such as how hard you should strike a diamond to cut it, that do not pertain to moral virtues and character traits. This is because failure at hitting these means is not a moral failure. A habit with respect to a mean is a character trait for Aristotle only if failure to hit the mean is a moral failure. Therefore, the objection that some habits with respect to means are not character traits fails to discredit Aristotle's understanding of character.

2.2.1.6   Character Traits Might be Accidental

One more objection to Aristotle's understanding of character is that it leaves it possible for someone to acquire a character trait through sheer accident. For example, courage normally requires the ability to discern and compare different variables to regularly and consistently hit the mean that falls between cowardice and foolhardiness, yet a person who isn't very good at this might, through sheer luck, regularly make the right choice and hit the mean. This would be analogous to someone who takes a multiple choice test and gets all the right answers just by guessing. The probability for it happening is extremely low, but there is nevertheless some probability that it will happen. But in light of what a habit is, this objection fails. A habit is a mode of feeling or acting that a person has grown accustomed to through repetition, and the presence of a habit makes it more likely that the same sort of feelings or actions will continue in the future. If someone has regularly hit the mean of courage by sheer luck, he hasn't actually developed the habit of hitting the mean. He has merely met with a lucky set of accidents and still lacks the habit which distinguishes the courageous from the uncourageous. Therefore he isn't courageous, and the Aristotelean theory of character traits meets this last objection.

2.2.1.7   Epilogue to Objections

In light of how Aristotle's theory is able to meet these objections, let's now reformulate it with greater precision. On this theory, a character trait is a habit with respect to a type of passion or action. A habit is a mode of feeling or acting that has become routine by becoming easy and familiar. The ease and familiarity of a habit create a disposition toward the mode identified with the habit. Thus, habits entail dispositions. These dispositions may be complicated, for habits may include mastery of complicated skills. A habit is counted as a character trait only if it can be evaluated by how closely it hits a mean between an excess and a deficiency, where excess and deficiency each count as failure and the mean counts as success. The failure and success mentioned here are understood to be moral failure and success.

This ends the presentation of Aristotle's theory of character. It is a very different theory of character than Brandt's. But before evaluating either of these any further, let's move on to the theories of character proposed by Kekes and Kupperman. These are especially relevant, because a subsequent chapter is on Kekes' theory of evil, and Kekes bases his theory of character on Kupperman's.

2.3 KEKES AND KUPPERMAN ON CHARACTER

Kekes describes his own understanding of character in his book *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives*, but instead of providing detailed arguments for his position, he refers the reader to Kupperman's book *Character*, which he describes in a footnote as "an excellent analysis of the nature of character" (91). Although there are similarities between their conceptions of character, they are different enough that very little, if anything, Kupperman says in favor of his own position can be used to support Kekes'.

 Kekes describes character by its genus and by the characteristics which set it apart from other members of its genus. As a preliminary approximation at what character is, Kekes says it "is composed of enduring patterns of motivation and action" (115). He then adds onto this some other conditions. "The first is that it should have some significance in our life," and the second is that it must be "maintained in the face of some internal or external obstacle" (116). Summarizing his position on character, Kekes describes it as "the collection of enduring patterns formed of desires, capacities, opportunities, values, and corresponding actions which are significant given our conception of the good life, and which require us to make some effort to maintain" (116). In making this summary, Kekes changes his description of the genus he believes character is made of. He starts out by suggesting that it is made of enduring patterns of motivations and actions. But he shifts from these to "desires, capacities, opportunities, values, and corresponding actions" (116). Yet he doesn't make much note of this shift, and here is what little he says in its defense:

> To act characteristically is to do what we would normally and predictably do in a given
> situation. What makes our action normal and predictable is that we are regularly motivated
> by certain desires, possess certain capacities, and are guided by certain values. If we find

ourselves in a situation where we have the opportunity to satisfy our desires by exercising our capacities according to our values, then we naturally perform the appropriate action. If this happens time and time again, so that the pattern formed of particular desires, capacities, opportunities, values, and actions is a recurrent feature of our lives, then we may identify it as one component of our character. (115)

Both of Kekes' definitions include enduring patterns of action, and we know from Brandt, as well as by Kekes' phrase "motivated by certain desires," that desires are motivations. So the new things Kekes has added are capacities, opportunities, and values. Let's contrast this with what Kupperman says:

X's character is X's normal pattern of thought and action, especially with respect to concerns and commitments in matters affecting the happiness of others and of X, and most especially in relation to moral choices. (17)

Although this is as explicit as Kupperman gets in defining character, it is not his last word on the subject. It appears very early in his book, and he subsequently mentions more aspects of character that are not covered by this definition. These include desires and feelings (51), abilities and wishes (103), intentions (104), and skills (105). Some of these are the same thing or at least fall into the same category. Desires and wishes go together, intentions are related to these, and abilities and skills belong together. Although he doesn't bring these ideas together into a new definition of character, he does bring them together into a definition of virtue, which is a closely related concept. He writes:

Very broadly then, for X to have a moral virtue is for X to meet three requirements: X must have certain abilities, X's wishes must not fall outside a certain range, and X must will and act appropriately in the situations in which that virtue is tested. (105)

This definition of virtue points to four main aspects of character. These are ability, motivation, intention, and behavior. Although it doesn't explicitly mention feelings, it doesn't rule them out. Unlike Brandt, who has made a much clearer distinction between feeling and motivation, Kupperman may associate them more closely with each other. Besides that, he is giving a broad definition, not one that is meant to be precise and fully comprehensive. In light of what he has subsequently mentioned as aspects of character, his original definition can be amended to go something like this: "X's character is X's normal pattern of thought, *feeling, motivations, intentions, abilities,* and action, especially with respect to concerns and commitments in matters affecting the happiness of others and of X, and most especially in relation to moral choices." Four additions to his original definition are italicized, and the rest is as he originally wrote it.

The conceptions of character offered by Kekes and Kupperman are similar in several respects. First, each takes an eclectic approach to character, identifying it with a collection of different elements. Second, there is a good degree of agreement on what these elements are. Both include motivations, abilities, and appropriate action. Third, their general approach to understanding character is the same. Each presents character in terms of a genus and a moral standard, and each has identified some kind of patterns as the genus character belongs to. On this point, Kekes says "the collection of enduring patterns," and Kupperman refers to the "normal pattern." This seems to be more a difference in wording than any real disagreement between them. The main things they differ on are what the patterns are patterns of, and on what the moral standard is. Let's begin by reviewing each item Kekes and Kupperman include as part of character. Once that's done, we can turn to the moral standards each uses to differentiate character.

2.3.1   Components of Character

Kekes identifies character as made up of "desires, capacities, opportunities, values, and corresponding actions" (*Moral Wisdom* 116). Kupperman broadly identifies character as made up of one's normal pattern of thought, action, feeling, motivation, ability, and intention. Phrasing Kupperman's theory more like Kekes', we may understand Kupperman to be saying that character is made up of patterns of these elements. Let's now consider in more depth each of the components Kekes or Kupperman identify with character.

2.3.1.1   Opportunities

Kekes includes opportunities as part of character, but this is a mistake. A person's character is an internal part of the person, but opportunities arise from external circumstances. It is true that a person's character may influence the opportunities which come his way, and it is also true that a person's character will influence how he responds to different opportunities, but neither of these facts make opportunities a part of character. So let's drop opportunities from the notion of character.

2.3.1.2   Abilities

Kekes also includes capacities, and Kupperman mentions abilities and skills.   These are more or less the same thing, and ability is a good general word to use here. Although they agree on this element, there seems to be a good reason for not including abilities as elements of character. Although abilities are internal, they affect our choices in the same way that external circumstances do. External circumstances restrict or expand the choices available to us. Abilities provide us with more options to choose from, and inabilities restrict our options. In contrast to this, character is something that directs our choices, given the choices available. If abilities affect our moral choices only by restricting or expanding our options, then it seems that they are not a part of character.

But character does more than just direct our choices. Character also affects how well we follow through on our moral decisions. Moral weakness, which is an instance of bad character, occurs when we do not follow through with our moral decisions. If making moral decisions were all that character is concerned with, moral weakness would not be a matter of character, but it is. Abilities can affect how well you follow through with your moral decisions. For example, the ability to keep your mind focused can be a big asset when it comes to following through with your moral decisions. Other abilities can make a difference too. So, based on this, abilities can be a part of character.

But we may distinguish between at least two kinds of capacities, physical and psychological, and, presumably, only psychological capacities are part of character. Psychological capacities can include reasoning abilities, emotional intelligence, creativity, and perceptiveness. Physical abilities may include the ability to move your body, to lift heavy objects, to keep your balance, etc. Some abilities will be both physical and psychological, such as typing. Typing requires knowledge of language and key locations, which are psychological capacities, and it requires a set of working hands and arms. I assume that physical impairment, so long as it is not to the brain or central nervous system, will not directly cause any changes in character. It may create obstacles which lead to changes in character, but that is not the same as directly changing character, which it does not do. For example, Robert J. Ringer, writing in *Getting What You Want: The Seven Principles of Rational Living*, tells of a man whose strong character helped him make something of his life despite losing the ability to walk. During his senior year in high school, Jim Blanchard, who became a longtime friend of Ringer's, was in an automobile accident that severed his spinal cord, leaving him unable to walk (241). Shortly after this, he went to Mexico for a special program he had heard about "where paraplegics and quadriplegics could share houses together and learn to become self-sufficient" (242). After this, Blanchard became a wealthy businessman and traveled a lot. He even did the unexpected. Ringer says, "When a mutual friend told me that he and Jim had gone mountain climbing, I asked him how that was possible. He responded, 'Because Jim doesn't understand that he's crippled.' No sentence could better have described the essence of Jim Blancard" (243). Despite being physically disabled, Blanchard didn't let it impair his character. In general, physical impairments are obstacles which character sometimes has to overcome, but physical impairments are not themselves impairments of character. Likewise, physical abilities might make some moral decisions easier to carry through, but they are not a part of character. Only some psychological capacities would be part of character.

2.3.1.3   Desires

Kekes includes desires, where previously he included motivations. Kupperman includes desires and wishes. Wishes are one kind of desire, and as we know from Brandt, desires are one kind of

motivation. Although Brandt might be wrong in concluding that character is made up only of motivations, his arguments for his motivation theory provide good enough reasons for including motivations as part of character. Since motivations include both desires and aversions, it is better to speak of motivations than to speak only of desires.

2.3.1.4   Values

Kekes also includes values, and these may also be subsumed under motivations. But it is worth mentioning values on their own, because they are substantially different from other kinds of motivations. Values are about what is important to us, and they play a larger role than any other kind of motivation in shaping our moral opinions. For example, the value I place on life plays a large role in shaping my belief that it is wrong to murder. Contrast this with other motivations, such as my aversion to snakes or my preference for a temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. These have much less influence on my moral opinions, and they are rooted in peculiarities about me more than they are in basic values. Although values are motivations, it is worth mentioning them separately to emphasize how important they are to character.

2.3.1.5   Thought Patterns

Kupperman includes thought as part of character, and one reason against this is that thoughts are generally fleeting. But Kupperman is describing character in terms of patterns of thoughts, or as he puts it in terms of one's normal pattern of thought, not merely in terms of thoughts. So before continuing on the subject of thoughts, let's consider the idea of patterns as used by both Kekes and Kupperman. To get the right sense of what is meant here, let's look at how the word pattern is used in other contexts. When making cookies, you may cut out the same pattern with a cookie cutter for each of the cookies. If you're a detective investigating a crime, you may notice that it fits a pattern you've seen before. In these contexts, a pattern is what things which resemble each other share in common.

Something is enduring if it remains the same across time. So an enduring pattern is one that shows up on a regular basis and remains the same. This is not to say that a person's thoughts, motivations, or actions are always rigidly the same. Patterns allow for variation. Think about cookies for a moment. Several cookies may be cut from the same pattern, yet there will still be lots of variation among the cookies. A pattern is an abstraction that applies only to a certain level of detail. Somewhat different thoughts may fit into the same pattern. For example, thoughts such as "I'm no good," "everybody hates me," and "I hate everyone" are different thoughts, but they fit into a common pattern.

Let's now return to Kupperman's assumption that character traits can be made from patterns of thought. Let's first consider whether patterns of thought exist and whether any have any bearing on choices concerning morality or happiness. Evidence that patterns of thought exist and also affect happiness comes from Cognitive Therapy. This is a school of psychology that focuses on the ways people think and on changing the ways people think to help them live happier and more fulfilling lives. In *The Feeling Good Handbook*, David Burns lists ten cognitive distortions that have been identified by cognitive therapy:

1. All-or-nothing thinking: You look at things in absolute black-and-white-categories.
2. Overgeneralization: You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. Mental filter: You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives.
4. Discounting the positives: You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities "don't' count."
5. Jumping to conclusions: (A) Mind reading–you assume that people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite evidence of this; (B) Fortune-telling–you arbitrarily predict that things will turn out badly.
6. Magnification or minimization: You blow things way out of proportion or you shrink their importance inappropriately.
7. Emotional reasoning: You reason about how you feel: "I *feel* like an idiot, so I really must be one." Or "I don't *feel* like doing this, so I'll put it off."
8. "Should statements": You criticize yourself or other people with "shoulds" or "shouldn'ts." "Musts," "oughts," and "have tos" are similar offenders.

9. Labeling: You identify with your shortcomings. Instead of saying "I made a mistake," you tell yourself, "I'm a jerk," or "a fool," or "a loser."
10. Personalization and blame: You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and overlook ways that your own attitudes and behavior might contribute to a problem. (96)

I assume that this list of cognitive distortions was based on observations of how people actually think. I have also observed some of these patterns in myself and in other people. For example, the second example of emotional reasoning has often delayed work on this dissertation. So I accept that cognitive distortions like these do exist. Cognitive therapy is based on the assumption that certain cognitive distortions are prevalent in the thinking of some people and that they can learn to replace these distortions with healthier ways of thinking. If we examine some of these cognitive distortions, we will easily find how some of them bear on happiness or morality. Distortions like overgeneralization, mental filter, and discounting the positives all seem to be prescriptions for unhappiness. How we think affects how we feel, and focusing on negatives or discounting positives can easily lead to unhappiness. All-or-nothing thinking affects moral reasoning by casting all moral decisions in black or white terms. For example, a person may assume that a choice must be entirely good or entirely evil with nothing in between. Moving down to the tenth distortion, blaming other people and ignoring your own contributions to a problem is scapegoating, a behavior M. Scott Peck, whose views are covered in a later chapter, associates with evil people. So, based on the evidence from cognitive therapy, it seems reasonable to include patterns of thought as a part of character.

2.3.1.6 Feeling

Kupperman includes feeling as part of character, though he mentions it only in passing. Kekes does not explicitly mention feelings as an element of character, but both Kekes and Kupperman have included desires, which are closely related to feelings. Brandt distinguishes between feelings and motivations, but Kekes and Kupperman do not. Although feelings and motivations are conceptually distinct from one another, they are often bound together. In identifying character with long-standing motivations that are normally more enduring than individual feelings, Brandt neglects a large class of more temporary motivations that come and go with feelings. Feelings motivate people. Some motivations come and go with feelings. Some motivations are strengthened by feelings but linger in a weakened form when feelings go away. Thus, patterns of feeling greatly influence patterns of motivation, which Kekes and Kupperman already include as part of character.

Besides influencing motivations, feelings influence patterns of thought and action by reward and punishment. Positive feelings reward and encourage a pattern of thought or action, whereas negative feelings punish and discourage a pattern of thought or action. How a person feels about what he does also reflects what kind of person he is. A person who feels bad about doing something bad is a better person for it than he would be for feeling good about it. Likewise, a person who takes joy in doing good is better for it than if he did good grudgingly. One sign of good character is that a person takes pleasure in doing good and displeasure in doing evil. Because of this, and because of the other roles feelings play in a person's character, it makes sense to include patterns of feeling as one element of character.

2.3.1.7 Actions

Both Kekes and Kupperman include patterns of actions as part of character. Their agreement is one reason in favor of including it as part of character. We also have the support of Aristotle, for whom virtues are habits of right feeling or action, and vices are habits of wrong feeling or action. If someone has a habit of right or wrong action, that person has patterns of right or wrong action.

One objection to this idea is that character is responsible for shaping a person's actions, but this is distinguished from the actual actions themselves. For example, Brandt never described any character trait in terms of actions. Instead, he described them in terms of motivations, which ultimately had some bearing on actions. Enduring motivations would lead to enduring patterns of actions, but the motivations

and actions would still be separate and distinct from one another. For Brandt, the motivations would make up character, and the actions would not. This is a legitimate distinction, for what accounts for a person's actions must be different from the actions themselves. In general, character accounts for a person's actions, and the actions are merely the result, not a part, of a person's character. Nevertheless, patterns of actions may still have a place in character.

If some patterns of action contribute to a person's actions, as distinguished from merely being caused by the person's character, then the stated objection would not prevent us from including these patterns of action as part of character. There do seem to be patterns of action which are not the result of character. People engage in many kinds of automatic behavior which they do without thinking about it. One example is typing. Although I consciously think about what words I want to type, I type them without consciously thinking about which letters are in the words and without consciously looking for each key before I press it.

In general, automatic behavior is procedural. This means that we often decide to do something and then automatically follow some ingrained procedure for getting it done. Typing is one example, but we do it all the time in other matters. The benefit of automatically following ingrained procedures is that it keeps us from getting bogged down in the smallest details of what we are doing. This lets us do things much more efficiently. But that is understating things. Without a tendency to rely on ingrained procedures, we couldn't function at all. We couldn't walk or speak, much less drive or type. So we rely on automatic behaviors, and it is very good for us that we do.

But there is also a danger in relying on automatic behaviors too much. We sometimes do things by rote without stopping to ask whether what we're doing is appropriate. We often do things merely because we are accustomed to doing them and not because we intend to accomplish anything. For me, this becomes most apparent when I mix up automatic behaviors. For example, I have gone to the bathroom to use the toilet and ended up brushing my teeth instead. This happened because I acted without thinking about what I was doing. And the less a person thinks about what he is doing, the more his behavior will be automatic instead of purposeful. Although this kind of behavior isn't purposeful, it can fall into certain patterns. This is because we fall back on what we know and are used to doing when we behave without purpose or conscious attention to what we are doing.

However, what we fall back on in these moments can be shaped through discipline and training. For example, someone could develop the habit of getting out of bed in the morning no matter how he feels about it. It might take many mornings of consciously and purposefully pulling himself out of bed as soon as the alarm goes off, but over time it would eventually become a habit. Without discipline, a person could sink into the habit of sleeping in every morning. These patterns of behavior would eventually be a matter of habit, rather than the result of consciously held thoughts or motivations. So patterns of behavior such as these could be a part of character.

2.3.1.8   Intentions

Intentions are closely related to motivations. I already discussed intentions when I brought up the theory that an evil person is someone with evil intentions. I pointed out that fully described intentions include the motivation behind what a person intends to do. For example, the intention to relieve someone's suffering through euthanasia includes a desire for the person's suffering to end. Yet intentions are not identical with motivations. Intentions reflect decisions, whereas motivations do not imply that any decision has been made. For example, I may be motivated to end someone's suffering through euthanasia, and I may be motivated to keep her alive. Yet I may be undecided about what to do. So long as I remain undecided, I haven't formed an intention. Once I have formed an intention, I cannot form the contrary intention without discarding the first one. An intention commits me to a plan of action, whereas a motivation does not.

It is clear that intentions shape behavior. They shape behavior even more directly than motivations do, and they contribute to the integrity of a person's character even more strongly than

motivations do. Yet there seems to be at least one good reason why intentions should not be regarded as part of character. Since intentions reflect decisions, and since character affects moral choices, it seems that intentions are a result of character rather than a part of it. This is the same kind of objection that was raised against the idea that actions are part of character. There is a legitimate distinction between moral choices and the source of a person's moral choices. Character is part of the source of a person's choices, and as such it cannot also be the choices.

Nevertheless, it was shown that some patterns of action can be part of character, and it may be that intentions or patterns of intention can also be part of character. The intentions that are most likely to be the result of a person's character are momentary intentions that pertain to individual actions. But some intentions are enduring and give rise to a range of actions over a stretch of time. Someone's intentions may include such long-ranging intentions as the intention to never drink alcohol, the intention to never hurt innocent children, or the intention to complete a dissertation. Long-ranging intentions integrate a large set of actions over a long-range of time. Although intentions reflect decisions, the decisions they reflect are sometimes long-range commitments, and these are different than a person's day-to-day moral decisions. Long-range commitments shape day-to-day moral decisions, and in this respect intentions seem to be part of character. Although momentary intentions may be a reflection of character rather than a part of it, long-range intentions, and especially moral commitments, seem to be a part of character. So it now begins to look like enduring patterns of thoughts, motivations, intentions, feelings, values, and actions are all part of character. That takes care of what character is made of. Let's now turn to the standards which make it character.

2.3.2   The Moral Standard for Identifying Character

Kekes and Kupperman give similar but different standards. Kekes says that the patterns which are part of character are those which are significant given our conception of the good life. In essence, Kekes is distinguishing character from the broader genus by saying that patterns of character are those which pertain to a moral standard. Kupperman does the same thing, but he uses a different kind of moral standard. Kupperman identifies patterns of character with those which pertain "to concerns and commitments in matters affecting the happiness of others and of X, and most especially in relation to moral choices" (17). We may more generally say that they are those which pertain to happiness of oneself and others and most especially to moral matters.

One drawback of Kupperman's definition of character is that his moral standard is not strictly applied to the genus. The way he words his definition, the genus is all that identifies character, and the moral standard is given as an afterthought. Instead of saying that character is made up of those patterns of thought and action which pertain in someway to happiness and morality, he says that character consists of a particular genus *especially* with regard to the moral standard he gives. This would be like saying that a vegetarian avoids animal foods, especially meat. It makes more sense, as Kekes does, to use the moral standard as a filter to identify what of the genus is actually a part of character. So let's replace Kupperman's original definition with one that identifies character with the enduring patterns of thought and action that pertain to happiness and morality. This modification to Kupperman's definition eliminates the confusing *especially's*. Let's now turn to the standards themselves.

Both Kekes and Kupperman leave their standards vague, but there are important differences between the standards they use. Most importantly, Kekes offers a subjective standard, whereas Kupperman's standard will be subjective only insofar as happiness and morality are subjective matters. If morality is objective or absolute, Kupperman's standard will have an objective or absolute element to it, but Kekes' will still be subjective. The reason for this is that Kekes frames his moral standard in terms of a person's *conception* of the good life, instead of in terms of what would actually constitute a good life for a person. These need not be the same. Someone's conception of the good life could be mistaken. Although what constitutes the good life may be objective for each person, someone's conception of the good life will

be subjective. Since Kekes frames his standard in terms of someone's conception of the good life, his standard is subjective.

One reason this is a problem is because someone's standards for what constitutes the good life can conflict. For example, someone might be convinced by his friends and by the media that the life of a rock star is the truly good life, yet he may feel in his heart a longing to enter ministry. With conflicting standards for what constitutes the good life, this standard for what constitutes character would sometimes be incoherent. This incoherence can be removed only if we settle on a conflict-free way of characterizing someone's conception of the good life. We might settle on what a person consciously believes, or we might settle on the longings that lie in his heart. But these aren't conflict-free either. A person can have longings that conflict with each other, and many people, such as religious fundamentalists, have shown a capacity to hold conflicting beliefs. So a subjective standard of character will in many cases be an incoherent standard.

We could bite the bullet, insisting that a subjective standard is the correct one, and maintain that character is sometimes incoherent or that character does not exist without a coherent and conflict-free conception of the good life. The idea that character is sometimes incoherent seems very implausible, because character is something that gives shape to who you are, but incoherence is a lack of shape. Thus an incoherent character would be equivalent to no character at all, and that leaves us with the second option. But the second option, that character requires a coherent and conflict-free conception of the good life, is also problematic. There are various problems with this, but let's focus on the ones that make the theory incoherent, because these show conclusively that it is false. One of these problems is that it makes someone's conception of the good life logically prior to character, yet it is wholly conceivable that someone's character could give shape to his conception of the good life. For example, a loving person may imagine the good life as one in which he helps people, and a hateful person may imagine the good life as one free from the people he hates. Furthermore, a subjective standard prevents us from intelligibly saying that character is an important element of the good life. If our character depends on what we conceive the good life to be, then it would be vacuous to conceive of the good life as a life ruled by good character. What is a matter of character could not be fleshed out until our conception of the good life was fleshed out further, and this conception of the good life could not be fleshed out until our conception of character was fleshed out further, and this just leaves us in a vicious circle. Therefore, what is a matter of character cannot depend upon what someone's *conception* of the good life is. In this respect, Kekes is wrong about character.

Kupperman's conception of character does not meet with the same objections. Beyond this difference between Kekes and Kupperman, there is another. Kekes frames character in terms of a particular moral standard, namely the good life, whereas Kupperman speaks merely of happiness and morality. As a result, Kupperman's conception of character works better with various and conflicting moral theories, whereas Kekes' works well only with theories that emphasize the importance of the good life. If it turns out, as Kekes seems to believe, that the chief concern of morality is living the good life, then Kupperman's claim that character has to do with happiness and morality is equivalent to the claim that character has to do with living the good life. If there is more to morality than living the good life, it follows that there is more to character than just living the good life. Therefore, Kupperman's description of character, insofar as a moral standard is concerned, covers more bases. Depending upon what the correct moral standard is, it is just as good or better than a modified, non-subjective version of Kekes' description.

2.3.3   Does Character Require Effort?

The last part of Kekes' description of character has no counterpart in Kupperman's, though it does have a counterpart in Kupperman's description of strong character. Kekes says that character takes some effort to maintain, i.e. it must be "maintained in the face of some internal or external obstacle," whereas

Kupperman does not say this. What Kupperman does say is that a *strong character* is one which is, among other things, "strongly resistant to pressures, temptations, difficulties, and to the insistent expectations of others" (14). Kupperman is surely correct that resistance to such things is part of a strong character. What is at issue is whether Kekes is correct in assuming that character always takes some effort to maintain.

There should be no question that effort can help a person maintain his character. If you can maintain patterns of character in the face of internal and external obstacles, it is a good sign. But this is not what is at issue. The question is whether maintaining character in the face of obstacles is *required* for character. It is not required for character, and this can be proven. If obstacles were required for character, then no character trait could be maintained except in the face of some kind of obstacle. Yet if a character trait can be maintained only by facing obstacles, its opposite is a character trait that arises from failing to meet those same obstacles. For example, it makes sense to suppose that facing obstacles is part of courage, yet it surely isn't part of cowardice. But cowardice is every bit as much a character trait as courage is. In fact, cowardice may result from failing to meet the very obstacles that must be met for a person to be courageous. The idea that character is maintained in the face of obstacles seems to be based on confusion between character and good character. A good character normally is maintained in the face of obstacles, because being good and maintaining integrity requires a person to resist various temptations. But some characters, or at least some character traits, result from failing to resist temptations. Thus, meeting obstacles is not a requirement for character.

2.3.4 Comparing Kekes and Kupperman's Theories

Having examined the similar, though somewhat different, conceptions of character provided by Kekes and Kupperman, Kupperman's theory seems clearly superior to Kekes'. In describing what the elements of character are, Kupperman's choices all seem correct, whereas Kekes includes some elements, such as opportunities, that cannot be a part of character. Kupperman's moral standard seems accurate, and it is general enough to describe character without committing to a particular moral theory, whereas Kekes' moral standard is tied to a particular moral theory. Finally, Kekes, unlike Kupperman, makes the mistake of confusing character with strong character, stating that character takes some effort to maintain. Nonetheless, there are some points on which Kekes' theory seems better than Kupperman's. Kekes uses the moral standard as a filter, whereas Kupperman uses it more as a spotlight. Some of Kekes' language is also preferable to Kupperman's. Kekes refers, for example, to enduring patterns, whereas Kupperman refers to one's normal pattern. One's normal pattern suggests a single holistic thing, whereas enduring patterns suggests a variety of elements. The latter is preferable, because both Kekes and Kupperman do seem to be identifying character with a collection of elements.

In light of this examination of Kekes' and Kupperman's theories, a hybrid suggests itself. This hybrid is mostly the same as Kupperman's but borrows slightly from Kekes. It identifies character with a person's collection of enduring patterns of motivations, psychological capacities, thoughts, feelings, intentions, values, and corresponding actions that have any bearing on moral matters, the happiness of oneself, or the happiness of others.

2.4 COMPARING THEORIES

Now that we've reviewed some theories on character, let's compare them. Three theories will be compared: Brandt's, Aristotle's, and the hybrid of Kekes' and Kupperman's theories. Let's begin with the most basic difference. These theories describe character at different levels. Aristotle, Kekes, and Kupperman describe character in terms of some kind of regularities, whereas Brandt describes character in terms of psychological properties that underlie and can account for a variety of regularities. Both are valid ways of describing character, but Brandt's seems to have the advantage of being more fundamental, because it focuses on the causes of regularities rather than on the regularities themselves.

There are two main ways that one theory could be better than another. One is to be more fundamental, as Brandt's seems to be, and the other is to be more comprehensive. So, if Brandt's theory really is more fundamental, the other theories still have a chance of being better if they are more comprehensive. A cursory look at the hybrid theory immediately suggests that it is more comprehensive than Brandt's. Both include motivations, but the hybrid theory covers many other details, such as patterns of thought, feeling, action, etc. But if the motivation theory can account for everything mentioned in the hybrid theory, then it will be as comprehensive and more fundamental, which will make it the better theory. Let's consider this possibility.

As a reminder, the hybrid theory includes as parts of character enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, intentions, actions, values, psychological capacities and motivations. Values and motivations are easily accounted for by the motivation theory, for these simply are motivations. That leaves thoughts, feelings, actions, capacities, and intentions, which are harder to account for solely in terms of motivations. Of these, feelings are most closely linked with values and motivations. What a person feels is normally determined by values and motivations. For example, people are usually happy when they have what they want and unhappy when they don't. But there are more factors than just these. One is the difference between perception and reality. Feelings are sometimes influenced too much by the imagination. Even when two people have roughly the same motivations in equivalent circumstances, the role of imagination can lead to very different feelings. For example, one woman might imagine that her husband is cheating on her, while another woman has better awareness of what is happening in her marriage. Another factor besides imagination is focus. Some people focus only on certain kinds of details, such as the people who are described as looking through rose-colored glasses. Factors such as these make feelings dependent not only on motivations, but also on patterns of thought.

Patterns of thought include both overactive imagination and selective focus, as well as obsessive thinking, black-and-white thinking, and other distortions of thinking that can unduly influence a person's emotions. Thinking influences how we perceive the world, and this influences how we feel about things. Some patterns of thought may be due to motivations. For example, a selective focus on good things may be due to an aversion to unhappiness. Nevertheless, some patterns of thought could be due to something other than mere motivations. One possibility is inertia. A pattern of thought could have its origin in certain motivations and, through repetition, become a habit that outlives the original motivations. For example, a person might focus attention on the bright side of things to better survive a harsh environment but eventually find herself in a more hospitable environment.

Habits may also have roots in tangential motivations. For example, a person may pick up a habit out of the motivation to emulate a parent, who, as it happens, has that habit. Or a person may pick up habits simply by looking to others to know how to do things, then emulating what other people do. For example, a child can pick up habits from his parents without even having any motivation to be like his parents. It may just be that he hasn't learned how to do some things differently than his parents do them. It would be wonderful if having the right motivations would lead to the right behavior, but the truth is that a person can have the right motivations and still not know how to do things any differently than he has been doing them. There are times when a person needs to focus on changing his motivations, but there are also times when a person has to focus primarily on changing his habits.

Because habits cannot be reduced to motivations, and because habits are a part of character, Brandt's theory is not as fundamental as it originally seemed. Motivations are an important part of character, but habits are too. Habits include habits of feeling, habits of thinking, and habits of behavior. This accounts for the patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions that are part of the hybrid theory. What's left are capacities and intentions, and motivations can account for these no better than they can account for habits. As I already mentioned, intentions reflect decisions, whereas motivations do not. As for capacities, motivations may sometimes play a role in developing and encouraging them, but capacities cannot be reduced to motivations. For example, when I'm watching a foreign movie, I'm motivated to

understand the language it's in, but I still end up reading the subtitles, because my motivation doesn't give me any understanding of the language. Psychological capacities are based on natural mental abilities, which exist prior to motivation, as well as on learned and trained abilities, which take effort, not just motivation, to build.

Character is made up of habits, intentions, psychological capacities, and motivations, and none of these are reducible to the others. They are interrelated, but none can be described solely in terms of one of the others. Thus, none of these are the single fundamental building blocks of character, and any theory which describes character in terms of only one of these is incomplete. Aristotle's is incomplete for focusing only on habits, and Brandt's is incomplete for focusing only on motivations. The hybrid theory is the most comprehensive of the three, but it has the flaw of not being quite as fundamental as it should be.

The hybrid theory focuses on patterns instead of habits. It also fails to distinguish between habits and other components of character. It merely groups everything together as patterns. Patterns are a vague idea, and patterns do not refer to anything which belongs to a person. Patterns are epiphenomena, which is to say that they are caused by character but do not themselves have any effect on character or behavior. They are a reflection of character, but they are not the underlying character. In contrast, habits, intentions, psychological capacities, and motivations have real effects, and the causal relations they have to their effects are concrete and identifiable. So, instead of adopting one of the three theories under discussion, I am led to synthesize them into a new theory that identifies the components of character as habits, intentions, psychological capacities, and motivations.

At this point, the new theory contains all the components of character identified by the original theories, but it is still missing an important part of character. It is missing moral beliefs. A moral belief is not the same as a habit of thinking. Although beliefs influence how people think, they are not thinking habits. A habit of thought is some kind of tendency, such as the habit of focusing only on the positive. A belief is a mental affirmation of an idea, and a belief can be held without being consciously thought about. For example, I believe that the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal in length to the square root of the sum of the squares of the other two sides, but this belief rarely emerges into consciousness unless I am thinking about triangles. It normally remains in unconscious storage until it becomes useful. Also, a moral belief is not the same as a motivation. If a person is uninterested in morality, moral beliefs will not motivate him. But for a person who cares about morality, moral beliefs will have an important influence on his moral conduct. So besides habits, psychological capacities, intentions, and motivations, character also includes moral beliefs.

Let's now turn to the moral standard that will identify which habits, capacities, intentions, motivations, and beliefs are part of character. Borrowing the hybrid theory's standard, the new theory identifies character with those habits, intentions, moral beliefs, psychological capacities and motivations that have any bearing on moral matters, the happiness of oneself, or the happiness of others. On a cursory examination, this moral standard seems fine, but deeper examination reveals problems with it. Suppose, for example, that a person has the ability to play Chess well, which is a psychological ability, and he takes pride in this, which increases his happiness. In this manner, his ability to play Chess bears on his happiness, and this is enough, given this moral standard, to make his ability to play Chess well a part of his character. The qualities which make him a good Chess player may be part of his character, but it's wrong to consider a psychological ability part of character merely because having it contributes to his happiness. Thus, the moral standard, as it stands, is inadequate.

This might be fixed by distinguishing between direct and indirect influences. The ability to play Chess well indirectly influences his happiness by being a source of pride, but that is not the same as directly influencing his happiness. So let's suppose that the influence must be direct. Then character would be defined as those habits, beliefs, intentions, psychological capacities and motivations that directly bear on moral matters, the happiness of oneself, or the happiness of others. With this change, the pride

he took in playing Chess well would be part of his character, but the mere ability to play Chess well would not, per se, be part of his character. (The qualities that make him a good Chess player might, for other reasons, contribute to his character, but that is another matter.)

Since this modification rules out more than the original version, let's consider how much is ruled out. The ability to speak and understand a language certainly bears on happiness, for a common language helps make friendship possible, and friendship contributes to happiness. It also bears on moral conduct, because language helps a person read and understand moral theories and moral codes. But these are all indirect influences, and it does seem right not to include linguistic ability as part of a person's character.

Let's move on to what might be a character trait, but which might be ruled out by this modification. The habit of behaving in a friendly manner contributes to forming and maintaining friendships, which then contribute to happiness. Thus, it seems to have the same kind of relationship to happiness as understanding language has. It contributes to something that directly bears on happiness. Be that as it may, it also bears directly on moral conduct. A habit of behaving in a friendly manner predisposes a person away from some kinds of immoral behavior, such as treating people rudely when it's uncalled for. So this is not ruled out by the modification.

What might be ruled out is the idea that the happiness of others is directly relevant to what should be identified as character. Whenever one person does something for another, it seems that it can affect the other person's happiness only indirectly. For example, if one person declares his love for another, the other person will be happy for it only if it's something that she desires. Whether a person is happy ultimately depends on that person and no one else. Nevertheless, a person might contribute to another's happiness in a direct manner by learning what will make that person happy (or at least less unhappy) and doing it. For example, a mother might understand that her children are happier when fed than when left to starve, and she might directly contribute to their happiness by feeding them. Also, even without knowing what will make any individual happier, a person could directly contribute to overall happiness by doing something on a large scale that affects many people, with the predicted result that more people would be made happier by it than not. For example, a person could write an advice column that reaches many people with good advice. So, with some kind of appropriate knowledge of cause and effect, a person could directly influence the happiness of others.

It seems that the modification doesn't rule out anything that shouldn't have been ruled out. If that is correct, it will be futile to think up more possible counterexamples. Nevertheless, one other modification seems appropriate. The idea of "bearing on" seems vague. Character is dispositional in nature, yet the idea of "bearing on" doesn't fully capture this. It should be replaced with something that does. So let's revise the theory to say that a person's character is made up of all of his habits, moral beliefs, psychological capacities, intentions, and motivations that shape any dispositions of his that directly pertain to moral matters, personal happiness, or the happiness of others. Although this definition seems a bit stilted, it is formal and precise. It indicates that the components of character must belong to a single individual; it underscores the dispositional nature of character without making the mistake of identifying character traits with actual dispositions; and it makes clear that the relevant dispositions are those that directly influence a person in the matters that character is concerned with.

I believe this is a good theory of character. It explains why people do many of the things they do, including both intentional and unintentional behavior; it can help us predict what people will do; it provides a way for people to be held morally accountable for some kinds of unintentional behavior; and it can help us identify character traits. Furthermore, it identifies character with an identifiable part of a person that is relatively stable but also capable of changing over time. This is very important, because character is normally thought of as something that is relatively stable, gives shape to behavior, but is subject to change over time. Let's now turn to theories of an evil character.

Chapter 3
Simple Character Theories

The first chapter presented some simple theories of evil, and it concluded that the correct theory would be a character theory. This means that an evil person is someone with an evil character. However, there wasn't much to say about character theories in the first chapter, because we first had to understand what character is. This chapter will present some simple character theories and explain why each is incorrect. This will lay the groundwork for the guidelines that will be used in subsequent chapters for identifying the correct theory of evil.

3.1 BAD CHARACTER

The simplest character theory is that an evil character is the same as a bad character. A bad character is any character that normally predisposes a person toward doing what is bad or morally wrong and away from doing what is good and right. Since I'll be referring back to the idea of a bad character repeatedly, let me also just refer to all of this as bad behavior. So, in the more abbreviated way of putting it, a bad character is one that predisposes a person toward bad behavior. On any character theory of evil, an evil character will be one that predisposes a person toward bad behavior. On this theory, that's all an evil character is.

But this theory is wrong. There is more to having an evil character than having a bad character. An undeveloped character, such as the character of a baby or young child, is often bad without being evil. For example, young children can be mean, mischievous, and unruly, yet they are normally not evil. They are mainly immature and ignorant and don't fully realize the consequences of their actions. Because young children commonly have bad characters without being evil, it follows that an evil character is not the same as a bad character.

3.2 VERY BAD CHARACTER

Another simple character theory is that an evil character is a very bad character. "Very" is a generic intensifier, and it could be replaced with a stronger intensifier, such as "extremely" or "exceedingly." The full description of this theory will actually need two intensifiers. So let's use "exceptionally" for the stronger intensifier and "very" for the weaker intensifier. Rephrasing the theory, it says that an evil character is an exceptionally bad character. There are at least three main ways in which a character can be better or worse. These are strength, frequency, and enormity. A bad character which produces a *stronger* disposition toward bad behavior is worse, other things being equal, than one which produces a weaker disposition. A bad character which *frequently* predisposes a person toward bad behavior is worse, other things being equal, than one which predisposes a person toward bad behavior less frequently. A bad character which predisposes a person toward worse behavior, i.e. bad behavior of greater *enormity*, is worse, other things being equal, than one which predisposes a person to bad behavior of lesser enormity. Notice the use of "other things being equal" in each description of one of the factors. It is simple to judge which of two bad characters is worse when only one factor differs between them. But when two characters differ on more than one factor, it becomes more difficult to tell which is worse.

When more than one of these factors combine together in a character, it can be exceptionally bad even without any single factor being enough to make the character exceptionally bad on its own. For example, if a character very frequently and very strongly predisposes a person toward very bad behavior, it would also be an exceptionally bad character. Please note that "very" is intended as a weaker intensifier than "exceptional." It basically works like multiplication. When a single factor is on its own, it has to be

exceptional to make a character exceptionally bad. But when multiple factors work together, their effects multiply.

One difficulty with this theory is that it will require some kind of calculus of badness to determine whether anyone's character is evil. This difficulty is compounded by the difficulty of ascertaining values for each factor. There is no standard measure of these factors, and if we made one up, we still wouldn't be able to use it outside of abstract philosophical examples. Another problem with the theory is that external factors may influence these bad-making features. For example, a person may be more *strongly* disposed toward bad behavior in some circumstances, more *frequently* disposed to bad behavior in some circumstances, and disposed to *worse* behavior in some circumstances. One consequence is that each of two different characters may be better than the other in different circumstances.

Another problem with this theory is that there is nothing distinctive about an exceptionally bad character. On this theory, the only difference between the evil character and one which falls a bit short of being exceptionally bad is that the evil character is a bit more bad. Yet it seems that there should be something distinctive about being evil. Evil is supposed to be the strongest term of moral censure, and it loses its sting as a term of moral censure if something really minor could make the difference between being evil and not being evil. But something minor does make the difference if evil is nothing more than being bad to a high degree. So evil cannot be a mere matter of degree. Instead, an evil character must be a *kind* of bad character.

3.3 STRONGLY DISPOSED TO BAD BEHAVIOR

Bearing in mind that an evil character must be a kind of bad character, another simple theory is that an evil character is one that produces exceptionally strong dispositions toward bad behavior. As previously mentioned, there are at least three ways of measuring how bad a character is. One is how *strong* the dispositions it produces toward bad behavior are. This theory presents evil as a kind of bad character, because it focuses on one bad making characteristic instead of on them all. But this theory is flawed by its arbitrariness.

Evil is supposed to be our strongest term of moral censure, and if evil is a kind of bad character, it follows that an evil character will be the most morally objectionable kind of bad character there is. A character that produces exceptionally strong dispositions toward bad behavior is not the most morally objectionable kind of bad character. Let's contrast this with a character that produces with exceptional frequency moderately strong dispositions toward bad behavior of exceptional enormity. This is another kind of bad character, also based on the measures of a bad character mentioned in the previous section. It would be arbitrary to say that this is not evil while the character that is strongly disposed toward bad behavior is. It is not enough to single out one kind of bad character and arbitrarily choose to call it evil. An evil character will be the most morally objectionable kind of bad character, not any arbitrary kind.

3.4 SUMMATION OF GUIDELINES

In going over these simple character theories of evil, I have derived some guidelines for evaluating other theories. First, an evil character is a bad character. The main consequence of this is that an evil character is a character that predisposes a person toward bad behavior. Second, an evil character is a kind of bad character. This is distinguished from a character that is merely bad to a high degree. An evil character may very well be bad to a high degree, but this won't be all that makes it evil. An evil character will be evil because of something distinctive and morally censurable about an evil character. Third, an evil character is the most morally objectionable kind of bad character there is. Which kind of bad character is evil is not an arbitrary matter.

In the following chapters, these guidelines will be used to evaluate various theories of evil. The first two guidelines will guide the selection of theories. To be considered, a theory must describe evil as a kind of bad character. It does not have to say it in these terms, but it should be possible to apply these terms to it. The other guideline, that an evil character is the most morally objectionable kind of bad

character, will be used for comparing the theories with each other. This last guideline is a comparative guideline. It is not useful for selecting the theories to consider, but it will be useful for deciding which is best.

Chapter 4
John Kekes on Evil

In *Facing Evil*, John Kekes defines an evil person as a moral agent whose character is dominated by vices. His understanding of character already came up in the chapter on character. He defines a vice as a character trait for which people who have them "regularly, predictably, and habitually cause simple evil" (55). He defines simple evil as undeserved simple harm. By this he means simple harm for which there is no moral justification. He contrasts this with complex harm. Simple harm is the sort that counts as harm for anyone. It includes such things as physical pain, injury, and disability. Complex harm depends, according to Kekes, on someone's conception of the good life. The sort of things which count as complex harm for some people will not count as harm for others. One example is divorce. Divorce may leave some people devastated, which is bad, but liberate others to live better lives than they have been living, which is good.

4.1 KEKES' VICES ARE NOMOTHETIC

There is a serious problem with Kekes' theory right from the start. Even if an evil person is someone whose character is dominated by vices, this conception of an evil character does not work well with Kekes' own understanding of what a vice is. This can be seen in light of a distinction Alan Miller makes in his book *Personality Types: A Modern Synthesis*, according to which there are two kinds of traits: nomothetic and ideographic. Miller describes nomothetic traits as "what Allport refers to as *common* traits, dispositions that are relevant in describing everyone" (5). Writing about ideographic traits, Miller says, "These traits, which are sometimes referred to as *personal* traits, are thought to be unique to each individual and are largely irrelevant when applied to others" (6). Since "common" and "personal" are more familiar words, I will use these to describe the distinction.

Kekes' theory works well with common character traits, but it makes no provision for and does not work well with personal traits. The difference between a common and a personal trait is in the level of abstraction at which we identify the trait. A common trait is a trait understood at a high level of abstraction, and a personal trait is so particular, it can belong to only one individual. Thus, common traits may be shared by many individuals, and personal traits can be shared by none.

At the most basic level, a trait is made up of various psychological properties. Psychological properties are unique to the individual who has them, and at this level a person's character traits are unique to the individual. This is the sense in which character traits are personal. No two people have the same personal character traits, and we do not customarily name personal character traits. But we do name character traits. We speak of traits like courage, temperance, and fortitude, and we readily ascribe the same traits to different individuals. In this sense, we are speaking of traits at a higher level of abstraction. We are identifying something in one person and something else in another person which we can identify by the same name. It is in this sense that character traits are common.

Kekes' theory of evil works only with common traits, because it refers to vices in a way that works only if the vices are common. Kekes has defined a vice as a character trait for which people who have them "regularly, predictably, and habitually cause simple evil" (55). This provides us with a basis for distinguishing between traits only for traits belonging to multiple individuals. When traits belong to multiple individuals, as common traits do, then we can identify vices as those for which most people who have them regularly, predictably, and habitually cause simple evil. But when it comes to personal traits,

no more than one person has any of them. So, if a person regularly, predictably, and habitually caused simple evil, all of his personal traits would be vices. This is because everyone who possesses each of these traits would regularly, predictably, and habitually cause simple evil. But we cannot rule out the possibility that some personal traits will be virtues even when the dominant ones are vices. Therefore, Kekes' definition of a vice is not suitable for personal traits.

However, this is not a fatal flaw to his theory. We may just presume that his theory refers only to common traits and makes no reference to personal traits. Since common and personal traits are just two ways of speaking about the same thing, and not separate components of character, nothing essential is lost by speaking of one and not the other. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated shortly, this fact about Kekes' theory is important, for it will lead to a contradiction in his theory. But before getting to that, let's turn to other details about Kekes' theory.

4.2 THREE TYPES OF VICE: INSUFFICIENCY, EXPEDIENCY, AND MALEVOLENCE

According to Kekes, insufficiency, expediency, and malevolence are the three main vices people have, and all other vices are forms of these three. He maintains that these three vices are the means by which contingency, indifference, and destructiveness are expressed through human agency. He recognizes these as the three ways we are vulnerable to evil. Contingency means that we don't all come into the world with the same abilities and advantages. Some people are strong, good-looking, rich, intelligent, etc., through the luck of birth, and other people are not. We do not all start out equal. Indifference refers to nature's indifference to what happens to us. A hurricane doesn't care whether it destroys good or bad people. Bad things can happen to good people and good things to bad people. Nature isn't keeping score and could care less. If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, nature isn't going to step aside because you're a good person. Finally, destructiveness is sometimes part of human motivation. People sometimes seek to destroy each other or each other's happiness instead of doing good things for one another.

Insufficiency is the expression of contingency in human agency. People have different capabilities, largely because they are born with different capabilities. Because of this, some people are lacking in various abilities. "The lack may be cognitive, emotive, or volitional" (71). This covers the main types of habits identified with character in chapter two. These were habits of thinking (cognitive), habits of feeling (emotive), and habits of action (volitional). This also reflects three of the other components of character: moral beliefs (cognitive), motivations (emotive), and intentions (volitional). The other component of character, which is psychological capacities, touches on all three areas. Cognitive insufficiency may include stupidity, dogmatism, and some kinds of insanity. Emotive insufficiency may include insensitivity, lack of empathy, and weak motivation. Volitional insufficiency may include cowardice, weakness of will, and laziness. Vices of insufficiency are all the negative vices, those that result from the absence of ability rather than from the presence of something bad.

Expediency is the expression of indifference in human agency. It is the vice of not caring enough about any consequences of your actions except your goals. An expedient person focuses on his goals, and if he happens to do unjustified harm along the way, it's of little or no concern to him. For example, in the movie *The Usual Suspects*, we are told that assassins broke into Keyser Soze's home to kill him. Soze picked up a gun, and instead of attacking his assailants, he killed his wife and children. This terrified his assailants, and they ran away. Soze believed that in his business, which was crime, he had to be willing to do whatever it took to stay alive and get ahead. Killing his family, whom he presumably loved, was the ultimate expression of expediency, for he sacrificed them to save his own life. Two forms of expediency Kekes identifies are selfishness and fanaticism. A selfish person focuses on what will benefit him, and a fanatic puts some cause above everything else. Soze is an example of selfishness. Good examples of

fanaticism include idealistic Communist revolutionaries, who willingly killed innocent people for the sake of bringing about the utopian vision of Communism.

Malevolence is the expression of destructiveness in human agency. A malevolent person wants to harm people. This may be for the sake of revenge, hatred, or cruelty. Insufficiency means that a person doesn't know any better or can't help what he does. Expediency means that a person doesn't care about some important consequences of his actions. Malevolence means that a person wants to cause harm.

4.3 A Contradiction in Kekes

The vices Kekes has named are common vices, for they are the sort that different people can share in common. As a consequence of this, it is possible, on his theory, for someone's character to be dominated by vices without that person causing any evil. Yet Kekes also asserts the opposite of this when he says, "If the dominant character traits are vices, then their agents are regular sources of evil" (48). So there is a contradiction in Kekes' thinking about evil. His definition of an evil person allows for the possibility that an evil person will not commit any evil, yet he also denies this possibility by saying that an evil person will commit acts of simple evil.

In case this isn't immediately obvious, let me explain why Kekes' theory allows for the possibility that an evil person will not commit any acts of simple evil. An evil person, according to this theory, has a character dominated by vices. What makes a trait a vice on this theory is a statistical relationship between the trait and the people who have it. If some significant majority of people with a trait regularly, habitually, and predictably cause simple evil, then it counts as a vice. This carries with it a high probability that anyone with the trait will also cause simple evil, but it comes with no guarantee of this. Someone could, for example, be dominated by malevolence and actively seek to harm people, yet through regular bumbling always fail to harm anyone. Likewise, someone dominated by expediency could always have the good luck to never have to hurt anyone to get what he wants. So someone could be dominated by vices yet never commit any act of simple evil.

Nevertheless, this contradiction is not fatal to Kekes' theory of evil, for it is a contradiction between his theory and a belief of his that is not essential to his theory. Rather, Kekes is just mistaken about the consequences of his theory.

4.4 Statistics Don't Make a Vice

The problems mentioned for Kekes' theory have not proven fatal, but they are rooted in a more serious problem. Kekes has given a statistical definition of a vice. He identifies a vice as a character trait that is strongly correlated with acts of simple evil. It is not important what Kekes says character traits must be correlated with to count as vices. The problem is that he thinks correlation makes something a vice. If vices have any relation to simple evil, it is that they *cause* or *predispose* people to commit acts of simple evil, not that they are merely correlated with simple evil in some way. Vices are strongly correlated with simple evil, but it is the vice that makes the correlation and not the correlation that makes the vice. Vices play a causal role in bringing about simple evil, and this is what accounts for their strong correlation with it.

4.5 Replacing Kekes' Definition of Vice

In place of Kekes' definition of a vice, I propose that a vice is a character trait that predisposes a person to commit acts of simple evil. In my chapter on character I concluded that "a person's character is made up of all of his habits, moral beliefs, psychological capacities, intentions, and motivations that shape any dispositions of his that directly pertain to moral matters, personal happiness, or the happiness of others." So, a character trait would be a distinguishable aspect of a person's character, such as a particular value, motivation, habit, etc., or some combination of these, that is responsible for certain dispositions. So a vice would be an identifiable component of a person's character that predisposes the person toward bad behavior.

With this modified definition of a vice, let's continue with Kekes' idea that an evil person is someone whose character is dominated by vices. Character is made up of various components that influence actions and choices. In someone dominated by vices, his vices would have the predominant influence over his actions and choices. Thus, his actions and choices would regularly reflect and give expression to his dominant vices. So, an evil person would normally commit acts of simple evil on a regular basis. Moral luck leaves open the possibility that some evil people would never commit acts of simple evil, but overall the great majority of evil people would regularly commit such acts.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

The theory we've ended up with is not Kekes' exact theory. I had to do some tweaking to eliminate ambiguity and contradiction. The resulting theory is that an evil character is one dominated by vices, and it is understood that the three main types of vices are malevolence, insufficiency, and expediency. A vice is understood to be a character trait that regularly, habitually, and predictably *predisposes* anyone with the vice to commit acts of simple evil. People who are predisposed to commit acts of simple evil normally will commit such acts, but moral luck allows for the possibility that some people so predisposed won't commit any acts of simple evil.

4.7 EVALUATING THE MODIFIED THEORY

One of the strongest criticism of this understanding of evil focuses on specific vices. According to this theory, a character dominated by any single vice will be enough to count a person as evil. Kekes has described three broad categories of vice, making it clear what sorts of traits he regards as vices. These categories are insufficiency, expediency, and malevolence. Other vices are more specific forms of these three types. For example, dogmatism and insensitivity are forms of insufficiency; selfishness and fanaticism are forms of expediency; and wrath and spite are forms of malevolence. According to Kekes, any character trait that is a form of one of these three is also a vice. Yet there seem to be some vices, understanding vices along these lines, that could dominate a person's character without making him evil, and on that basis this theory seems wrong.

The best examples come from insufficiency. Vices of insufficiency result from a lack of something, and according to Kekes this lack may be cognitive, emotive, or volitional. Consider babies. Babies are severely lacking in all three areas. They know next to nothing, their understanding of other people's emotions is poorly developed, and they haven't learned to stick to a plan of action. Babies are full of vices of insufficiency. It would seem that their characters are dominated by insufficiency. So, according to Kekes' theory, babies would be evil. Certainly, babies are not saints, but it stretches a theory of evil too far when it includes babies as evil. So, either there is more to being evil than having a character dominated by vices, or traits of insufficiency are not always vices, or a baby's character isn't truly dominated by vices of insufficiency.

The point we should consider first is whether this is a valid example of a character dominated by traits of insufficiency. It is true that traits of insufficiency are predominant in a baby's character, at least insofar as predominant means "being most frequent or common," but this is not the same as saying they are predominant in the sense of "having superior strength, influence, or authority" (*Merriam Webster*). *Webster's Dictionary* distinguishes between the nuances of meaning between synonyms, and in its entry for "dominant," it says that it "applies to something that is uppermost because ruling or controlling." Yet the absence of something cannot rule or control a person's character.

Instead, traits of insufficiency play a more passive role in influencing conduct. Some traits of insufficiency will remove obstacles to more active influences. For example, if a person lacks empathy, he may be more inclined to act on any impulses he has to hurt people. But it is his malevolence that controls his decision, and his lack of empathy merely fails to stand in its way. The dominant trait here is the malevolence, which grew dominant because it was unopposed by empathy. Other traits of insufficiency will contribute to wrongdoing by failing to support the good influences in a person's character. For

example, empathy would give a person greater resolve to do good for other people, and a lack of empathy would result in a diminished resolve to do good, even if the person otherwise believed something was the right thing to do. So traits of insufficiency influence which traits become dominant in a person's character, because they fail to oppose bad traits, and they fail to support good traits. But traits of insufficiency do not otherwise control a person's character. Therefore, traits of insufficiency cannot dominate a person's character.

So Kekes' theory does not entail that babies are evil. Although traits of insufficiency are predominant in a baby's character, they do not dominate it. A baby would be evil only if its insufficiencies allowed some very bad traits to gain dominance in the character. But this doesn't normally happen with babies. The largely undeveloped character of a baby hasn't yet developed strong tendencies toward good or bad. Without the presence of bad influences to dominate an otherwise undeveloped character, a baby would not be evil.

One more criticism of Kekes' theory comes from Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, who mentions Kekes' theory of evil in his book *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*. Thomas writes in a footnote, "Kekes, *Facing Evil*, initially characterizes evil as undeserved harm. This seems to get the discussion off on the wrong foot" (73-74). Although Thomas doesn't discuss Kekes' theory in detail, the weight of this criticism can be seen in the contrast between Kekes' theory and Thomas's. Regarding an evil person, Thomas says, "an evil person or–as I prefer to say, for reasons that will soon become clear–a person with an evil character is one who is often enough prone to do evil acts" (82). So far, this seems a lot like Kekes' theory. As Kekes' understands evil acts, his theory describes an evil person in much the same way. The difference between their theories lies mainly in how each understands an evil act. For Kekes, an evil act is merely a harmful act, whereas for Thomas, "an evil act must be a wrong act, done in the appropriate way, that has the right moral gravity to it" (78). None of these conditions apply to an evil act as Kekes understands it. All that makes an act count as evil for Kekes is that it harms someone, and an evil person on his theory is essentially someone who is often enough prone to harm people. Yet Thomas emphasizes that this is just mistaken. He writes,

> **A harmful act is just that–one that causes harm. Nothing is gained by treating all harmful acts as evil acts. For, philosophically, we would have to distinguish, among the class of evil acts, between intentional and nonintentional evil acts. And among intentional evil acts we would then need to distinguish between those that issue from delight in causing the harm of another and those that do not. And so on. By the time we finished our litany of distinctions, we would be mirroring the very distinction between harmful and evil acts, that we had obliterated in the first place. This does not make for philosophical progress. (78)**

In light of what Thomas has to say, it turns out that Kekes has merely identified someone with an evil character with someone who has a harmful character. A harmful character counts as a kind of bad character, since some bad characters, such as a baby's bad character, may be relatively harmless–but it seems wrong to regard a harmful character as the morally worst kind of bad character. Generally, having the tendency to cause harm is not as morally reprehensible as having the tendency to intentionally and knowingly commit immoral acts of severe moral gravity while also enjoying what one is doing. By including all harmful characters as evil, Kekes seems to apply the label of evil too broadly, describing as evil many who are not evil. In contrast, Thomas's theory may be too narrow, but it doesn't seem too broad. Although Thomas's presentation of his own theory is very skeletal, the next theory to be discussed introduces concepts that will help to flesh out what is contained in Thomas's theory. It will also provide a framework for understanding and comparing other theories. After reviewing the next theory, we will return to Thomas's theory.

Chapter 5
Immoral and Wicked

This theory builds on some of the ideas presented by Kekes, and particularly on some of the issues I raised in criticizing his theory. Kekes had divided vices into three main categories: insufficiency, expediency, and malevolence. Vices of insufficiency are passive. They do not actively predispose a person toward wrongdoing. Insufficiency merely fails to put up sufficient resistance against the tendencies a person does have toward wrongdoing. In contrast to insufficiency, malevolence is active. It actively predisposes a person toward wrongdoing, particularly toward wrongdoing that involves harming people. Expediency is a blend of passive and active influences. It involves a strong desire for something that may or may not be immoral coupled with a lack of moral restraint against doing whatever it takes to get it.

Instead of making the tripartite distinction that Kekes makes between vices, this theory is based on the dual distinction that Kekes' tripartite distinction helps to reveal. This dual distinction is between active and passive vices. Active vices predispose a person toward doing what is morally wrong, and passive vices predispose a person away from what is morally right. For example, rage is an active vice, because it predisposes a person to hurt others, and callousness is a passive vice, because it predisposes a person away from helping others. This distinction leads to a distinction between two kinds of bad character. One is the immoral character, and the other is the wicked character.

The immoral character is the opposite of a moral character. A moral character is dominated by virtues, and it strongly predisposes a person toward doing what is moral. In contrast, an immoral character is lacking in virtues, and it fails to sufficiently predispose a person toward doing what is moral. The wicked character is the opposite of an innocent character. A wicked character is dominated by vices, and it strongly predisposes a person toward doing what is immoral. This is very similar to the sort of character that was identified by the modified version of Kekes' theory. In contrast to a wicked character, an innocent character is lacking in vices and is not strongly disposed toward doing what is morally wrong.

One possibility is to identify an evil character with either a wicked character or an immoral character. Both are distinctly different kinds of bad character. Between these two, a wicked character may seem worse, because it actively predisposes a person toward wrongdoing. Yet, if we are to compare them, we must compare each one in isolation from the other. So we must compare a wicked and moral character with an innocent and immoral character. A wicked and moral character is one that is in conflict between a person's moral side and wicked side. If the moral side is strong enough, the character as a whole might not be especially bad. Although the wicked side will predispose someone toward wrongdoing, the moral side will temper those predispositions. In contrast, an innocent and immoral character lacks the inner conflict of a wicked and moral character. But it also lacks direction. Without a wicked character, an immoral character may not lead a person very far into evildoing. In isolation from the other, a wicked or immoral character is limited in how far it can predispose a person toward wrongdoing or away from doing what it right. But when a character is both wicked and immoral, the potential for evildoing greatly increases. Thus, neither a wicked character nor an immoral character seems to be what we should identify as an evil character. But the combination of these may be.

A wicked and immoral character combines the wicked character's predispositions toward wrongdoing with the immoral character's lack of resistance to such predispositions. The result is a person who engages in wrongdoing much more freely and deliberately than someone whose character is wicked or immoral but not both. To flesh out this theory, let's now turn to the ways in which a character can be immoral or wicked.

5.1 IMMORALITY

In his book *Immorality*, Ronald Milo describes six types of immorality. By immorality, he means more than a failure to do what is right. What he specifically has in mind is a morally blameworthy failure to do what is right. The six types of immorality are perverse wickedness, amorality, moral negligence, moral weakness, moral indifference, and preferential wickedness. Detailed descriptions will follow these brief descriptions. Perverse wickedness is when a person's wrongdoing was permitted or even required by false moral beliefs. Amorality is when one's wrongdoing stems from not having any or not thinking about one's moral beliefs. Moral negligence is when someone mistakenly believes that his wrongdoing was permitted or required by his moral beliefs. Moral weakness is when someone understands that an action is wrong and takes this as a reason not to do it but fails to do what is right out of a lack of moral strength. Moral indifference is when someone understands that an action is wrong but doesn't care. Preferential wickedness is when someone understands that an action is wrong but values something else above morality.

Before discussing each type individually, let me point out some similarities and differences. The first three types–perverse wickedness, amorality, and moral negligence–are types of ignorance (11). Perverse wickedness is ignorance of correct moral principles. Moral negligence is ignorance as to the right application of moral principles. And amorality is ignorance of morality. All three are ways in which a person can do something wrong without knowing it. The other three types–moral weakness, moral indifference, and preferential wickedness–all presuppose the knowledge (or at least belief) that an action is wrong (11-12). They differ on why someone behaves immorally despite this knowledge. A morally weak person lacks strength of character. A morally indifferent person doesn't care about morality. A preferentially wicked person values something else above morality. Based on this brief introduction, it may seem that the three types based on ignorance cannot be blameworthy types of immorality. But Milo maintains that they are morally blameworthy, and the reasons for this should come out in the lengthier descriptions of each type of immorality, to which we now turn.

5.1.1   Perverse Wickedness

Perverse wickedness consists in doing what is wrong because it was permitted or required by false moral beliefs (29). Milo emphasizes that something counts as perverse wickedness only if a person's most basic moral beliefs are mistaken. These could include, for example, the belief that it is morally wrong to harm one's child, but they would not include a Christian Scientist's belief that it would be wrong to give medical treatment to a seriously ill child (40). The distinction here is that the Christian Scientist's belief is derivative, not fundamental. The Christian Scientist does not believe that it is morally acceptable to harm his child. Rather, he believes that faith-healing is a better method for treating the child's illness than medical treatment. Thus, the Christian Scientist's mistake is in the application of his moral beliefs, which is moral negligence, not in his most fundamental moral beliefs.

Given that a perversely wicked person has false moral beliefs, it may seem that a person can be perversely wicked only if cognitivism is true. Cognitivism is the meta-ethical theory which maintains that moral beliefs are meaningful and have truth values. It is contrasted with noncognitivism, which maintains that moral beliefs do not refer to facts but instead serve other purposes, such as expressing approval, commanding an action, or prescribing an action. As William K. Frankena puts it, noncognitivism "holds that ethical judgements are not assertions or statements ascribing properties to (or denying them of) actions, persons, or things, and insists that they have a very different 'logic,' meaning, or use" (105). For example, one of the noncognitivist theories, emotivism, maintains that a statement like "Killing is wrong" is like "Killing, boo!" (Frankena 105) "Rudolf Carnap," Frankena says, "once took a similar view, except that he interpreted 'Killing is wrong' as a command, 'Do not kill' [. . .]" (105). Although Frankena regards views such as these as naive and false, he is impressed with some of the more sophisticated and less extreme forms of noncognitivism. He says,

More recently, from a number of Oxford philosophers and others, we have had still less extreme views. They refuse to regard ethical judgements as mere expressions or evocations of feeling or attitude, as mere commands, or as arbitrary decisions or commitments. Rather, they regard them as evaluations, recommendations, prescriptions, and the like; and they stress the fact that such judgments imply that we are willing to generalize or universalize them and are ready to reason about them, points with which we have agreed. That is, they point out that when we say of something that it is good or right, we imply that there are reasons for our judgment which are not purely persuasive and private in their cogency. (106)

Given that some noncognitivist theories seem respectable and worth looking at, it seems that this would pose a problem for accepting that perverse wickedness is possible. If moral beliefs cannot rightly be described as true or false, it would seem that no one can have false moral beliefs. Milo does argue against noncognitivism, but he doesn't do that in the context of perverse wickedness. Instead, he provides both cognitive and noncognitive interpretations of perverse wickedness. Only the cognitive interpretation describes perverse wickedness in terms of false moral beliefs. The noncognitive interpretation describes it in terms of bad moral beliefs (Milo 36).

On some of the simpler noncognitive theories, such as emotivism, it may be hard to make sense of the notion of a bad moral belief. But when Milo speaks of noncognitivism, he seems to have in mind some of the more respectable and less extreme theories Frankena was referring to. For example, he speaks of noncognitive moral beliefs as though they must be universalizable (38). Given that the better noncognitive theories let people reason about morality, some moral beliefs could be more rational than others, and this is one respect in which some moral beliefs could be better than others.

Ultimately, Milo believes that perverse wickedness is impossible, because he is a cognitivist, and he has problems with the cognitivist interpretation. Although he recognizes that people can have false moral beliefs that are derivative, such as the beliefs that lead Christian Scientists to harm their children, he is incredulous at the idea that anyone can fail to have the most basic of moral beliefs, such as that it is *prima facie* wrong to kill. In support of this position, Milo gives some examples to show the absurdity of people holding false moral beliefs of a fundamental nature. He says, "It seems [. . .] absurd to suppose that someone believes that what one is morally required to do is to cause as much pain or suffering as possible–that it is morally wrong to fail to maximize misery and unhappiness" (50). In discussing the idea that "Hitler believed that it was his duty to kill Jews," Milo says,

Perhaps he believed that Jews were a menace to all other human beings and hence had to be destroyed in order to save civilization. If he really believed this, or managed to convince himself of this in order to justify his dislike of Jews, then it makes sense to suppose that he was morally required to kill Jews. Notice, however, that we do not suppose that he believed there is nothing wrong about killing other human beings; nor do we suppose that he believed that it would not be wrong to kill Jews even if they did not pose any threat to other human beings. (51)

Despite Milo's incredulity at the prospect of perverse wickedness in its cognitive interpretation, I don't share the full extent of his skepticism. Although I agree with the absurdity of believing in a duty to maximize suffering, and although I think his remarks on Hitler are reasonable, I still believe that perverse wickedness is possible. Nihilism is technically a form of perverse wickedness, because, as far as moral beliefs go, it is distinguished by the moral belief that everything is permissible. Someone can find himself in this position when he bases all his moral beliefs on a belief in God, then suddenly finds himself converted to atheism. Although atheism is not equivalent to nihilism, a sudden conversion to atheism could drop a person into nihilism when he has previously been convinced that God is the source of all morality. The conversion can leave the former theist without his moral bearings, leading him to believe that everything is permitted. In fact, this possibility is the source for the prejudice on the part of some theists that atheists have no morals. Although this possibility is no real criticism of atheism, it reveals the possibility of nihilism, which reveals the possibility of perverse wickedness in its cognitive interpretation.

Nevertheless, perverse wickedness may be rare, for it is more than the mere presence of false moral beliefs. Perverse wickedness happens only when false moral beliefs account for someone's wrongdoing.

Given the absurdity in someone holding a fundamental moral principle that actively favors wrongdoing, perverse wickedness may rarely be a source of wrongdoing. Nevertheless, nihilists may sometimes do immoral acts on the mistaken belief that they are morally permissible. This would count as perverse wickedness.

Insofar as it is possible to hold false moral beliefs at the most fundamental level, this seems to be something a person would be morally responsible for. Milo maintains that perverse wickedness, assuming it exists, is mainly due to bad preferences (234). This means that a person will prefer other concerns over the usual concerns of morality. For example, a person might place inordinate value on his art, his country, or his race–and not so much on compassion. Milo prefers to describe something like this as preferential wickedness, but a noncognitive understanding of moral terms allows it to be understood as perverse wickedness.

5.1.2 Amorality

Amorality is generally ignorance of morality itself. More specifically, it is the absence of moral convictions, or at least the failure to apply one's moral principles (57). One sort of amoral person may be the psychopath, whom Peck has described as "blissfully lacking a sense of morality" (*People of the Lie* 76). Other writers, including Milo, do not support this notion of a psychopath, but another suitable term for what Peck is describing is moral imbecile. A moral imbecile is generally someone who has been unable to develop a sense of right and wrong, because there is something wrong with his mind. Moral imbeciles basically have a learning disability when it comes to morality. They may understand that society disapproves of some actions and so hide what they do, but this doesn't translate into an understanding that their actions are morally wrong. Still, the people we would normally be most inclined to call moral imbeciles are the people identified as psychopaths. Assuming that psychopaths are not actually moral imbeciles, as Milo and others contend, this calls into question the idea that there are many moral imbeciles.

With respect to psychopaths, Milo suggests that "the most distinguishing characteristic of the psychopath is that he is entirely egocentric, without any concern whatsoever for the needs and interests of others" (61). Although Milo doubts that psychopaths lack knowledge of morality, he still identifies them as amoral–though for a different reason. He says, "I am inclined to think that the amorality of the psychopath consists, not in a lack of moral understanding, but rather in his indifference to the rightness or wrongness of what he does" (63). My first impression on reading this was that he was describing the psychopath as morally indifferent rather than as amoral. To some extent, he is. He goes on to describe two ways in which the psychopath's indifference can influence him. One way is that he may not be moved to act by his moral judgements. This is moral indifference. The other way is that he may not bother to make moral judgements. This counts as amorality, because the wrongdoing that stems from this is due to the absent influence of moral convictions, not to any indifference to any particular moral beliefs.

Another type of amorality is due to the lack of moral convictions pertaining to a certain deed, as distinguished from the complete lack of any moral beliefs. A person may know the difference between right and wrong but still lack complete moral knowledge. As with perverse wickedness, Milo doubts that a cognitive interpretation of this sort of amorality accurately describes anyone. On any cognitive interpretation of morality, a person will know right from wrong by knowing what right and wrong mean, and this knowledge, Milo believes, will give one knowledge of the most basic moral principles, such as killing another person is *prima facie* wrong. Although some people clearly lack moral convictions that other people hold, Milo would interpret this as disagreement on derivative moral principles. For example, many people lack moral convictions against abortion–yet this is not because they lack the moral conviction that killing another person is *prima facie* wrong. Instead, some don't regard a fetus as a person, and some regard a woman's right to control her own body to be a greater right than the fetus's right to go on living.

What seems to be another type of amorality is the belief that everything is morally permitted, but this actually counts as perverse wickedness and was already brought up in the previous section. The difference between this and true amorality is that this sort of person holds the moral belief that everything is permitted, whereas the truly amoral person doesn't base his actions on moral beliefs.

The type of amorality Milo finds most believable is very similar to moral indifference, and it was alluded to in his understanding of a psychopath. This is the type of amorality that results from an indifference to whether one's actions are right or wrong. The indifference here is a general indifference to moral concerns, not a specific indifference to specific moral beliefs. The result of this general indifference is a failure to consider whether one's acts are right or wrong. Thus, an amoral person, out of a general indifference to morality, fails to make moral judgments, and this leads to the person acting without any guidance from morality.

Yet this type of amorality makes sense only on a cognitivist interpretation of morality, not on a noncognitivist one. Milo presumes that any noncognitivist interpretation of reality holds that someone holds a con attitude toward anything he regards as morally wrong. Thus, on a noncognitivist interpretation, the indifference here would be indifference to whether one had any con attitudes toward anything. In other words, it would be not caring about whether one cared, and that seems absurd. But Milo is a cognitivist, and he argues against noncognitivism in the section on moral indifference. I will cover this issue in more detail in the section on moral indifference.

5.1.3   Moral Negligence

Moral negligence, as Milo defines it, is "culpable ignorance of the fact that one's act violates one's own moral principles" (83). In *People of the Lie*, Peck gives a good example of extreme moral negligence. A boy named Stuart killed himself with a .22 caliber rifle, and a year later his parents gave the same rifle to his brother Bobby as a Christmas present. This act was immoral because it amounted to telling Bobby to follow in his brother's shoes and go kill himself. Peck confronted the parents with this, and the father said, "No, we didn't think about that. We're not educated people like you. We haven't been to college and learned all kinds of fancy ways of thinking. We're just simple working people. We can't be expected to think of all these things" (57). The father's words indicate that their fault was moral negligence. They didn't understand the consequences of giving their son the same weapon his brother used to commit suicide. Besides that, any decent human being should have understood these consequences. Their ignorance was culpable. They really should have known better. Even worse, the father tried to justify his negligence by saying he's simple and uneducated. This just compounds error on error, making this an example of gross moral negligence.

Milo distinguishes between four types of moral negligence. These are impulsiveness, carelessness, recklessness, and self-deception. The first two are types of inadvertent moral negligence, and the other two are types of willful moral negligence (113-114). Someone who acts impulsively acts without thinking at all about moral considerations that may pertain to what he does. One who acts carelessly notes some morally relevant features of his actions but neglects others. One who acts recklessly is aware of some features that may make an act morally wrong, but he deliberately disregards this and hopes that his action won't be morally wrong. Someone who is guilty of self-deception knows in his heart that an action is wrong but has deceived himself into thinking that his action is right. These are the types of moral negligence in brief. I will now expand on them.

Some people have poor impulse control and will blow up at people at the slightest provocation. This is an example where a person's moral convictions against acts of violence do not stop him from acting violently toward those around him. Many of the guests on Jerry Springer, as well as many other daytime talk shows, seem to illustrate impulsiveness. They say stupid and insulting things without thinking, and they attack each other with little provocation. Even if much of the behavior on that show is staged, it is

still ample evidence that many people actually behave with poor impulse control. The guests could not all exhibit the signs of poor impulse control so well if they were all unaccustomed to poor impulse control.

Peck's example of the parents who gave their son the rifle his brother used to kill himself illustrates carelessness. They thought a gun like this was a good Christmas present for a boy, but they failed to consider reasons why giving him this gun was a very bad idea. But this example could also illustrate self-deception. Suppose they knew in their hearts that this was wrong, as you might imagine anyone would, but they also felt hostility toward their son. Believing that parents aren't supposed to feel this way about their children, they repress their hostility and don't own that it's there. This repressed hostility works at deceiving their conscious minds into thinking that the gun is a good present for their son. If this is what really happened, and it is possible that this is what happened, then their action is an example of self-deception.

A good example of moral recklessness are the actions of the superhero Ozymandius in Alan Moore's graphic novel *The Watchmen*. The story takes place in the mid 1980s, in a world with strong tensions between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Ozymandius is the most intelligent man in the world, and he concocts a plot to make the two nuclear superpowers into allies, thereby averting nuclear war. This plot involves tricking the entire world into thinking that an alien invasion is imminent, so that everyone will unite against the threat of a common enemy. But part of the plot involves obliterating much of New York City without giving anyone any warning. This is to make people think that the aliens have begun to attack Earth. Ozymandius follows through with his plot and destroys much of New York City. He is aware that killing innocent people is a wrong making factor about what he is doing, but he expects that the good he does will outweigh the harm.

5.1.4   Moral Indifference

We now turn from wrongdoing done out of ignorance to wrongdoing done with the belief that what is done is wrong. Moral indifference is when someone does something wrong despite his knowledge that it is wrong because he doesn't care that it is wrong. According to a meta-ethical theory called internalism, moral indifference is impossible. Milo describes internalism as "the thesis which holds that having some con-attitude toward an act is a necessary condition of believing it to be morally wrong" (141). If anyone who believes something is wrong necessarily holds a con attitude toward it, then the belief that something is wrong always gives a person some motivation against doing it, making it impossible to both regard something as morally wrong and to not care that it is morally wrong. But Milo does not accept internalism, and he argues against it.

As Milo understands internalism, it is rooted in certain noncognitive analyses of what it means to hold a moral belief. For noncognitivists, the concept of morally wrong does not describe a property. It is not meaningful in a cognitive sense, but it does have its uses. Although there are different noncognitive theories on what this use is, noncognitive theories generally agree that someone who regards something as morally wrong has a con attitude toward it. For a noncognitivist, this is just part of what calling something morally wrong signifies. Whether the actual use of morally wrong is a jeer, a command, a recommendation, a prescription, or something else, part of what it means to honestly jeer, forbid, or prescribe against is to hold a con attitude. So, if some noncognitivist theory of morality is true, no one can be morally indifferent. Anyone who thought that something was morally wrong, in the proper sense identified by the correct theory, would care that it is morally wrong, for he would hold a con attitude against doing it. This is distinguished from someone misusing the term 'morally wrong' in a way that lets him believe that something is 'morally wrong' without caring about it. Even if some noncognitivist theory is true, this could still happen, but it is not what would properly be identified as moral indifference.

Milo disagrees with noncognitivism, and so do I. One of the problems with noncognitivism is that it fails to suitably distinguish between moral disapproval and other kinds of disapproval. For example, if killing is wrong means something like "Killing, boo!", it doesn't seem that it would be any different than

what is meant when someone boos a bad performance. If it means "do not kill," it doesn't seem any different than something like "do not move your King into check when playing Chess." Although these examples come from the less sophisticated forms of noncognitivism, more sophisticated forms do not fare much better. One of the best forms of noncognitivism is prescriptivism, according to which terms like ought, right, and wrong express universalized imperatives. For example, "killing is wrong" would mean something like "let no one kill." This is different than the mere "do not kill," because it extends to everyone. It is somewhat better at distinguishing between moral and nonmoral evaluations than other noncognitivist theories. Generally, someone will universalize a prescription only when he can honestly commit himself to prescribing that everyone do as he prescribes under any and all circumstances. For example, someone might honestly make it a universal prescription that no one should ever kill another person, but it is less likely that someone could make it a universal prescription that anyone playing Smess[4] should keep his Brain safe from capture. Even though I accept this as a general principle of sound Smess strategy, I would be willing to play Smess differently for even a small financial incentive, whereas I would more strongly stand by a principle against killing another person. Nevertheless, even a principle against killing another person may have exceptions. For example, some people regard abortion, euthanasia, or execution as exceptions to the rule against killing another person. Thus, under prescriptivism, people might not be able to honestly say that anything is wrong without enumerating more qualifications than is humanly possible. Some people might stick to their guns and make very simple prescriptions, but they would often wind up in moral dilemmas between competing prescriptions. Instead of making general prescriptions, people might taylor their prescriptions to specific circumstances, saying, for example, in a situation that meets this large set of parameters, killing another person is wrong. But I could do exactly the same thing with recommendations on how to play games, such as prescribing that anyone who plays Smess under ordinary conditions should avoid letting his Brain be captured. It is clear to me that a prescription against killing someone would be a moral prescription, whereas a prescription on good Smess strategy would not be. Prescriptivism cannot account for this, but a cognitive account of morality can.

According to Milo, what distinguishes moral principles from other principles is that they come from the moral perspective. Milo conceives of morality as being concerned with certain values, such as harmonizing the varied needs of people. When a principle is about the achievement of moral values, it counts as a moral principle, but when it does not concern itself with moral values and has some other aim, it is not a moral principle. For example, a principle concerning Smess strategy has the aim of winning Smess, not the aim of harmonizing people's needs. It counts as a gaming principle, not as a moral principle. Likewise, principles concerning art, commerce, or etiquette may be aesthetic, economic, or etiquette principles, but not moral principles. Moral principles, on Milo's view, are distinguished by their content, not by any formal characteristics concerning how they are used.

I generally agree with Milo's cognitive understanding of moral principles. The only thing I would add is that morality is also about personal fulfillment. To some extent, this is already covered by saying that morality is about harmonizing disparate needs, as personal fulfillment is one need everyone shares. But I think the moral perspective has more to do with harmonizing the satisfaction of my own needs with the needs of others. This makes the perspective more personal than the third-person omniscient perspective that is otherwise suggested, and I believe that is more precisely what morality is about. Understood this way, morality is distinguished by the domain it covers.

Given this understanding of morality, it is easier to conceive how moral indifference is possible. Someone may have no concern with harmonizing his needs with the needs of others. He may consider his

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[4] Smess is a Chess-like game made by Parker Brothers in the early 1970's. The object is to capture a piece called the Brain. I used Smess rather than Chess for this example, because the object of checkmate would overcomplicate the example.

needs all-important and not care for anyone else except insofar as others can help him satisfy his own needs.

5.1.5   Preferential Wickedness

Someone who is preferentially wicked prefers something else over the avoidance of wrongdoing. As with moral indifference, this is hard to make sense of on a noncognitivist interpretation of moral terms, especially on a prescriptivist view, according to which regarding something as 'morally wrong' means that the person universally prescribes its avoidance. But I have already expressed my disagreement with noncognitivism. So I won't concern myself with answering noncognitivist objections against preferential wickedness here. On cognitivist interpretations of moral terms, it is easy to make sense of preferential wickedness. A person may care about some things, such as survival, revenge, or romantic love, more than about moral considerations. The difference between preferential wickedness and moral indifference is that someone guilty of preferential wickedness does care that his action is wrong. He knows his action is wrong, and he would prefer to avoid doing what is wrong, but he puts other concerns above morality. In contrast, a morally indifferent person just doesn't care that he is doing anything wrong.

A vivid example of preferential wickedness comes from Greek mythology. At the behest of his mother Aphrodite, Eros inspired a young witch named Medea with love for the hero Jason, and she helped him retrieve the Golden Fleece. Preferring her love for Jason over family loyalty, she murdered her father and her brother to help Jason. Jason married her when he came back to Greece, and they had children together. But Jason later left Medea and married Glauce, the daughter to the King of Corinth (Richardson 101-126). Medea was outraged, and, as is described in Euripedes' play *Medea*, she realized that the best way to get revenge on Jason was to kill their children and his new wife. She loved her children and didn't come to this idea lightly, but she put aside moral considerations and her love for her children and slew them, because what mattered to her more than anything else was to hurt Jason as much as she felt hurt by him.

5.1.6   Moral Weakness

Moral weakness may be the most difficult to understand of all six types of immorality. A morally weak person regards something as wrong but lacks the moral strength or courage to avoid doing it. A morally weak act meets three conditions. (1) The agent believes his act is wrong. (2) He has a con attitude toward doing what is wrong. (3) He prefers to avoid doing what is morally wrong to doing what he does. Unlike moral indifference and preferential wickedness, the distinction between cognitivist and noncognitivist interpretations of moral terms has no bearing on the possibility of moral weakness. The con attitude against what one does is a necessary part of moral weakness, because it distinguishes it from moral indifference. The preference for avoiding wrongdoing is also a necessary part of moral weakness, because it distinguishes it from preferential wickedness.

The third condition takes some work to understand. It implies a comparison, and the first step is to understand what is being compared. It refers to what the agent does. We might take this to mean the actual action that is performed, or we might take it to mean the action as the agent understands it. In the first sense, the action is a specific act token. In the second sense, it is a description, and thus an act type. The first sense can be used only when the agent actually commits a morally weak act. It cannot be used to describe an averted act of moral weakness, because an averted action is understood only under a description. Taking the action to be the action as the agent understands it also allows us to ascribe moral weakness when an agent misunderstands what he does. Thus, I favor the sense in which an action is understood to be the action as understood by the agent while acting.

To give a concrete example, the action might be taking a drink of alcohol. Let's suppose that the agent is a Mormon, who believes that drinking alcohol is wrong. Applying the third condition, we may say that he would rather avoid wrongdoing than drink alcohol. But this is still ambiguous. There are at

least two interpretations: an overriding interpretation and a *ceteris paribus* interpretation. On the overriding interpretation, it means that he would rather do anything to avoid wrongdoing than drink alcohol, whatever that may be. On the *ceteris paribus* interpretation, it means that other things being equal he would rather avoid wrongdoing than not. The *ceteris paribus* interpretation may mean no more than that while he is drowning in alcohol at the local bar, he wishes that what he was doing was the right thing. But this interpretation fails to distinguish moral weakness from preferential wickedness. A preferentially wicked person could prefer, other things being equal, to do what is right over what is wrong. What distinguishes a preferentially wicked person is that, all things considered, he prefers to do something he knows to be wrong over not doing it.

Between the overriding and the *ceteris paribus* interpretations is one that is stronger than the *ceteris paribus* interpretation and weaker than the overriding interpretation. On this interpretation, actions of the preferred type are strongly preferred over actions of the other type, but there will be circumstances under which the stronger preference isn't strong enough to play the deciding factor in what to do. This is because a contest between two preferences does not exist in a vacuum. When two preferences are in conflict, other preferences may come into play. Let's go back to the person who is contemplating taking a drink of alcohol. He believes it is wrong, and he has a strong preference for avoiding wrongdoing over drinking alcohol. But these aren't the only preferences at play. On this day, let us say, his wife has left him, and he wants to escape from the pain of feeling heartbroken. On most days he can resist his desire to drink alcohol, because his desire to avoid wrongdoing normally overpowers his desire to drink. But on this day, his desire to forget about his heartbreak combines with his desire to drink alcohol, and his desire to avoid wrongdoing isn't strong enough to overpower both of these desires. So he takes a drink.

The question before us now is whether this is a good way to characterize moral weakness. The objection is that this is preferential wickedness, not moral weakness. Although his desire to avoid wrongdoing is normally strong enough to prevent him from drinking, the objection goes, his desire to escape the pain of heartbreak increased his desire to drink, so that his desire to drink became stronger than his desire to avoid wrongdoing. If this situation is best understood by saying that his desire to drink temporarily rose above his desire to avoid wrongdoing, then it is preferential wickedness.

We might call the type of preference involved here a partially overriding preference, as opposed to a completely overriding preference. A completely overriding preference is what I previously called an overriding preference. The difference between these is in how they are quantified. If you have a completely overriding preference for one type of action over another, it means that you prefer every action of the preferred type over every action of the less preferred type. If you have a partially overriding preference for one type of action over another, it means that you prefer most actions of the preferred type over most actions of the less preferred type. Partially overriding preferences generally allow for examples of moral weakness to be interpreted as examples of preferential wickedness. Instead of trying to make sense of moral weakness in terms of partially overriding preferences, let's try to make sense of it in terms of completely overriding preferences.

If we accept the completely overriding interpretation, moral weakness seems paradoxical. On this interpretation, a person knows that his action is morally wrong and would rather do anything else than do what is morally wrong, yet he knowingly does what is morally wrong anyway. It seems on this interpretation that he would do what is morally wrong only if he were hapless enough to find himself in a moral dilemma, where every option was morally wrong and he couldn't escape moral wrongdoing. Yet if someone were in a moral dilemma, we would not attribute his wrongdoing to moral weakness. We would attribute it to his unlucky situation. So it is hard to conceive how moral weakness is possible on this interpretation of the third condition.

Nevertheless, it can be conceived. This interpretation of moral weakness is impossible only if it is additionally true that a person always acts to do whatever he most desires to do. Although this principle seems like common sense, it is false. Here is why. The basic reason it is wrong is that it is the will, and

not desires, that is the final arbiter on what a person chooses to do. Will is not mere desire, and without will, desire is nothing. Scott Peck has defined will as "desire of sufficient intensity that it *is* translated into action," (*Road Less Traveled* 83), but Peck is wrong.

Will is fueled not only by desire but by expectation. For example, I have the desire to fly through the air like Superman, but I lack the will, because I don't expect I can fly through the air. If I acquired Superman's powers, I would also gain the will to fly through the air. My will to fly would have increased, but my desire would have remained the same.

Another factor that affects will is discipline. I have in me various desires to do various things. I would like to wander around, watch TV, surf the web, write computer programs, etc., but my will is presently focused on writing this dissertation. I am not willing to do any of these other things right now. Desire is there, but will is absent. This is another thing that distinguishes will from desire. Will is focused; desire is scattered. Will is focused, because it has to tune out other desires and focus on a single desire. Desires are like radio signals, and will is like a tuner that brings in one of the signals. But will is different from a tuner in one relevant respect. Will requires discipline to keep itself focused on the same desire, whereas a radio tuner will remain set to the same signal unless someone changes it.

Because action is shaped by will rather than by unmediated desire, it isn't a truism that a person always does what he most desires to do. The will may be focused on one desire while other desires are stronger. In fact, discipline requires this for a will is to be constant long enough to follow through with a long term plan of action. Some things, such as writing a dissertation, exploring the South Pole, or courting a woman, cannot be accomplished unless the will remains steady enough over an extended period of time. This means that the will sometimes has to override strong desires even when the desire it is focused on is weaker than other desires.

Someone may object that someone who can discipline himself to carry out a long-term project has actually disciplined his desires and regularly maintains a stronger desire to carry through with his project than to do other things. This objection is mistaken. It is assuming that the strongest desire is always in charge, whatever that desire may be. It also assumes that the strongest desire is conscious and in general that all our desires are conscious. But not all of our desires are conscious. People regularly repress some of their desires. One piece of evidence for this is that our dreams sometimes reveal to us desires we weren't consciously aware of. This implies that some of our desires are sometimes hidden from our conscious mind.

But if that is so, it seems entirely possible that a person's strongest desires would sometimes be hidden from her conscious mind. And that does seem to be true for some people. For example, a news report on *20/20* told of some happily married middle-aged women who suddenly realized that they were lesbians. They had apparently spent their lives repressing their lesbian desires, because they interfered with their other desires to have a family and children. One woman reported that she started to feel depressed and suicidal over not living as a lesbian. This was apparently an example of a woman who had repressed one of her strongest desires, who was slow to act on it when she became aware of it, and who was suffering for this non-alignment between her will and her lesbian desires through depression and suicidal feelings. This example provides good reason for recognizing that the will is not the same as desire, that the will is what determines a person's actions, and that the will may sometimes be out of alignment with a person's strongest desires. So, a person doesn't always attempt to do what she most wants to do, but she does always attempt to do what she wills to do.

With this conclusion established, we can understand why a person who wants to do what is morally right more than anything else may sometimes fail to. Although the desire is there, the will is not. This will sometimes be because the will lacks the discipline required to stay focused on the desire to avoid wrongdoing. Although the desire to avoid wrongdoing may remain strongest, the will may temporarily be hijacked by other desires demanding its attention. If this happens at a critical moment, such as when fear freezes your attempt to do what is right, the wrongdoing that results would be due to moral weakness.

Another cause for moral weakness may be the failure to expect a good outcome from your actions. Although you want to do what is right, you may doubt your ability to do what you know is right. One more cause for moral weakness may be the repression of the desire to do what is right. Although this may have the appearance of some other kind of immorality, such as moral indifference or preferential wickedness, it would be moral weakness.

5.1.7   Summing Up Immorality

The character traits that make up an immoral character would be those that predispose a person toward the various kinds of immorality just mentioned. Milo identifies three main faults that contribute to immorality. These are bad preferences, lack of self-control, and lack of moral concern (234). He maintains that bad preferences account for perverse and preferential wickedness, that lack of self-control accounts for moral weakness and moral negligence, and that lack of moral concern accounts for amorality and moral indifference (234). Bad preferences and lack of moral concern both pertain mainly to motivations and values. Lack of self-control pertains mainly to a person's abilities and habits. Of these six types of immorality, two are better described as types of wickedness. These, naturally, are perverse and preferential wickedness. Thus, an immoral character will chiefly consist in a lack of self-control or a lack of moral concern.

5.2 WICKEDNESS

Milo's six types of immorality included two types of wickedness. These were perverse wickedness and preferential wickedness. These were distinguished from the others by including some motivation toward wrongdoing. A perversely wicked person is motivated to do what is wrong by the belief that it is right. A preferentially wicked person is motivated to do what is wrong by a desire that overpowers the desire to do what is right. In the other four types of immorality, there is no mention of any motivation toward wrongdoing. In moral negligence and moral weakness, a person wants to do the right thing but messes up. In amorality and moral indifference, a person doesn't care whether he does right or wrong. Overall, a wicked person is strongly predisposed toward wrongdoing, and motivational vices play the largest role in predisposing a wicked person toward wrongdoing.

Kekes has described two ways in which a person can be wicked. These are expediency and malevolence. Expediency is mainly just another name for preferential wickedness–though it can also encompass moral indifference and amorality. It is when what you want matters more to you than moral considerations do. Malevolence is the desire to do harm for its own sake. Both of these have already been covered in the chapter on Kekes.

5.2.1   Instrumental Evil

In his book *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*, Roy F. Baumeister describes four roots of evil, as he calls them. More precisely, as the concept of wickedness is being used here, they are four sources of wickedness. The first of these is described in a chapter called "Greed, Lust, Ambition: Evil as a Means to an End" (99). This first source is the same thing as expediency or preferential wickedness, but he fleshes out the concept by associating it with greed, lust, and ambition.

In his book *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*, Ted Peters groups greed, lust, and related vices under the heading of concupiscence. This is an archaic word that is etymologically related to the name Cupid, the Roman name for the god Eros. Peters describes sevens steps to radical evil, and concupiscence is the fourth. He understands concupiscence as evil desire, which he distinguishes from the good desire of eros. The difference between eros and concupiscence is that eros is rooted in "our normal drive toward self-fulfillment," whereas concupiscence arises "solely from the pleasure-pain principle apart from the pursuit of self-fulfillment" (123). Eros is good and appropriate, whereas concupiscence is a perverted kind of desire. Although we may all be prone to some concupiscence, it can sometimes get out of hand, leading to intense and consuming desires. Among the seven deadly sins, the typical examples of concupiscence are envy, greed, gluttony, and lust. When strong concupiscent desires are present in a person, he will be

more prone to committing acts of evil as a means to his ends. The object of the desire is not what is important. When any concupiscent desire is strong enough, even if it is for something good, it can lead a person into doing evil.

5.2.2   Egotism and Revenge

The second source of wickedness Baumeister identifies is egotism and revenge (128). He says of these:

> In principle, revenge and egotism are two inseparable things. Revenge involves getting even for some wrong or loss, and egotism involves thinking well of oneself. Certainly, one can pursue revenge for something that has no element of egotism, and feelings of superiority could lead to violence even when there is no clear element of revenge. But such cases turn out to be relatively uncommon. Egotism and revenge probably overlap most of the time. Threats to self-esteem form the main category of things over which people seek violent revenge. (132)

After saying this, Baumeister describes an experiment which showed that insulting a person's ego leads a person to go to greater lengths to seek revenge than merely harming a person does. In this experiment, two people played a video game in which they each controlled a section of highway. One person was a subject, and the other was a confederate pretending to be a subject. Each player had the option of charging tolls on his highway, and the confederate would go first and generally abuse this option, frequently charging tolls to the other player. When their roles were reversed in the game, the subject would start charging tolls as revenge, but he also had to pay more highway taxes when he charged tolls, such that he would actually lose money if he tried to stick it to the other player. So, the subject would generally charge moderate tolls, so that he would get some revenge without losing much. But when the subject had been told that an audience was watching the game, and that the audience regarded him as a sucker, the subject would normally charge very high tolls–even though it meant losing money. The subject was willing to incur harm to himself to vindicate his hurt ego (133-4). Baumeister concludes with "When responding to a blow to one's self-esteem or public image, people will accept further costs and losses to hurt the person who humiliated them" (134). He then adds some observations about the costs people are willing to incur to get revenge for a wounded ego. He says that people will put "considerable time and effort" into it, that they will risk "being hurt or even killed," and that nations will risk war and even the cost of losing a war for the sake of national pride (134).

Baumeister goes on to criticize the contrary idea that violence is often due to low self-esteem. He cites many people who claim that it is, and he maintains they are all wrong. He says,

> There is ample reason to question whether low self-esteem is to blame for violence. Think of the obnoxious, hostile, or bullying people you have known–were they humble, modest, and self-effacing? (That's mainly what low self-esteem is like.) Most of the aggressive people I have known were the opposite: conceited, arrogant, and often consumed with thoughts about how they were superior to everyone else. (136)

He also cites reports that the most violent groups of people normally have higher self-esteem than other groups. For example, men are more violent than women and normally have higher self-esteem. He also notes that depression has been correlated with low self-esteem, but that "depression has not generally been linked with crime or violence (unlike other mental disturbances)" (137). He adds that psychopaths normally "feel no regret about using or exploiting other people" because they "regard other people as inferior" (138).

But Baumeister does not conclude that high self-esteem makes a person violent. He notes that "most people with high opinions of themselves are not violent" (141). He says instead, "The most potent recipe for violence is a favorable view of oneself that is disputed or undermined by someone else–in short, *threatened egotism*" (141). He then describes two different ways in which a person's self-esteem is prone to being threatened. One is inflated self-esteem (143). This is when you normally think better of yourself than you should. The danger in inflated self-esteem is that people will commonly evaluate you at your real level of worth, which will call into question your inflated self-worth. The other way is unstable

egotism (148). This is when people are "vulnerable to frequent or large fluctuations in their self-esteem" (148). He adds, "Fluctuating self-esteem makes a person hypersensitive to ego threats, and a basically high but somewhat malleable self-esteem is probably the most dangerous" (148). He then refers to some studies which confirm that people with high but unstable self-esteem tend to be the most violent (148-9). He also returns to the subject of low self-esteem, saying

> **The extreme, irrational sensitivity to a stranger's slightly disrespectful tone or remark may be what caused some earlier observers to conclude that low self-esteem must be at work. But it is not low self-esteem. It is high self-esteem that is vulnerable to fluctuations. (150)**

5.2.3   Idealism

The third source of wickedness described by Baumeister is idealism. The point is not that idealism is a bad thing. It is often a very good thing, leading people to do what is good. But idealism sometimes finds itself in service to evil, as in idealism about false moral principles. (This is similar to what Milo calls perverse wickedness, though Milo will probably attribute most false idealism to moral negligence). Baumeister writes,

> **In idealistic evil [. . .], moral virtue and idealism remain in force–but they support the committing of violent or evil deeds. That is what often makes idealistic evil especially bad: The traits of inner conscience and strength of character operate to spur the perpetrator on to more severe and intense deeds. It is not simply that it becomes acceptable to hurt others–it becomes one's sacred obligation to do so. When inflicting harm goes from being a right to being a duty, it is fair to expect that the violence will become relentless and merciless. (170)**

Baumeister recognizes the seeming paradox in saying that goodness can make a person do evil. What is comes down to is a difference in perspective over what is good and evil. Some people may sincerely want to do the right thing but be entirely mistaken about what that is. Baumeister points out that the Bible contains many examples of divinely-sanctioned behavior that would be considered abominable without the assumption that God's sanction makes an action moral. One example he gives is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. He says,

> **Certainly to anyone who doesn't share the belief in divine legitimacy, Abraham is a child abuser who is about to commit a horrible act of deadly violence against a defenseless family member. That Abraham must be a real sicko, you'd think, if you saw that story on the news today, even if it had the same happy ending. But to devout believers, Abraham's willingness to kill his son was a good thing, a positive proof of his moral faith in God. (171)**

He also mentions how the Israelites massacred the Canaanites in the belief that it was God's will. Then he goes on to talk about the Crusades, which he describes as "an extremely important instance of divinely sanctioned brutality involving millions of people over hundreds of years" (172). Other examples of people doing great evil in the name of idealism include the Inquisition, the European conquest of the Americas, the Communist revolutions in Russia and China, and Joseph McCarthy's persecution of Americans for being Communists.

One of the dangers Baumeister finds in misguided idealism is that it can make the belief that the ends don't justify the means less of an obstacle to doing evil. This belief often keeps people away from mere instrumental evil. But idealism invests the ends with strong moral value, and when the ends matter enough to a person, this can make it easier to assume that the ends really do justify the means. This is especially true considering that people normally need to feel that what they are doing is morally right. And one way to do this is to focus on the goodness of one's goal, especially when faced with the ugliness of what one is doing. Speaking of soldiers, Baumeister says,

> **They have enlisted to fight for a cause or a country or another ideal in which they strongly believe, and then they are confronted with the ugly, sordid reality of combat. This includes killing other young men at close range on a cold day when you are soaked from the rain and have diarrhea and are tired from lack of sleep. It's all miserable, but it's all for a good cause, and so you do your duty and you do your best. (178)**

Since idealists are normally convinced that they are on the side of good and right, they often end up hating their enemies, casting them as villains on the side of evil and immorality. They do this, because

it supports their opinion that they are good and right. Baumeister says that this "is far more than just a convenient way of rationalizing one's violence toward certain people. It is central to the idealist's basic faith that he is doing the right thing. The enemies of the good are, almost by definition, evil" (181).

5.2.4   Sadism

The fourth source of wickedness described by Baumeister is sadism, not so much in the sexual sense, but merely in the sense of deriving pleasure from hurting others (205). Baumeister maintains that sadism is rare but real. He gives examples of soldiers refusing to fire on enemies, and mentions that many Vietnam war veterans were tormented by nightmares of the violence they had committed (207). He also mentions that Nazi soldiers were extremely distressed by routinely mowing down groups of Jews with machine guns during WWII (208-9). And he gives several more examples of how much people have been distressed by hurting others. He even says, "The famous serial killer Ted Bundy said he never really achieved the satisfaction he expected from killing, and in fact his murders usually left him feeling empty, depressed, forlorn, and hopeless of ever finding emotional satisfaction" (211).

Although people are often reluctant to harm others, Baumeister finds evidence for sadism in the enjoyment people get from violent entertainment. There are violent horror films, violent action films, violent cartoons, such as the Simpsons' "Itchy and Scratchy Show," violent sports, and other forms of violent entertainment. Back before film and television, Roman citizens enjoyed watching gladiators kill each other or lions devour people in the Colosseum. Baumeister points out that Christians were fed to lions for the sake of the spectacle of people being devoured by lions, not for the sake of punishing Christians. Before film and television, the only way for people to watch spectacles of violence was to watch real violence (217). Between ancient Rome and our modern era, people enjoyed such spectacles of violence as public executions, including the executions of heretics during the Spanish Inquisition. Baumeister reports that these were especially popular, drawing in large numbers of people from many miles away (218).

Baumeister finds even more evidence for sadism in bullies, serial killers, and other people who have committed gruesome acts of gratuitous violence against people. Referring to a study on violence by Hans Toch, Baumeister points out that the men Toch labeled as bullies would intensify their violence at the point when their victory seemed secure, "as if the fun were just beginning" (224). In contrast, most violent predators would cease their violence when they knew they had won.

Baumeister quotes a Vietnam veteran who says,

> **"There is incredible, just this incredible sense of power in killing five people. . . . The only way I can equate it is to ejaculation. Just an incredible sense of relief, you know, that I did this. I was very powerful." (224)**

Baumeister also quotes from serial killers who claim they have gotten pleasure from killing. He says,

> **Some of these individuals frankly admit to having gotten pleasure from the experience, such as David Bulock, who told a New York state judge that "killing makes me happy," or Charles Schmid, who said it made him "feel good" to murder young girls and bury their bodies in the desert. (226)**

Baumeister shares his skepticism that these killers are all telling the truth, but besides relying on the testimony of killers who say they enjoyed it, Baumeister recounts some of the gruesome deeds that some killers have done. In light of their actions, it seems unlikely that they had any other motive than some kind of perverse enjoyment in torturing and killing their victims. The serial killer Henry Lee Lucas would mutilate the bodies of his victims before killing them. For example, he would use a chain saw to chop off their fingers and toes before killing them (227). The serial killer Arthur Shawcross boasted that when he served in Vietnam, he captured a girl and a woman, tied up the girl, then butchered and ate the woman with the girl watching. After the girl had witnessed this, he did the same to her (227). The idealistic hatred of communism that brought many American soldiers to Vietnam cannot account for this. Nor can hunger. If he were just hungry enough to commit cannibalism, he could have at least been

merciful enough to spare the girl from watching him butcher and eat the woman. Although revenge might be a motive, his boasting suggests that he did enjoy it.

The pleasure in hurting or killing others seems to come from some sort of high that a person feels in exercising power over other people. Baumeister believes that this pleasure does not come naturally to most people, but that people can come to find pleasure in it as they become accustomed to it. For example, Baumeister tells of an American soldier in Vietnam who initially refused to shoot at people from a helicopter. After repeated commands to do it, he shot at the people, then was so shaken up by it that he vomited and felt upset about it for some time afterward. But after doing it more times, he came to enjoy shooting people, and he compared it with shooting targets in a shooting gallery. Instead of being distressed by killing people, he was having fun (236-7).

Baumeister also refers to the writings of Marquis de Sade, the man from whose name we get the word sadism. De Sade wrote novels describing sexual perversions, in which the characters engaged in philosophical discussions about their activities in between their sexual acts. In one discussion, a character maintained that whipping was preferable to intercourse, because in whipping you could be more certain that the other person's responses were genuine. Someone could fake pleasure during intercourse, but a person would be less likely to be faking pain while being whipped. The significance Baumeister found in this is that some people consider it important to have a strong effect on other people. He says, "The power seeker is miserable when he or she fails to have a strong effect on people. To be ignored, to be treated as irrelevant, to believe that one's own presence and actions make hardly any difference in what others do–these are the experiences that upset and frustrate people who have a high need for power" (243). The pleasure of sadism, it seems, is not so much in causing suffering, but in having a strong effect on others. Hurting people is a way to have a strong effect on them, and it reinforces a person's sense of power. In light of this and other evidence Baumeister gives, it seems that people are capable of sadism.

5.2.5 Summing up Wickedness

Based on what Baumeister has described, the vices that make a character wicked will generally be strong desires, high but fragile self-esteem, misguided idealism, and a taste for the pleasures of cruelty. In *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*, Peters echos the same sources of wickedness described by Baumeister. Peters describes seven steps to radical evil, and the third through sixth steps parallel what Baumeister has described as the four roots of evil. The third step is pride, which parallels the egotism part of revenge and egotism. The fourth step is concupiscence, which parallels Baumeister's attention on instrumental evil, and which I have already mentioned in the section on it. The fifth step is self-justification, which is related to misguided idealism. The sixth step is cruelty, which parallels sadism.

5.3 The Immoral and Wicked Character

The immoral and wicked character combines a wicked character with an immoral character. The wicked character will generally be characterized by concupiscent desires, a high but fragile self-esteem, misguided idealism, or sadism. These are the features, as identified by Baumeister, that will most commonly predispose a person toward wrongdoing. The immoral character will generally be characterized by a lack of moral concern and a lack of self-control. These are the features, as identified by Milo, that account for the four types of immorality that aren't outright forms of wickedness.

The main reason for identifying an evil character with an immoral and wicked character is that the combination of the two is more predisposed toward evil than either is alone. A wicked character makes a person want to do what is wrong, and an immoral character lets him. In contrast, a wicked character is less dangerous when it is paired with a strong moral character, and an immoral character is less dangerous in an innocent person who isn't predisposed toward anything wicked. Furthermore, this conception of evil seems to be echoed in Baumeister's conclusion, though he does not take the final step of saying this is what an evil person is. He writes,

All told, the four roots of evil are pervasive, which leads one to wonder why violence and oppression are not even more common than they are. The answer is that violent impulses are typically restrained by inner inhibitions; people exercise self-control to avoid lashing out at others every time they feel like it. The four root causes of evil must therefore be augmented by an understanding of the proximal cause, which is the breakdown of these internal restraints. (377)

Nevertheless, this particular theory seems to be very broad. It looks like it will include everyone who is evil, but it also looks like it will include some people who should not be described as evil. One possible objection to this theory is that there may be morally relevant differences between the different kinds of immorality and wickedness enumerated by Milo and Baumeister. For example, Milo generally regards amorality and moral indifference as morally worse than the other four types of immorality (244-47). Among the types of wickedness identified by Baumeister, sadism seems morally worse than the others. The others are mainly misdirected attempts to do good, such as satisfying one's desires, achieving one's ideals, or righting injustice and protecting oneself. In contrast, sadism focuses more on doing harm to people. Wicked and immoral people may include such truly evil people as morally indifferent sadists, but they may also include morally weak idealists, who don't seem quite so evil. This reflects the criticism Thomas made of Kekes' theory. It's going to take more than a predisposition toward wrongdoing to distinguish an evil person. There is also the matter of why someone is predisposed toward wrongdoing, and the issue of how someone feels about the wrongdoing he does. These are not adequately addressed by the immoral and wicked theory.

The good thing about this theory is that it focuses attention on two logically distinct kinds of bad character, and it reveals that the combination of these is even worse than one by itself. Although it doesn't seem to be the correct theory of evil, it points us in new directions. One direction is to consider another theory of the same form, i.e. a theory that identifies evil as the combination of a certain kind of immoral character and a certain kind of wicked character. The failure of this theory may be that the concepts of an immoral and of a wicked character were both too broad. If we could narrow them down to specific kinds of immorality and wickedness, we might get an accurate theory. Another direction is to consider a theory that defines evil in terms of some particular trait whose presence distorts a person's character. This theory and Kekes' theory have gone in the opposite direction, defining evil in terms of classes of traits. If a person's character traits fell within certain parameters, this theory would consider him as evil, but it never identified evil as any particular character trait. You could be evil by being a morally weak idealist or by being an amoral sadist, yet what do these two types of people share in common? If it makes sense that evil people should share some traits in common, that's another problem for this theory. So it will be worthwhile to look at some theories that anchor the meaning of evil around particular traits. In the next chapter, we return to Thomas's theory, but following chapters will examine some theories that do anchor evil around particular traits.

Chapter 6
Laurence Thomas on Evil

The chapter on Kekes ended with criticisms made by Thomas, and these criticisms came in light of Thomas's own theory, which was similar to Kekes's but was distinguished by associating an evil character with the doing of evil actions rather than with the doing of merely harmful actions. But a discussion of his theory didn't immediately follow that chapter, because I wanted to discuss it within the context of the immoral/wicked model of evil. Doing so will help provide a better understanding of Thomas's theory. Let's begin with understanding what his theory is.

Thomas maintains that an evil person is "one who is often enough prone to do evil acts" (82), and he understands an evil act as "a wrong act, done in the appropriate way, that has the right moral gravity to it" (78). This theory seems to describe an evil character mainly as a kind of wicked character–though it does better than merely equating an evil character with a wicked character, for there is significantly more to an evil act than being morally wrong. Whereas a wicked person would be someone who is often enough prone to do morally wrong acts, Thomas's evil person is someone who is often enough prone to do morally wrong acts in an appropriate way with the right moral gravity to them.

One objection to this theory is that it does not fit into the immoral/wicked model, for it seems to require only that an evil character be wicked, not that it also be immoral. But, on closer examination, it turns out that it does fit the immoral/wicked model. For Thomas, an evil act is distinguished not only by its wrongness or the magnitude of its consequences. It is also determined by the frame of mind of the person who acts, which is what Thomas is referring to when he says that an evil act must be done in an appropriate way. This comes out in two examples he contrasts with each other. In one example, a five-year old child accidently sets off nuclear weapons that destroy North America. In the other example, an adult rapes a six-year old child. Although the first example results in much greater harm, Thomas does not regard the child's act as evil. In contrast, he does regard the second act as evil, for it reflects a deadening of moral sensibilities. He sums up by saying, "In general, an evil act seems to be not only a wrongdoing, but a wrongdoing that evinces a profound deadening of moral sensibilities" (75). Given that this is part of what goes into making an act evil, someone would be often enough prone to perform evil acts only if his moral sensibilities were profoundly deadened. As Thomas puts it, "a person can have an evil character only if he is lacking in certain sensibilities" (82). So, an evil character would be distinguished by a lack of moral concern, which, according to Milo, contributes to amorality and moral indifference. Thus, an evil person, for Thomas, would have a character that is generally amoral or morally indifferent, which implies an immoral character. Therefore, Thomas's evil person has both a wicked and immoral character, and it does fit the immoral/wicked model.

In favor of this theory, amorality and moral indifference are the two types of immorality that Milo regards as the morally worst types. Thus, with respect to Milo's types of immorality, Thomas's evil person has the morally worst kind of immoral character. This lends support to the idea that Thomas's conception of an evil character describes the morally worst kind of bad character. As for the wicked side of an evil character, Thomas seems to have in mind a malevolent character. He says, "An act is evil only if the agent both intends to harm and delights in harming the person in question, even if the agent has not in any way been harmed by the person" (77). This generally describes sadism, which is generally the morally worst kind of wickedness described by Baumeister, but it does not rule out revenge. Although Thomas notes that revenge isn't usually considered to be evil, he also asserts that it is not a conceptual truth that acts of revenge cannot be evil (76-77). The main distinction between revenge and evil, as

Thomas puts it, is that "evil differs from revenge in that evil does not require that one has been wronged by the person whom one is harming. By contrast, it is a conceptual matter that revenge requires this" (77). So, an act of revenge could be evil if it was accompanied by delight in harming someone, but if someone took revenge without taking delight in harming anyone, Thomas would not regard it as evil.

Essentially, Thomas identifies the wicked part of an evil character with sadism and sadistic revenge. Although Baumeister discussed revenge and sadism as separate roots of evil, this does not mean that they cannot combine together. In the acts of revenge Thomas regards as evil, sadism seems to be one of the elements. Thus, the evil person, as understood by Thomas, could be described as a kind of amoral or morally indifferent sadist. This generally combines the morally worst kinds of immorality with the morally worst kinds of wickedness. In doing so, it describes a character that could very well be the sort that should be called evil, the morally worst kind of bad character.

Nevertheless, there are still problems with Thomas's theory. Part of his theory is that an evil act has a certain moral gravity to it. He says that the moral gravity of an act is "a function of the hideousness of the act" (78-79), and that we can distinguish between "inherent hideousness and quantitative hideousness" (79). For example, raping a six-year old has inherent hideousness, killing one hundred people has quantitative hideousness, and killing one hundred people by skinning them alive would have both inherent and quantitative hideousness (79). Because of the moral gravity condition, Thomas's theory maintains that the extent of a person's evil is partially due to how hideous the actions are that he is often enough prone to do. Thus, an evil person could be made non-evil by reducing the hideousness of the actions he is prone to do.

This opens Thomas's theory to an objection inspired by the movie *A Clockwork Orange*. This movie is about a violent delinquent named Alex, who lives a life of gleeful sadism until an experimental behavior modification program makes him nonviolent. While watching scenes of violence on a movie screen, he is subjected to pain, such that he comes to associate violence with feeling pain. When he's released, he cannot act violently without buckling under in agony. So, to avoid the pain, he avoids violence. The objection begins with an evil person, as understood by Thomas, who undergoes the same kind of conditioning, so that he feels pangs of agony whenever he tries to act violently. This makes him much less prone to commit evil acts, so that he is no longer a person who is often enough prone to commit evil acts. By Thomas's definition of an evil person, he is no longer evil. Yet my intuition is that he is still evil. He still wants to do hideous acts of evil, he still has deadened moral sensibilities, and only the conditioning has reduced how prone he is to commit acts of evil. This is not to say that the conditioning couldn't help lead him away from being evil. As he lived without committing violence, this might give him the opportunity to grow as a person, so that he eventually becomes non-evil. But the conditioning should not be enough, on its own, to automatically make him not evil. Thomas's theory seems to imply that it would, and that's what I disagree with.

It might be said against this objection that the conditioning changes his character in relevant ways, such that he really is no longer evil. I don't think this is accurate, for the pain he is conditioned to feel at the thought of violence is just physical pain, not guilt. But the example can be changed to remove this kind of doubt. Instead of conditioning an evil person to be nonviolent, an evil person could suffer an injury that leaves him paralyzed and unable to speak, so that all he can do is lie in a bed and let others feed him. In this state, he wouldn't be nearly so prone to commit evil acts, because he wouldn't be able to commit them. On Thomas's theory, he would no longer be evil, yet his character would be the same. But if his character is the same, and if it is character that makes a person evil, as both Thomas and I maintain, then he would still be evil. Thus, an evil person should not be defined by how often he is prone to commit acts of evil. The inability to do evil should not preclude a person from being evil.

This criticism of Thomas's theory really hinges on a distinction between being prone and being predisposed to do something. To be prone to do something is to be likely to do it. How prone you are to do something can change with circumstances. For example, children will be more prone to kill each other

if loaded guns are left in their toybox. But they will not be more *predisposed* to kill each other, because predispositions do not depend on external circumstances. A predisposition is a reflection of how much someone's own psychological traits influence him toward doing things. It can be described in terms of subjunctive conditionals about what a person is likely to do under different circumstances. With respect to a paralyzed evil person, his predisposition toward evil acts remains the same, even though he becomes less prone to do evil. This suggests a modification to Thomas's theory.

Instead of describing an evil person as someone who is often enough prone to do evil, it should describe an evil person as someone who is often enough strongly predisposed toward doing evil. This modified theory echoes one of the simple character theories mentioned in a previous chapter. That theory identified an evil person as someone with an extremely bad character, and it identified three ways in which a bad character could be worse. It could have more frequent dispositions toward bad behavior, stronger dispositions toward bad behavior, or dispositions toward worse kinds of bad behavior. For this modified theory, the notion of worse kinds of bad behavior is incorporated into the concept of evil acts. Strength and frequency describe the predispositions. Having strong predispositions toward evil-doing better captures what Thomas intends by *prone* than merely having predispositions does, for *prone* indicates a favorable likelihood of doing something, and, under normal circumstances, it takes a strong predisposition to make someone likely to do something. When a person has strong predispositions toward evil-doing frequently enough, this theory counts him as evil.

Like the simple theory this is similar to, it makes evil a matter of degree. The difference is that instead of describing an evil character as an extremely bad character, it describes it as an extremely bad character of a particular kind. Yet this is not the same as just describing evil as a kind of bad character. The kind of bad character identified here is merely any character with some predisposition, however slight, toward committing evil acts. An evil character, on this theory, is an extremely bad type of this kind of character, distinguished by passing a threshold that separates evil from non-evil. The main problem with this theory is that it provides no standard or rationale for accepting a particular threshold. It just assumes the existence of some arbitrary threshold, which makes the theory arbitrary.

Nevertheless, it does seem to be a better theory than the immoral/wicked theory. It has identified an evil character with a combination of especially bad kinds of immoral and wicked characters, and it emphasizes that evil people are predisposed to do evil actions, not just immoral actions. It may be wrong about the fine details of what makes someone evil, but it does at least provide the guideline that, generally speaking, evil people are normally predisposed toward doing evil actions (whether or not it is right about what evil actions are), and evil actions are generally the worst sorts of immoral actions. One of its strengths is that it helps give us a better understanding of what sorts of parameters distinguish evil people. It also speaks more to the psychological aspects of being evil than the previous theories have. The next couple theories will focus even more on the psychological aspects of being evil.

Chapter 7
Evil as Pride

7.1   DOES EVIL MEAN PROUD?

In Christian tradition, there is some suggestion that pride makes a person evil. In *The Seven Christian Virtues*, Hugh Ross Williamson writes that pride "is the greatest sin and the origin of all sin" (98). Pride is also depicted as the sin of Lucifer, the angel who rebelled against God and became Satan. In *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Burton Russell reports that Pope Gregory the Great maintained that "The Devil fell because of pride; he freely chose to try to be independent of God, to be a principle in his own right. His prideful desire, the source of all sin, blotted out his proper respect and fear of God" (97). In *The Book of Vices*, Robert J. Hutchinson writes, "When it comes to pride, you'd have a hard time topping Milton's Satan: attempting to overthrow the Creator and take over Heaven" (178). Yet pride is so lauded today, even by ministers on TV,[5] that it may seem like an archaic throwback to suggest that pride is what makes a person evil. These days, people are often encouraged to take pride in themselves, or they are criticized for having no pride, and various philosophers have portrayed pride as a good thing. For example, Richard Taylor, writing in his book *Restoring Pride: The Lost Virtue of Our Age*, says "pride is the justified love of oneself" (11). Understood in this sense, there seems to be nothing wrong with pride, and the idea that this would be what makes a person evil seems outrageous.

But when Christians talk about the sin of pride, they don't mean anything as innocuous as justified love for oneself. In *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*, Ted Peters, a Lutheran theologian, identifies seven steps to radical evil, and pride is the third step. He writes,

Pride plays a prominent role in the history of thinking about sin. It is thought to be far more grave than the positive value of self-esteem. Pride heads the classic list of the seven deadly sins and has long been considered the seed that comes to bloom in all the others. Augustine held that "pride is the beginning of sin." By pride Augustine meant the self-exultation that results from centering our attention on ourselves when pursuing our own pleasures rather than the long-range purposes of God. Pride essentially refuses to allow God to be God. It tries to co-opt divinity for itself. This is symbolized by the manner in which the serpent tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden: if she would only eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would become like God. Pride is the attempt at human self-divinization. Although [Paul] Tillich prefers the Greek term *hubris* to the English term *pride*, he is clear in asserting that this "is sin in its total form," because it amounts to our turning away from the divine center to which we belong. He calls it "spiritual sin," saying that its main symptom is that we do not accept our own limits. It is the self-elevation of oneself into the sphere of the divine. (86-87)

Some of this seems to suggest that all humanists and atheists are guilty of pride, which may incline them to reject this notion of pride. In what is quoted above, the strongest suggestion of this is when Peters writes, "By pride Augustine meant the self-exultation that results from centering our attention on ourselves when pursuing our own pleasures rather than the long-range purposes of God. Pride essentially refuses to allow God to be God" (87). Humanists, whether or not they believe in God, believe it is more important to focus on humanity than on God, and atheists simply don't believe in God. So none of them would be centering their attention on the long-range purposes of God. If that makes them all guilty of pride, then it would certainly be objectionable to them to identify evil with pride.

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[5] I have seen Rev. Robert Schuller praise pride on his weekly *Hour of Power* show, which airs on CBS, or at least the local CBS station 8, on Sunday mornings.

A religious understanding of pride is suggested even more when Peters writes, "Can we trust God, or should we put our trust somewhere else? If we decide to place trust in ourselves, we thereby indulge in pride" (87). Humanists and atheists will naturally put more trust in themselves than they do in God. If there is no God, as most of them believe, what is wrong with this? It seems that this could be wrong only within a theological context. Could the sin of pride just be a theological vice that has no meaning for an atheist? Maybe not. In *The Seven Deadly Sins Today*, Henry Fairlie gives a more secular account of the sin of Pride. He writes,

> **But a reasonable and justified self-esteem is not what is meant by the sin of Pride. The first definition of pride in the dictionaries is of something unfitting. "An inordinate self-esteem," says *Webster's*, as also does the *Oxford English Dictionary:* "an unreasonable conceit of superiority . . . an overweening opinion of one's own qualities." Its synonyms or near-synonyms are not attractive: vanity, vainglory, conceit, arrogance, egotism, boastfulness, self-glorification, selfishness, and many more, all of which we use as terms of reproach. (39)**

This is different than what Taylor was calling pride. He described pride as justified self-love, yet Fairlie is describing pride as a good opinion of oneself that goes beyond what is justified. Both notions of pride describe a proud person as having a high opinion of himself. The difference is whether this high opinion is justified. Taylor describes pride as a virtue by associating it with a justified high opinion of oneself, and Fairlie describes it as a sin by associating it with an unjustified opinion of oneself.

As the word is normally used, pride probably means a high opinion of oneself, whether or not it is justified. This tends to cause confusion over whether pride is good or bad. The key to ending this confusion is to distinguish between justified and unjustified pride, recognizing that justified pride is good and unjustified pride is bad. If we look more closely at what Peters, Fairlie, and Taylor each say, we can see that each is making a distinction like this. Taylor, who has described pride as a virtue, says, "The commonest form of false pride is simple egoism or vanity" (97). These are two of the synonyms Fairlie gave for the notion of pride as a sin. The passage from Fairlie begins with "a reasonable and justified self-esteem is not what is meant by the sin of Pride" (39). Peters says the sin of pride "is thought to be far more grave than the positive value of self-esteem" (86). So they all agree that justified self-esteem is good, whereas egoism and vanity are vices.

This same line of thinking is found in Aristotle. Robert J. Hutchinson writes in *The Book of Vices*,

> **For Aristotle, perhaps one of the most influential philosophers in the West, pride was an essential component to a truly human life: the word he used was *megalopsychia* (□ε□□□□□□□□), which literally means "largeness of soul" or "high-mindedness." [. . .] In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle complains that there is not, in fact, a word for the proper blend of humility and self-confidence that he has in mind. "A man is regarded as high-minded (*megalopsychos*) when he thinks he deserves great things and actually deserves them," he says. Someone "who thinks he deserves them but does not is a fool" and this is, in fact, what false pride, or vanity, is. However, someone who *underestimates* himself is not truly humble, either, but "small-minded" (*micropsychos*). (169-70)**

So there is a common idea, held by both defenders and opponents of "pride," that it is a vice or a sin to think better of yourself than is justified. As Fairlie has pointed out, there are various words that refer to this unjustified pride. But the words listed by Fairlie have specific connotations and uses, and it would be best to use a general term that is as appropriate for mere vanity as it is for excessive egotism. False pride is a suitable general term for thinking better of yourself than is justified. It is appropriate to call it false pride, because there is a falseness to it. It is a high opinion of oneself that is based on falsehoods. So the question is now whether false pride is what makes a person evil.

7.2 Is False Pride What Makes a Person Evil?

This question seems easy to answer. If false pride is what makes a person evil, then the morally worst thing you could say about anyone, aside from compounding evil with other faults, is that he thinks too highly of himself. Yet there are morally worse things you could say about a person, such as "you are terribly immoral." So it appears that evil cannot be the same as false pride.

Nevertheless, there is a parable in the Bible which seems to suggest that false pride is worse than being terribly immoral. In this parable, which is told in Luke 18:9-14, a Pharisee and a tax collector both pray to God. The Pharisee thanks God that he is "not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people," and the tax collector prays, "God have pity on me! I am such a sinner" (*CEV*). Jesus ends the parable by saying "it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God" (*CEV*). It is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament that "All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory" (*CEV* Rom. 3:23). This reveals the context for understanding why God would be more pleased with the tax collector than the Pharisee. God regarded both as sinners, but the tax collector had the saving grace of realizing he was a sinner, whereas the Pharisee did not realize that he too was a sinner. Thus, the Pharisee thought more highly of himself than was justified, making him guilty of false pride, whereas the tax collector was terribly immoral but, in confessing his sin, wasn't guilty of false pride.

Based on this, this parable seems to be expressing the idea that false pride is worse than being terribly immoral. But that's the wrong interpretation to put on it. All that is required for false pride is an overestimation of your own worth. Someone could be guilty of false pride simply for believing that he is more helpful to people than he really is. The Pharisee was guilty of more than mere false pride. He was guilty of failing to acknowledge that he was a sinner. Someone could recognize that he is a sinner while also underestimating the extent of his own sinfulness. This would be false pride, but it would also be a lesser false pride than that of the Pharisee. The Pharisee was less pleasing to God, not merely because of his false pride, but because he believed he had been spared from sin. So this parable provides no reason to conclude that false pride is morally worse than being terribly immoral. In light of this, it remains reasonable to assume that some kinds of characters are morally worse than a character that is guilty of false pride, so that being guilty of false pride would not be sufficient to make someone evil.

7.3 EGOTHEISM

Nevertheless, there remains the possibility, as suggested by this parable, that evil is some especially virulent kind of false pride. False pride was a part of Peters' description of pride, but it wasn't all there was to it. Peters says, "Pride is the attempt at human self-divinization" (87). This goes well beyond thinking you're a better person than you really are. This kind of pride, which I shall call *egotheism*, is the exaltation of one's ego to God-like status. Whether or not there is a god, egotheism is bad, because it leads a person to hold an inordinately high opinion of himself that is completely unjustified.

The moral danger in egotheism is that a person may assume for himself the importance and moral authority normally reserved for God. In assuming the importance of God, an egotheist may assume that his whims and desires take overriding precedence over anyone else's needs. This can lead to a consummate selfishness that excludes the needs of anyone else. In assuming the moral authority of God, an egotheist may presume that he knows better than anyone else what is right and that whatever he does is the right thing. This would lead an egotheist to act without honestly considering whether he was doing anything moral or immoral. The end result of egotheism would be selfishness unburdened by morality. The character of an egotheist would be strongly dominated by expediency, which would be enough for Kekes to identify him as evil. In being exceedingly selfish and morally reckless, an egotheist would be regularly disposed to bad behavior, and this implies that an egotheistic character is a bad character. Since these dispositions toward bad behavior would be constellated around egotheism, it would also count as a kind of bad character. Based on these considerations, having an egotheistic character is a possible candidate for what it means to have an evil character. Let's now consider some objections.

7.3.1   Objections to Egotheism as the Essence of Evil

7.3.1.1   Objection 1: Egotheism is Meaningless Unless God Exists

One objection is that the notion of egotheism is meaningless unless there is a God. This is a poor objection, for it is based on a misunderstanding of egotheism. Egotheism isn't morally wrong because it challenges the importance and moral authority of some actual supreme being. It is wrong because it

exaggerates selfishness and weakens moral sensibilities. It does this whether or not there is an actual God. A couple recent examples of egotheists include the cult leaders Jim Jones and David Koresh. Jones was responsible for the massacre in Jonestown, Guyana, at which hundreds of people died by drinking poisoned Kool-Aid. Koresh led the Branch Davidians, who died in a conflict with the U.S. government, because they were stockpiling arms. In his book *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream*, Robert Simon writes, "Both Koresh and Jones had declared that they were God. When a cult leader makes such a declaration, it is evidence of a serious mental disorder. Gods do not have to abide by the rules of mere mortals" (159). Simon then reports that both men freely had sex with cult members while otherwise forbidding members to engage in sex. Koresh is reported to have had sex with girls as young as twelve, Jones with both men and women, and both of them with wives of cult-members. This behavior reflects that both men freely assumed the moral authority of God, making everyone abide by their rules while making themselves exempt from the rules they imposed on others. It doesn't take the existence of God to make behavior like this abominable.

7.3.1.2   Objection 2: Pantheists are all Egotheists

Another objection is that pantheists commonly believe that they are God, yet they aren't all evil. This objection is based on the mistaken notion that believing you are God automatically makes you an egotheist. Egotheism is not a form of theism that identifies God with the holder of the belief. It is a form of false pride in which a person presumes to have much greater importance and moral authority than other people have. Although a pantheist believes that he is God, he also believes that everyone else is God. This belief that everyone else is God helps to undermine the idea that he is much better than everyone else. In this way, pantheism even undermines the basis for egotheism.

7.3.1.3   Objection 3: Egotheism is too Narrow a Theory

A third objection is that the theory is too narrow. It identifies an evil character with a particularly strong kind of false pride. It may be true that some kind of false pride is essential to an evil character, but this would not automatically imply that egotheism is the right match. But to give this objection something to work with, we need another theory that identifies evil with some kind of false pride. M. Scott Peck may provide such a theory. In *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, Peck offers a theory of evil that identifies it with a type of false pride. Let's take a closer look at this theory and determine whether it identifies evil as egotheism or as some other kind of false pride.

7.4 PECK'S THEORY OF EVIL

Peck succinctly describes his theory of evil when he says, "It is not their sins per se that characterize evil people, rather it is the subtlety and persistence and consistency of their sins. This is because the central defect of the evil is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it" (69). In this short passage, Peck has identified evil as a kind of bad character. First, he points out that sins (or: bad behavior) are typical of evil people and have a consistency to them. He then points out that such patterns of bad behavior are due to the refusal of evil people to acknowledge their own sin. This is the feature that, for Peck, distinguishes an evil person's character from other bad characters, and this sets it apart as a kind of bad character.

One immediate objection to Peck's theory is that it must be incorrect if there is no God, for sin presupposes the existence of God. So, if there is no God, there would be no sin, and it would be perfectly appropriate to refuse to acknowledge sin. This is a poor objection, because sin does not presuppose the existence of God. Sin is merely the failure to be perfect. Here is what Peck has to say about sin:

> **Sinning is most broadly defined as "missing the mark." This means that we sin every time we fail to hit the bull's-eye. Sin is nothing more and nothing less than a failure to be continually perfect. Because it is impossible to be continually perfect, we are all sinners. (70)**

So all that Peck means by sin is moral imperfection. In this light, Peck's theory identifies an evil person as someone who refuses to acknowledge moral imperfection in himself. Moreover, it is not the refusal to acknowledge some imperfections that makes a person evil. It is the refusal to acknowledge any

imperfection. As Peck puts it, evil people "are characterized by their *absolute* refusal to tolerate the sense of their own sinfulness" (71). So an evil person, for Peck, is someone who refuses to acknowledge that he is a sinner. It should also be stressed that it is the *refusal* to acknowledge sin which is the distinguishing feature of an evil person. Peck says,

> **The essential component of evil is not the absence of a sense of sin or imperfection but the unwillingness to tolerate that sense. At one and the same time, the evil are aware of their evil and desperately trying to avoid the awareness. Rather than blissfully lacking a sense of morality, like the psychopath, they are continually engaged in sweeping the evidence of their evil under the rug of their own consciousness. (76)**

So ignorance of one's own sinfulness is not enough to make someone evil on this theory. Although an evil person is, on this theory, ignorant of his sinfulness, this ignorance is brought on by false pride, and it is the pride, not the ignorance, that makes one evil. Peck describes this false pride as

> **a kind of pride that unrealistically denies our inherent sinfulness and imperfection–a kind of overweening pride or arrogance that prompts people to reject and even attack the judgement implied by the day-to-day evidence of their own inadequacy. (80)**

7.4.1   Are Peck's Evil People Truly Bad?

It seems peculiar that evil would consist in the refusal to acknowledge sin. From one perspective, it seems that it might be a good thing. Consider the idea of self-fulfilling prophecy or the power of positive thinking. Someone can sometimes bring something about by believing strongly enough that it is true. For example, a paranoid person can make someone her enemy by, in part, thinking that he is her enemy. Or someone can get himself to do something by telling himself over and over again that he can do it. Perhaps the same principle applies to someone who believes he is without sin. By thinking that he is without sin, a person might focus on living up to the image he has of himself, leading him to regularly do good deeds and avoid sin. Even if he was incorrect in thinking that he was without sin, his belief in his own sinlessness might lead him to be less sinful than other people.

This idea seems to find some corroboration in the life and works of Ayn Rand. Rand seems to have been the sort of person Peck's theory would identify as evil, and she was an outspoken moral philosopher whose ideas are still admired by many intelligent people. Pride was one of the most important virtues in her moral theory, and here is what she says about it in her essay "The Objectivist Ethics" from her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*:

> **The virtue of Pride can best be described by the term: "moral ambitiousness." It means that one must earn the right to hold oneself as one's own highest value by achieving one's own moral perfection–which one achieves by never accepting any code of irrational virtues impossible to practice and by never failing to practice the values one knows to be rational–by never accepting an unearned guilt and never earning any, or, if one *has* earned it, never leaving it uncorrected–by never resigning oneself passively to any flaws in one's character–by never placing any concern, wish, fear or mood of the moment above the reality of one's own self-esteem. (27)**

It should be clear from Rand's description of pride that she believes the achievement of moral perfection is a real possibility. After telling us that pride is moral ambitiousness after moral perfection, she sets out the conditions for achieving moral perfection. In addition to claiming that moral perfection is achievable, Rand maintained that she was morally perfect. In *The Ayn Rand Cult*, Jeff Walker writes,

> **Rand's attorney in the 1950's, Pincus Birner, once propelled Rand into a rage with his suggestion that *everyone*, Rand included, at some time or another had done something they knew was ethically wrong. Decades later when asked whether "according to your philosophy *you* are a perfect being," Rand replied: "Have I absorbed and practiced all the principles of behavior which I preach? . . . I would say–Yes, resoundingly." (247)**

Despite her belief in her moral perfection, she was far from morally perfect. One of her biggest sins was how she hurt her husband, Frank O'Connor, by openly carrying on an affair with her protégé, Nathaniel Branden. Walker writes,

Rand procured explicit permission from both spouses for the affair. It was only grudgingly granted and Frank would probably have felt more like a man if he'd been secretly rather than so openly cuckolded. [. . .] Twice a week, for years, Branden would arrive at Ayn and Frank's apartment to have sex in their bed, while the humiliated husband retired to a neighborhood bar. (263)

Walker also mentions how Rand's disregard for her husband was destroying him. He writes,

In Kay Nolte Smith's *Elegy for a Soprano*, inner circle members "would watch Scotch slide down" Frank's "throat more easily and more often, gradually coating his eyes with glass and turning his gestures into painful slow motion. . . . There seemed to be less of him than before, not physically, but less of his personality. His self. As if he had a slow leak in his soul." Frank's drinking buddies regarded him as an alcoholic as far back as the mid-1950's. Barbara Branden relates that toward the end when people came into Rand's apartment, "the first thing they smelled was alcohol, and Frank had clearly been drinking," even in the morning. Now "Frank would fly into rages over nothing." After he died, his studio was found littered with empty litter bottles. (264)

Based on the moral value she gave to pride, her own claims to moral perfection, and the fact, denied by her, of her own sinfulness, Rand seems to be the sort of person Peck would describe as evil–someone whose pride led her to deny any sense of her own sinfulness. Yet Rand maintained and usually lived by strong moral ideals. Her belief in her own moral perfection did not arise in a vacuum. She grounded her sense of moral perfection in purposefully living by a moral theory which maintains that moral perfection is a real possibility. On the face of it, it seems strange to maintain that a proud moralism would be morally worse than being terribly immoral. Yet this is a consequence of Peck's theory. So let's look more closely at why Peck regards this kind of pride as the essence of evil.

One moral danger in this kind of pride is that it eliminates the role guilt plays in a person's conscience. When someone does something in violation of his own moral standards, the normal response is to feel guilty about it. Guilt puts a check on a person's immoral behavior by making him feel sorry for what he did, by encouraging him to repent, and by encouraging him to not do the same thing in the future. Imagined guilt also plays a role in the conscience. Someone can imagine doing something and realize, through his imagination, that he would feel guilty for doing it. When someone refuses to accept any sense of sinfulness, he refuses to accept feelings of guilt. This causes him to lose the moral guidance these feelings would normally give him. Without this guidance, he can do or contemplate doing wicked things without a sense of guilt telling him that it's wrong. Guilt is moral pain, and it serves a function similar to physical pain. If you could feel no physical pain, you would regularly injure yourself, because it would be much harder to tell when you were hurting yourself. Likewise, if you felt no guilt (or ignored your guilt), you would regularly be prone to moral deterioration, because it would be more difficult for you to tell when you were harming your character. Peck describes the same idea when he says, "Unpleasant though it may be, the sense of personal sin is precisely that which keeps our sin from getting out of hand. It is quite painful at times, but it is a very great blessing because it is our one and only safeguard against our own proclivity for evil" (72).

But this much applies equally as well to psychopaths, whom Peck describes as "blissfully lacking a sense of morality," (76) as it does to people who cannot abide any sense of sinfulness in themselves. Psychopaths, as Peck understands them, simply lack feelings of guilt, whereas the so-called evil people actively avoid feelings of guilt. Is there any moral danger in avoiding guilt besides losing its benefits? Peck says there is. He identifies scapegoating as a "predominant characteristic" of those he calls evil (73). He writes,

Scapegoating works through a mechanism psychiatrists call projection. Since the evil, deep down, feel themselves to be faultless, it is inevitable that when they are in conflict with the world they will invariably perceive the conflict as the world's fault. Since they must deny their own badness, they must perceive others as bad. They *project* their own evil onto the world. They never think of themselves as evil; on the other hand, they consequently see much evil in others. (73-74)

Aside from falsely accusing people, which is itself bad, the moral danger in scapegoating is that it leads a person into malevolence. Consider how a mother may feel after a man murders her daughter. She is likely to hate him and seek revenge. Consider how you would feel if someone spewed insults at you. You would probably feel angry and be tempted to do some harm in retaliation, even if it's just to say a few choice words of your own. In general, people often feel strong ill will toward other people for legitimate reasons. In scapegoating, people operate as if they have legitimate grievances, but instead of having legitimate grievances, they base their grievances on fantasy and a stubborn refusal to take any blame for anything.

Scapegoaters are full of imagined grievances, and these lead to hatred, ill will, prejudice, and many other kinds of malevolence. This malevolence regularly leads scapegoaters to mistreat other people, and it often leads them into committing various atrocities. History gives many examples. Hitler and the Nazis made the Jews scapegoats for everything wrong with post-WWI Germany. Joseph McCarthy hurt many people by persecuting people for communism. During the dark ages, many innocent women were tried, tortured, and executed for witchcraft, and this was due to scapegoating, not innocent mistakes. Racism, which has regularly led to evils around the world, is normally the result of scapegoating. In general, many kinds of harm result from scapegoating. It leads to ill will, physical abuse, genocide, pogroms, and wars.

This much provides some good reasons for agreeing with Peck's theory, but it still doesn't fully address the example of the moralist who, in being unwilling to abide any sense of sinfulness, tries to live a morally exemplary life. It was previously suggested that Rand is a suitable counterexample–a proud moralist who maintained strong moral ideals, usually lived by them, and occasionally made mistakes. A truly suitable counterexample will be someone who is universally regarded as good by those who knew her and who does not exhibit the morally reprehensible traits Peck believes are typical of evil people. In both respects, Rand fails to be a suitable counterexample. After her affair with Branden ended, she learned that he had been having an affair with a third woman[6]. Upon confronting him about this, she went on a tirade against him, and as he puts it in his memoirs, "she poured abuse on abuse, drowning her suffering in self-righteous anger" (*Judgement Day* 385). And this self-righteous anger did not fade after a good cathartic outburst. His wife Barbara told him, "Ayn wants you dead! That's all that's moving her right now!" (*Judgement* 398). A friend of his, a psychologist named Roger Callahan, told Branden,

> **The mistakes you made were not evil. But trying to block the publication of *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, taking *The Objectivist* from you the way it was taken, lying about your achievements, literally trying to destroy you–*is* evil. They accuse you of betraying Objectivism. What is your 'betrayal' compared to Ayn's and the others'? What is your deception compared to the multiple deceptions they're all conspiring in right now? (*Judgement* 399)**

In addition to Callahan's description of some of Rand's actions as evil, some of Rand's former disciples came to describe her as evil. Walker writes,

> **Roy Childs recalls "a six-hour discussion" at the Blumenthals' "about whether or not Ayn Rand was evil, the Blumenthals and Kay Smith saying 'Yes' and Barbara Branden being very defensive saying 'No'." Barbara's former husband recalls, though, "In the early years following the Break, Barbara . . . told me I was refusing to confront the extent of Ayn's evil and the harm she had done me and her and everyone else." (261)**

Walker adds some more detail on Allan Blumenthal's opinion of Rand:

> **Psychiatrist Allan Blumenthal, who knew Rand intimately for a quarter-century and who was *the* psychiatric authority among orthodox Objectivists for more than a decade, believes that Rand suffered from a veritable cluster of personality disorders: Paranoid, Borderline, and Narcissistic. (266)**

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[6] The third woman was Patrecia Scott. She eventually became Branden's second wife, and after her untimely death, he dedicated *The Psychology of Romantic Love* to her.

So, it turns out, Rand is not a good counterexample to Peck's theory. Despite her championing of moral ideals, and despite her influence on the ethical thinking of many intelligent people, a case can be made that she was evil. With only the testimony of others, I cannot say for certain that she was evil, but the evidence does suggest that she was far from being the sort of moral exemplar who would make a good counterexample to Peck's theory.

This takes care of the proposal that Rand is a suitable counterexample, but it still doesn't fully address the idea that there could be a proud moralist who is evil on Peck's theory but, through self-fulfilling prophecy, becomes a moral exemplar rather than a crazed scapegoater. Although an unwillingness to face one's own sinfulness may lead many people into abominable evil, why couldn't it also lead people into living morally exemplary lives? Isn't it, after all, rooted in the desire to be moral?

In actuality, it is not. The primary motivation for these people is to avoid the pain in self-reproach. They cannot tolerate thinking ill of themselves in any way. They are motivated by how they feel about themselves, and this is not the same as being motivated by the prospect of becoming better people. Here is how Peck describes this in *Further Along the Road Less Traveled: The Unending Journey Toward Spiritual Growth*,

> **Their self-esteem *is* the single most important thing in their lives. They will do anything to preserve and maintain their self-esteem at all times and at all costs. If there is anything that threatens their self-esteem, if there is any evidence around them of their own imperfection or something that might cause them to feel bad about themselves, rather than using that evidence and those bad feelings to make some kind of correction, they will go about trying to exterminate the evidence. And this is where their evil behavior arises. Because it is necessary for them to preserve their self-esteem at all costs. (89)**

Yet this is not the same as having properly grounded self-esteem. Someone with properly grounded self-esteem is willing to patiently bear the burden of being displeasing to oneself. This may seem paradoxical, since self-esteem is generally regarded as feeling good about yourself. But there is no real paradox here. Genuine self-esteem is based in part on the understanding that being pleasing or displeasing to yourself is not an all or nothing matter. You don't have to choose between idolizing or hating yourself. You can choose to be pleased with some aspects of yourself, to be displeased with others, and to patiently accept what you don't like about yourself while working on self-improvement. This is how you can have genuine self-esteem while also being somewhat displeasing to yourself. It is likely that those whom Peck calls evil do not understand that there is this middle ground between self-idolization and self-hatred. Without understanding this, they are polarized toward self-idolization and away from self-hatred. Instead of being inspired by moral ideals, they are impelled by the fear of hating themselves.

Corroboration of this comes from psychiatric observations of psychopaths, as reported by Robert Simon in his book *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream*. Simon does not agree with Peck's understanding of psychopaths as moral imbeciles who blissfully lack any sense of morality, but what he reports about them fits well with Peck's theory of evil. He writes:

> **One of the great psychological paradoxes that forensic psychiatrists often uncover in evaluating psychopathic criminals is the presence in them of a sadistic, punitive conscience. Not having had appropriate models for behavior in their childhoods, many never mature past the eye-for-an-eye, harsh, punitive conscience of the child. If their own conscience struck them down, its punishment would be awful. To escape that possibility, these psychopaths reject all moral standards and ideals. Thus it becomes extraordinarily difficult for them to face the emotional pain of their own punitive consciences. (35-36)**

Like the people Peck describes as evil, psychopaths, as described here, fear the emotional pain of self-condemnation. Whereas psychopaths may try to avoid their conscience altogether, evil moralists may have a punitive conscience which they keep turned toward others, so that they won't fall victim to it. Thus, a person could be voraciously interested in morality, but for all the wrong reasons. Instead of caring about moral issues, such as the good life, the welfare of other people, the well-being of animals, and so on, the sort of person Peck calls evil will be interested in morality mainly out of the need to avoid self-

recrimination. The Pharisee wants to be able to stand before God and proclaim that he has scrupulously followed all of God's laws. Ayn Rand wants to "earn the right to hold [herself] as [her] own highest value by achieving [her] own moral perfection" (*Virtue of Selfishness* 27). Both are focused on using moral perfection as the means for thinking well of themselves. This is an egocentric perversion of morality that focuses on approving of oneself rather than on cherishing what is good because it's good and doing what is right because it's right. The perversion in this is even more evident when a moralist fails to achieve the purported goal of her morality. Walker writes, "while the ultimate goal of her philosophy is ostensibly personal happiness, it made neither Ayn Rand nor her most devoted followers happy" (266).

Although their morality may be perverted, it may still be objected that it still restrains people from acting on most of their immoral desires. For example, the Pharisees believed it was wrong to murder and steal, and they normally avoided such activities. Ayn Rand believed that people had rights, such as the right not be killed, and she regularly respected such rights. For example, she never killed anyone.

Generally, such moralists advocate moralities that give them "moral" outlets for their malevolence, and they aren't big on forgiveness. For example, the Pharisees of Jesus' day enjoyed executing sinners, which the Laws of Moses gave them the authority to do. As for Rand, her morality left out a good part of what normally goes into morality, such as compassion, duty, and the needs of other people. Focusing mainly on self-interest and negative rights, her morality left room to hurt other people. As already mentioned, she drove her husband to drink while openly carrying on an affair with another man. By her way of thinking, this affair was completely moral.

Furthermore, moralists commonly use moral condemnation as their weapon of choice. Instead of using morality as a guide to better their lives and the lives of others, they wield morality as a weapon for attacking other people. Rand commonly did this in her novels, creating negative caricatures of the sorts of people she disapproved of. She also treated most people with disdain, and when she learned that Branden had cheated on her, she unleashed all her moral indignation on him.

Peters' seven steps to radical evil also lend support to the idea that using morality as a weapon is particularly evil. The steps after pride are concupiscence, self-justification, cruelty, and blasphemy. Using morality as a weapon is akin to what Peters calls blasphemy, but we should go through these in order. Concupiscence happens to be a fault of everyone Peck calls evil. It is a perversion of regular desire. Regular, healthy desire is based on what a person needs for self-fulfillment. Concupiscence is rooted solely in the pleasure/pain principle (123). The people Peck calls evil feel concupiscent desire for the feeling of moral perfection. They want it because it gives them pleasure and its absence causes them pain, not because they recognize the role morality plays in self-fulfillment. Self-justification is the flip side of scapegoating. Peters describes these as going together (162). Self-justification is about convincing yourself that you are morally blameless, and scapegoating is about putting the blame on somebody else. As mentioned previously, the people Peck calls evil are regularly guilty of both of these. Cruelty is basically the same thing as malevolence. The scapegoating of others normally leads people into cruelty.

Finally there is blasphemy, and Peters defines this "as the misuse of divine symbols so as to prevent the communication of God's grace" (16). Although Peters is a theologian and describes blasphemy in religious terms, using morality as a weapon is very close to what he has in mind by blasphemy. Used properly, morality has the power to help people live rich, fulfilling lives. When morality is turned on people as a weapon, this can rob it of its power to help people. In defending themselves against morality used as a weapon, people may be reluctant to find comfort in morality and end up turning to immorality instead. They may rebel against morality because it has been turned against them, and they may find it more difficult to rely on morality to better their own lives. The same kind of danger also exists for the person who uses morality as a weapon, for he grows accustomed to using morality to hurt rather than to help, and this robs morality of its power to improve his own life. And this points to one more way in which using morality as a weapon can harm the person it is used against. Instead of abandoning or rebelling against morality, the victim may fight back with the same weapon.

Using it as a weapon himself, the victim would begin to rob morality of its power to help him live a better life. This is all extremely harmful–and very similar to what Peters calls radical evil. In this light, it seems unlikely that any moralists fitting Peck's description of evil would serve as good counterexamples to his theory.

It is also worth mentioning that Richard Taylor, who says that pride is a virtue, once wrote a story, under the pseudonym of Diodorus Cronus, in which a plague-carrier, an executioner, a murderer, and a moralist were all being considered for the position of ruling Hell ("The Governance of the Kingdom of Darkness"). The plague-carrier, a woman named Adama, was responsible for more deaths than anyone else on record. She was immune to the plague and knew she carried it. She could have chosen to live a secluded life or to go out of her way to avoid spreading her disease to others, but to more conveniently get to wherever she was going, she would routinely pass through densely populated areas. She didn't mean to harm anyone, but she didn't care enough to avoid doing harm. The executioner, a man named Bazel, wasn't responsible for nearly as many deaths as Adama, but he intentionally and routinely killed many people, and over time he was able to double his efficiency, allowing him to kill hundreds of people each day. But he felt no ill will toward the people he killed. He was just doing his job. The murderer, a police officer named Calpon, hadn't killed nearly as many people as Bazel, but he had killed purely for the enjoyment of killing. He was part of a vigilante death squad that would hunt down criminals and kill them. When he was asked why he hated criminals so much, he said that he didn't hate them at all. He killed criminals because they were available for him to kill without much risk of getting caught. The moralist, a man named Deprov, never injured or killed another human, though he would sometimes kill or injure animals. He was law-abiding and considered himself a defender of law and order. Yet he was cruel; he didn't care one whit for other people, and he brandished his adherence to morality as a weapon for humiliating people. One of his favorite pastimes was to make examples of people. When he saw a man publically urinating, he called out to the man's children to stop their father's shameful action. When he knew about a black man and a white woman who were sleeping together, he arranged for the police to catch them. Taylor mentions that the dossier on Deprov was larger than all the others, but he doesn't say who got the position. A year later, the same journal published "Taylor and Satan," an article on Taylor's story by Dennis A. Rohatyn. In this article, Rohatyn maintains that Deprov was the most evil of the four. Rohatyn says of Deprov,

> **But Deprov mistrusts human nature. The presupposition which governs his actions is that most people, indeed, all people, are rotten. [. . .] Deprov is prepared to see not only the worst, but only or exclusively the bad side, in people. While their actions may be deplorable, Deprov's attitude is even more reprehensible, for he is after all the member of a community–he prides himself on being a good citizen, after all–and so, his lack of trust in his fellow men when they are left to their own devices is, if anything, more appalling than the misdeeds they perpetrate. (384)**

Rohatyn has essentially described the character of a chronic scapegoater. Deprov chronically scapegoats people, because he sees evil in everyone but himself, and he searches it out, fully expecting to find it. He does this to boost his own ego. He wants to believe in his own moral perfection. But he cannot do this by examining and reflecting on his own moral virtues, for he is morally impoverished. So he turns to other methods. By playing morality cop, he acts out a strong concern for morality, which helps him regard himself as moral. Focusing on the immorality of others, he removes focus from his own faults, and he relies on comparison with others, rather than honest self-examination, to feel good about himself. Since he cannot look at himself and see a good person, he looks at others, sees their faults, and tells himself that he must be good because he is not like them. This is like an ugly person who avoids the mirror and tells himself that he must be handsome because he doesn't look like other ugly people. Of course, if he avoids the mirror, how does he know? This is another fault of Deprov. By avoiding self-examination, he cannot honestly know whether he is really so unlike those he condemns as his moral inferiors.

Another reason for regarding Deprov as more evil is that he is the most qualified for ruling Hell. Adama would have no idea what to do. Bazel might make the torture in Hell more efficient, but that wouldn't be much of a contribution. Calpon might enjoy torturing people in Hell, but he would be more like a kid in a candy store, indulging himself in the torture of others, but not really furthering the business of Hell. Deprov would see the evil of everyone in Hell (except for himself), and he would make sure people knew why they deserved to be there. He would challenge those who didn't think they belonged there, enumerating their faults, berating them with moral censure, and beating them down until they realized how horrible they were, and then some. Deprov is not the sort of person who cares about justice or due proportion. He would harp on people's faults well past their capitulation. He would make sure people felt miserable about themselves, which goes well beyond torturing people with fire, pitchforks, and boiling oil. As portrayed in Job, it is Satan's job to accuse people of sin. Deprov would excel at this.

Another reason for recognizing Deprov as more evil is that he is obsessed with evil to the exclusion of any concern with goodness. Instead of seeking out the good in others, he concerns himself only with finding the evil in others. His main interest in morality is as a tool for condemning others. The idea that people can use morality to become good hardly enters his thoughts, if it does at all. For him, goodness has been reduced to not being evil, and evil has become the only reality he recognizes. In this respect, Deprov is a reverse Augustinian. Augustine regarded evil as a privation of good, whereas Deprov regards good as a privation of evil.

Although Deprov may be an extreme characterization of an evil moralist, Taylor's story does help illustrate how someone can be both a very strong moralist and utterly evil. It also helps show the difference between someone who is honestly concerned with morality, and someone who fears self-recrimination. Although an evil person, as Peck characterizes evil, may believe that he is morally perfect, this will not work the same as positive thinking or self-fulfilling prophecy. Such a person is focused on the denial of a negative, not the affirmation of a positive. Although these are logically equivalent to each other, they are not psychologically equivalent. To focus on denying a negative is to focus on the negative, whereas to focus on affirming a positive is to focus on the positive. Since the focus is on the negative, such a person is not even practicing positive thinking. He focuses on the idea of having faults, fears that he has them, and denies that it can be so. Instead of improving himself through positive thinking, he harms himself through negative thinking and the fear of negative thinking, which is just more negative thinking.

7.4.2   Does Peck's Theory Miss Some Evil People?

One selling point of Peck's theory is that it highlights the sort of evil self-righteousness can lead to. Yet it implies the seemingly paradoxical idea that evil people never recognize themselves as evil. This leaves the theory wide open to the objection that it does not include as evil anyone who believes he is evil. As it happens, children's television shows, comic books, various movies, and probably many other sources are replete with examples of villains who regard themselves as evil. A few of these are Darth Vader from *Star Wars*, Dark Specter from *Power Ranger in Space*, and many of the vampires on *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. What distinguishes these villains from those Peck calls evil is that they have chosen to embrace the powers of evil and to eschew the powers of goodness. If any of them can rightly be described as evil, then Peck's theory does not fit everyone who is evil.

Although they don't fit well with Peck's theory, they do have a kind of pride about them. Peck identified evil specifically with the pride of overweening self-righteousness. This is a kind of pride that belongs to those who think they are good. It is also a pride that bows before morality. It makes morality the standard of self-importance. As Rand put it, "one must earn the right to hold oneself as one's own highest value by achieving one's own moral perfection" (27). But what if someone believed he had this right regardless and did not believe he had to achieve moral perfection of any kind for the right to unequivocally assert his importance above the importance of anyone else. He might feel he has the right to use whatever power and might he has at his disposal to get whatever he wants. He may even dispense

with the idea of rights, considering himself more important than morality altogether. This is a pride that rejects morality.

But in the examples mentioned, there is more to it than just the rejection of morality. There is also an aligning of oneself with the powers of darkness. For Darth Vader, this is the dark side of the force. For Dr. Jekyll, who becomes Mr. Hyde, this is the dark side of his personality, what Carl Jung calls the shadow. In general, such a person has recognized his own potential for evil for what it is, and he has chosen to embrace it rather than reject it. Although Peck's theory of evil, as so far described, does not account for such people, Peck does offer some account of such people by distinguishing between human evil and demonic evil.

The part of Peck's theory described so far has been about what he calls human evil. This is how a human being can be evil on his own. But he also believes in another kind of evil, which he calls demonic evil, for the simple reason that someone who is demonically evil is possessed by demons. Concerning those who have embraced their own dark side, Peck would probably maintain that they are actually possessed by evil spirits.

Of course, we should be highly skeptical of any claim that demonic possession is real. Peck admits that he cannot convince of its reality. He says, "Conversion to a belief in God generally requires some kind of actual encounter–a personal experience–with the living God. Conversion to a belief in Satan in no different" (184). He further adds that he "personally met Satan face-to-face" and that there is no way he could translate his experience into our experience (184). So we are left with his word and little else.

We could take him at his word, going on the assumption that he couldn't possibly experience anything like a personal encounter with Satan unless he actually met Satan. But that would be a mistake. All we should take as given is that Peck experienced something unusually disturbing. His idea that it was an encounter with Satan is his own interpretation, and it was an interpretation he was, as a Christian, already prepared to give. An atheist would likely interpret the same experience differently.

The experiences Peck refers to were the exorcisms of two people, which he witnessed out of curiosity over whether demon possession was real. He was skeptical about demon possession, but he saw in these two cases some things he could not explain. In describing them, Peck provides some more reasons for why he believes these were real cases of demon possession. Although none of these reasons are conclusive, it is worthwhile to go over them, because the people who were exorcized reveal a kind of evil that isn't accounted for in Peck's notion of human evil.

Concerning these exorcisms, he writes:

In both cases the major distinction in differential diagnosis was between possession and multiple personality disorder. In these cases there were two distinguishing features. In multiple personality disorder the "core personality" is virtually always unaware of the existence of the secondary personalities–at least until close to the very end of prolonged, successful treatment. In other words, a true dissociation exists. In these two cases, however, both patients were either aware from the beginning or were readily made aware not only of the self-destructive part of them but also that this part had a distinct and *alien* personality. Not that they were confused by this secondary personality. To the contrary, it quickly became clear that the secondary personality *desired* to confuse them. In many ways the secondary personality seemed like a personified resistance. The secondary differentiation is that while in multiple personality disorders the secondary personality may play the role of the "whore" or "the aggressive one" or "the independent one" or someone with other unacknowledged traits, it has never been reported to my knowledge as being frankly evil. In both these cases before exorcism the secondary personality was revealed to be blatantly evil. (192-3)

Summarizing this, each of these two people exhibited an evil secondary personality that was known to the primary personality. Peck believed that it wasn't multiple personality disorder, because secondary personalities normally remain unknown to the primary personality, and the secondary personalities in multiple personality disorder have not, to his knowledge, been reported to be evil. This may rule out the usual variety of multiple personality disorder, but it is premature to assume that the only other possibility

would be demon possession. The correct diagnosis may be a personality disorder that hasn't been properly identified yet.

But other factors contributed to Peck's assessment that these two people were really possessed. One was that the primary personality of each seemed to Peck to be "unusually good and potentially saintly" (194). He speculated that Satan's powers are limited, saying "I wonder if Satan did not specifically invest its energy in attacking them because they represented a particular threat to its designs" (205). This is one explanation, but it is not the only one. There could have been some kind of split between the good side and bad side, such that the bad side took on a life of its own. Perhaps these people suffered from some kind of black and white split personality disorder.

Another factor was that these patients were somewhat transmogrified when the so-called demonic was revealed. Peck says,

When the demonic finally spoke clearly in one case, an expression appeared on the patient's face that could be described only as Satanic. It was an incredibly contemptuous grin of utter hostile malevolence. I have spent many hours before a mirror trying to imitate it without the slightest success. I have seen that expression only one other time in my life–for a few fleeting seconds on the face of the other patient, late in the evaluation period. Yet when the demonic finally revealed itself in the exorcism of the other patient, it was with a still more ghastly expression. The patient suddenly resembled a writhing snake of great strength, viciously attempting to bite the team members. More frightening than the writhing body, however, was the face. The eyes were hooded with lazy reptilian torpor–except when the reptile darted out in attack, at which moment the eyes would open wide with blazing hatred. Despite these frequent darting moments, what upset me the most was the extraordinary sense of a fifty-million-year-old heaviness I received from this serpentine being. (196)

The patient did not actually become a serpent. The patient merely started to act like one. This may suggest the demonic to Peck, but another explanation is that this secondary personality was more in touch with the reptilian brain than it was with the two mammalian brains. As Paul D. MacLean has discovered, the human brain comes in three different evolutionary layers (7). The oldest layer is the reptilian brain, which mainly controls stereotyped behaviors (8). Our reptilian brains are hardly any different than the brains of reptiles. Next is the paleo-mammalian brain, which mainly controls emotion and is common to all mammals (22). The third layer is the neo-mammalian brain, also known as the neocortex, which is mainly for our higher intellectual powers, such as "reading, writing, and arithmetic" (8). This layer is most highly developed in humans, though it is also fairly well-developed in dolphins and some other mammals. Since we all have reptilian brains in us, this could account for someone suddenly acting like a reptile. It may be shocking to witness it happen, but the shock of it does not imply that demons are responsible. As for this "fifty-million-year-old heaviness" that Peck sensed, that's merely his own feeling, and it has no scientific merit.

One more factor was that both patients benefitted from therapy much more readily after the exorcism than before it. Peck says, "In one case, psychotherapy became possible for the first time. In the other, more was accomplished in fifty hours of intense psychotherapy following the exorcism than in five hundred hours preceding it" (198). The suggestion is that demons were previously impeding the progress, and with the demons gone, these people could more easily benefit from psychotherapy. Another explanation is that the confrontation of the exorcism removed significant obstacles to recovery, but no real demons were ever present. As Peck himself notes, psychotherapy tends to be nonconfrontational. Yet some people may suffer from disorders for which some kind of confrontation is the best therapy. Once they have been adequately confronted, psychotherapy may be more beneficial.

Furthermore, in mentioning how he believes people become possessed, Peck opens the door to an alternate explanation for his observations. He says,

From both these cases I would conclude that possession is no accident. I very much doubt that somebody can go walking down the street one day and have a demon jump out from behind a bush and penetrate him. Possession appears to be a gradual process in which the possessed

person repeatedly sells out for one reason or another. The primary reason both these patients sold out seems to be loneliness. Each was terribly lonely, and each, early in the process, adopted the demonic as a kind of imaginary companion. (190)

Maybe it was never anything more than an imaginary companion, and this imaginary companion, in the mind of the so-called possessed person, took on a life of its own. The exorcisms were each performed by a team, and Peck says "A major reason that the team was crucial in each exorcism was that the team gave the patients their very first experience of a true community" (199). If the so-called demon was merely an imaginary companion that had developed a separate personality in the person's mind, feeling part of a real community would help dissipate the need to keep it around. The exorcism would merely be a drama in which the person chooses a real community with real people over any continued relationship with the imaginary companion. Once such a choice was made, regular psychotherapy would become more beneficial.

This alternate explanation has support in more of Peck's observations. He says,

During one of the exorcisms I witnessed the exorcist attempted to so enrage Satan that it would leave the possessed's body to attack him, the exorcist. The maneuver did not work. Despite its obvious homicidal fury at the exorcist, nothing happened. And slowly it dawned on us that the spirit either could not or would not leave the patient's body under such conditions. This led us to two conclusions. One, already mentioned, is that ultimately the patient had to be the exorcist. The other is that *Satan has no power except in a human body*. (206)

Another explanation for why Satan did not leave the body to attack the exorcist is that there was no Satanic possession going on, that what they took for Satan was merely an alternate personality in the mind of a human being. It may not have been classic multiple personality disorder, but it still could have merely been some kind of multiple personality disorder.

Based on his experience of these exorcisms, and based on his belief that he actually encountered Satan in them, Peck notes some of Satan's qualities. He believes that Satan is entirely hateful, hating not only human beings but reality itself. Due to its hatred of reality, Satan constantly lies, lacks a sense of reality, and has no comprehension of science, which involves dedication to reality. He also believes that Satan is extraordinarily proud and narcissistic. He writes, "Were it not for its extraordinary pride and narcissism, Satan would probably not reveal itself at all. Its pride overcomes its intelligence, so that the demon of deceit is also a showoff" (208). Pecks also maintains that Satan has no comprehension of love. He writes, "by virtue of its extreme self-centeredness, it has no real understanding of the phenomenon of love. It recognizes love as a reality to be fought and even to be imitated, but utterly lacking it itself, it does not understand love in the least" (208).

As far as understanding evil is concerned, it doesn't matter whether Peck really encountered Satan or merely two very disturbed human beings. In either case, Peck witnessed someone, whether a nonhuman entity or someone's alternate personality, who appeared blatantly evil without fitting Peck's previous description of human evil. Although Peck believes that humans can be evil only in the sense previously described, he regards Satan, whom he understands to be evil in a different way, as a person. He says of Satan, "Although intangible and immaterial, it has a personality, a true being" (207-8). So he regards Satan as an evil person of some sort, though Satan's evil is not rooted in any concupiscent desire after moral perfection.

Satan's evil, as Peck understands it, is rooted in its extreme self-centeredness and hatred of reality. Through self-centeredness, Satan is completely cut off from any sense of love or connection with others. Unlike those who crave after the feeling of moral perfection, Satan cannot even comprehend the need for morality, for morality is a guide for relating with others and with the outside world. In craving after a feeling of moral perfection, those whom Peck calls evil pay some homage to morality, and in doing this they respect, at least to some degree, the importance of recognizing and dealing with a real world outside of themselves. Satan does not even respect this much. It eschews any sense of reality, including any sense of reality that would have it pay any importance to morality.

Although Satan, as understood by Peck, lacks any interest in morality, there are common threads linking the evil of Satan and the evil of those whom Peck has previously described as evil. One of these is pride, the subject of this chapter. Peck identifies human evil as a kind of pride, and he also describes Satan as extremely proud and narcissistic. A central difference is that the pride of the humans Peck calls evil is rooted in a claim to moral perfection, whereas the pride of Satan surpasses any respect for or deference to morality. For both, pride reduces the hold morality has over a person. This has already been described in some detail for those whose pride is rooted in moral perfection. For someone whose pride even refuses to pay homage to morality, it should be obvious how it reduces the hold of morality.

Another common thread is malevolence. Evil humans, as Peck understands them, regularly engage in scapegoating, which results in various feelings of malevolence. Satan, as described by Peck, feels utter hostile malevolence. This too could be due to pride. In being so concerned with itself to the exclusion of anything else, Satan could regard everything else as a threat to it, and an all-consuming malevolence could grow out of a ubiquitous sense of threat.

One more common thread is isolation. The pride in each type of evil leads to isolation from others, from any sense of belonging or community, and from responsibility. For those whose pride centers around moral perfection, their pride makes it difficult for them to forgive others. It also makes it difficult to accept people in spite of their flaws. This is all compounded by their tendency to project their flaws onto others. Because of this, they can find fault with both the deserving and the undeserving, and find it difficult to accept or forgive anyone. This leads them to erect walls of resentment that cut them off from nearly everyone. In this manner, they isolate themselves from others.

They also isolate themselves from responsibility, for despite their praise for morality, they are more concerned with not being held morally blameworthy for anything than they are with accepting due moral responsibility. They will employ various psychological tricks, such as projection and evasion, to avoid any sense of blameworthiness. Instead of meeting their responsibilities, they pretend that they have met them, and this isolates them from any commitment to meeting the responsibilities they do have.

As described by Peck, Satan's immense narcissism separates it from any community with others, much as Narcissus isolated himself from the love of Echo by loving no one but himself (for the myth of Echo and Narcissus see Richardson 42-44 or T. Moore 57-68). Its malevolence, immorality, and hatred of reality also greatly contribute to its isolation. Assuming that Peck's Satan was just an imaginary friend of the people who were exorcized, rather than an actual evil spirit, isolation was also an important factor in their fantasy of demon possession. Peck mentioned that demons didn't just jump into people unaware, but that demon possession happened gradually, as a person gradually sold out. He also mentioned that the contributing factor in the possession of these two people was terrible loneliness. Even before their alleged demon possession, they felt extremely isolated from others.

Given that isolation is one of the common threads between Peck's concepts of human and demonic evil, it is plausible that isolation also plays a role in the development of evil. Isolation from community with other people can lead to feelings of alienation and resentment. It can also lead to feelings of persecution. When isolation is due to the way a person is treated by others, rather than from choice or being stranded in the middle of nowhere, he may begin to feel that others are treating him unfairly, that they are purposely choosing to shun him with no good reason. Such feelings can lead a person into feeling the need to justify himself, to prove his superiority over those who shun him. In the face of isolation, feelings of superiority can provide some consolation, and this can lead into what Peck has identified as evil, the unwillingness to tolerate any sense of moral imperfection in oneself.

Although Peck may be wrong about the existence of Satan and demon possession, his encounters with allegedly possessed individuals indicate that his theory of human evil cannot be all there is to being an evil person. Whether or not Satan exists, Peck's understanding of Satan serves as an example of how a person may be evil without fitting the description he has previously given. Instead of being intolerant of any sense of moral perfection, a person may be evil through a combination of intense malevolence and

narcissistic pride that severely isolates him from any kind of community with others and also elevates his ego above any concern for morality. Thus, evil should not be defined merely as an unwillingness to abide any sense of sinfulness.

7.5 FINAL THOUGHTS

Although Peck's theory sheds valuable insights on the psychology of being evil, it ultimately proves to be inadequate, and Peck's own discussion of demonic evil reveals the holes in his theory of human evil. The theory seems to identify a type of evil, but it falls short of describing what it means to be evil. As the discussion of demonic evil reveals, there are other ways of being evil. Besides being obsessed with moral perfection, a person could be evil by malevolently rejecting all interest in morality. The egotheism theory covers both kinds of evil, and in this respect, it is better than Peck's theory. It may turn out that evil is something other than a kind of pride, but that can wait until the egotheism theory is compared with other theories. In the meantime, the egotheism theory does describe evil as a kind of bad character. It is a character that is shaped by the strong presence of egotheistic pride, and it has been shown how egotheistic pride can corrupt a person and result in abominable behavior. Thus, it is a strong contender for the best theory of evil.

Chapter 8
Michael Gelven on Evil

This chapter focuses on one understanding of evil suggested by Michael Gelven in his article "The Meanings of Evil." This is the one I think holds the most promise. He suggests various meanings of evil in this article, some of which are similar to the simple theories presented in the first chapter. In this present chapter, I will examine the understanding of evil found in his ninth example, which is the one I find most promising. Since his ninth example is something of a rough sketch, I will turn to some of his other writings to flesh out what he seems to have in mind.

In this example, Gelven suggests that an evil person is someone whose "existence itself is somehow distorted, twisted, or characterized by unworthiness" (215). He further adds that to be evil means to "thwart or distort the meaning of existence, properly understood" (215). He gets more specific when he says that when we describe someone as not just bad but as evil, we mean that he has not only done immoral things but that his existence is nihilistic (216). He means by this that "the perpetrator does not affirm the worth or meaning of existence" (216).

We may draw from this that an evil person fails to affirm whatever it is that is fundamental to a worthwhile and meaningful existence, and in failing to do this he makes his own existence nihilistic. Since Gelven seems to be an existentialist, he may mean that a person's existence is really nihilistic in some ontological[7] sense. Perhaps the most literal way a nihilistic existence can be understood is to say that a person is dead or has never been born. But in his essay "Guilt and Human Meaning," Gelven says "Negative existence is not to be found in death, for that is not to exist at all" (72). He would surely say the same thing about a nihilistic existence. It is not non-existence; it is a kind of existence that is nihilistic.

To understand what Gelven could mean by a nihilistic existence, let's look at the related idea of a negative existence, which he brings up in "Guilt and Human Meaning." According to Gelven, Heidegger finds some kind of negative existence in guilt (72). Guilt is a kind of negative existence, because, as Gelven writes, "To be able to be guilty means that one sees his own existence as that which can fail or be inadequate, *and that this failure is one's own*" (74). Thus, guilt, as understood here, entails inadequacy, which is a negative aspect to something that is otherwise positive, and it entails the possibility for failure, not just failure at given tasks, but also the failure to continue existing. It is in this respect that guilt can be described as a negative existence.

But the negative existence of guilt is not the same thing as the nihilistic existence he is suggesting may be evil. Guilt is common to everyone beyond the age of innocence, whereas evil is not so common. As Gelven understands guilt, it is more or less the knowledge of good and evil, which is required for being either good or evil. Whereas turning evil is only one thing someone might do with the knowledge of good and evil. So they're not the same.

But what could a nihilistic existence be? Let's start with nihilism. This is a philosophical doctrine which denies that anything has any meaning or value. So, a nihilistic existence could be the sort led by someone whose outlook on life is thoroughly nihilistic. Someone with a thoroughly nihilistic outlook, such as the protagonist in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, would fail to affirm the worth and meaning of his existence, and this is what Gelven has been saying about an evil person in his ninth example. So, to

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[7] Ontology is the branch of philosophy concerned with being. If a term describing someone is ontological, it describes a mode of being.

understand what Gelven could mean by an evil person in this example, we need to know what he has in mind when he speaks of someone failing to affirm the worth and meaning of existence.

8.1   THE WORTH AND MEANING OF EXISTENCE

To understand what an evil person is like on this model, we need to know what it means to affirm the worth and meaning of existence, and this can be broken down into four questions we need to answer. (1) What does Gelven mean by existence? (2) What does it mean for existence to have worth? (3) What does it mean for existence to have meaning? (4) What does it mean to affirm these? The answers will help us flesh out the understanding of an evil person Gelven proposes in his ninth example.

The answers to these questions can be found in Gelven's essay "Guilt and Human Meaning," and in a few of his books, *Truth and Existence*, *The Risk of Being*, and *This Side of Evil*. Gelven answers the first question in "Guilt and Human Meaning." The following passage reveals that the existence he has in mind is an individual's personal existence. He writes,

> **We have seen that guilt can be interpreted as the ground of freedom; we must now consider the argument that guilt provides the basis for reasoning about the meaning of human existence. Whenever I think about the *meaning* of existence, as in such questions as what it means that I am in love, or that I have duties to perform, or that life is so exciting, or that life seems so ponderous and difficult -- whenever I *think* about the meaning of life, if I am to think and not merely respond to sentiment or triviality, I must do so in terms of that which makes those dimensions meaningful. (80)**

With respect to the first question, what's significant here are the expressions Gelven uses interchangeably with "the meaning of existence ." At the end of the first paragraph, he indicates that he is now going to say something about "the meaning of human existence." The next sentence begins with a reference to "the *meaning* of existence." After the first sentence indicates its subject, there is a long interlude of examples, which is followed by a dash and a repetition of the subject. This repetition of the subject uses a different phrase, "the meaning of life." So the worth and meaning of existence, as Gelven is using the phrase, is the worth and meaning of human life[8]. This much answers the first question. For each person, the worth and meaning of existence refers to the worth and meaning of his own life.

This passage also begins to answer the second question. When Gelven speaks of the meaning of life, he speaks of things that make life meaningful, such as being in love and performing duties. Thus, for Gelven, the meaning of existence is what makes it meaningful. We can extrapolate from this and understand the worth of existence in terms of what makes life worthwhile. So, the worth and meaning of existence would be what makes life worthwhile and meaningful. Therefore, an evil person would fail to affirm what is fundamental to making life worthwhile and meaningful. The following section explores Gelven's ideas on what makes life worthwhile and meaningful. This will reveal in greater depth what he means by the worth and meaning of existence.

8.2 GUILT, FREEDOM, AND RESPONSIBILITY

According to Gelven, the meaning of life is tied up with guilt, freedom, and responsibility. But he does not use these terms in their traditional senses. Understanding what he does mean by them will help us better understand what a failure to affirm the worth and meaning of existence could have to do with being evil.

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[8] He seems to understand human existence in an individual sense. He speaks of "the meaning of one's own existing" without any attempt to distinguish it from what he has been talking about. We could think of human existence in some abstract sense that is the same identical thing for everyone, but he doesn't go in that direction. His numerous references to Heidegger, an existentialist, provide a context in which an individual interpretation of human existence makes more sense. On this interpretation, my thoughts on the worth and meaning of existence are thoughts on what makes my life worthwhile and meaningful. So, in speaking of the worth and meaning of existence, Gelven really means whatever it is that makes individual lives worthwhile and meaningful.

8.2.1 Guilt and Responsibility

Gelven borrows his understanding of guilt from the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger. Gelven means guilt in an ontological sense, and he does not mean what people normally mean when they speak of guilt. What he means by guilt is a kind of negative existence. But, as already mentioned, he does not mean death. According to Gelven, what Heidegger means by guilt in the ontological sense is the "*ability* to be responsible for one's existence–hence a possibility and not an actuality. It is thus the ability-to-be-guilty" (GMH 73-4).

What initially sounds like a self-referential definition is not. Gelven recognizes other senses of guilt, and he distinguishes these from the ontological sense. The ontological sense is a very different conception of guilt than the two we usually use. One use is the moral/legal sense in which you are guilty of something immoral or criminal. This is a relational sense in which you may be guilty of some things but not others. For example, John Wilkes Booth is guilty of assassinating President Lincoln, but he is not guilty of assassinating President Kennedy. The other sense is the psychological sense in which guilt is understood as a feeling. This is normally the feeling that accompanies the realization that you have done something wrong. But people can sometimes feel guilt without being guilty of anything, and people who are guilty of something can sometimes feel guiltless about their wrongdoing. So these two senses of guilt are related, but they are not strictly tied to each other.

Although the ontological sense of guilt isn't commonly used, innocence is the opposite of guilt, and the sense of innocence that is the opposite of this kind of guilt is in common use. We commonly speak of children as being innocent, and sometimes speak of them as losing their innocence. For example, a young girl might lose her innocence by being brutally raped. She isn't guilty of wrongdoing, but she has gained a familiarity with evil. She has become aware that things can go terribly wrong. The innocence she lost was a kind of ignorance about evil and the bad things which can happen to people. In losing her innocence, she gained a stronger awareness of guilt in the ontological sense.

Guilt, in the ontological sense, is the *ability* to be guilty in the other two senses, because the ability to be responsible for one's existence is what makes it possible to *be* guilty of anything or to *feel* guilty of anything. It is what makes it possible for you to *be* guilty of anything, because you become guilty of something in the moral or legal sense only when you fail to meet responsibilities. If you could not be responsible for anything, you would have no responsibilities, and without responsibilities, you could not fail to meet any of your responsibilities. Ontological guilt makes it possible to *feel* guilt, because it is the awareness of responsibilities which makes it possible for a person to feel that she has not lived up to her responsibilities, and the feeling of guilt is the feeling that one has failed in this way.

You bear responsibility for something when its outcome depends on you. You bear responsibility for how your life turns out, because your choices have the biggest impact on how it turns out. But an awareness of this responsibility carries with it an awareness that you may fail, and that it is you who fails. This is the awareness of guilt. This awareness of guilt is important, for it enables us to give value and meaning to life.

Consider what it would be like if everything were colored white. Without shadows, it would be as though we were blind. We would require the absence of some light before we could actually see anything. The same is true with respect to value. We cannot understand that anything has value unless we are aware that some things are lacking in it. We need to be aware of the possibility of non-existence to place value on existence, and we need to be aware of the possibility for failure to truly appreciate success. Thus, an awareness of guilt is a prerequisite for valuing life. If someone tried to escape guilt, it might lead to the kind of nihilistic existence Gelven describes as evil in his ninth example.

8.2.2 Freedom and Responsibility

According to Gelven, guilt is the ground of human freedom (GHM 77). We commonly understand freedom to mean that we have choices. But this is not what Gelven means by freedom. He says, "The

point is that freedom cannot be based on choice; it's the other way around; men have choice because they are free. Freedom *essentially* is not about choice at all; it is about *responsibility*" (GHM 77-8). Freedom is, for Gelven, "the acceptance of responsibility" (GHM 78). And he distinguishes this from liberty, which is absence from restraint. Since responsibility and guilt go together, freedom is also the acceptance of guilt.

Gelven illustrates this notion of freedom with the example of Milton's Adam. Upon leaving Eden, Adam wonders whether he should repent of his sin or rejoice at the possibilities for good that have opened up to him. In the Garden of Eden, God took care of all of Adam's needs. Adam's fortune was God's responsibility rather than Adam's. So Adam was not free in Gelven's sense–even though he did possess liberty, and theologians like Augustine would claim that he was free in a counterfactual sense[9]. Adam gained freedom when he ate the forbidden fruit. He lost his innocence, thereby becoming guilty in the ontological sense, but he acquired a sense of responsibility for his own life. This is an important detail, because Gelven says that freedom comes at a high price. Its cost is the loss of innocence. Freedom is possible only to those who know ontological guilt, because it is the acceptance of this guilt.

Freedom is worth the cost of guilt, according to Gelven, because life can have no worth or meaning without freedom. He writes:

> **It is possible to praise freedom because it is in reality the basis for all other praising; it is the basis for merit itself. To be responsible, i.e. free, is to be in such a way that it matters to be. Freedom (responsibility) is hence the ultimate presupposition for any worth or merit in existence whatsoever. Why then, would one want to be free? Because only as being free is meaning possible. (GHM 79)**

So, for Gelven, a meaningful existence is one lived freely, with knowledge of good and evil, and with an awareness of the responsibility one bears for choosing one's way in life. Let's now turn to understanding what Gelven means by the worth of existence. In the passage just quoted, Gelven mentions that freedom is the ultimate presupposition for both worth and merit. So, we may understand him to mean that a life cannot be worthwhile unless it can be meaningful. Since guilt, freedom, and responsibility are crucial for making life meaningful, they must also be crucial, on Gelven's account, for making life worthwhile.

In his recent book *This Side of Evil*, Gelven distinguishes between two kinds of worth people have. There is a moral worth, which might be what he meant by merit in the passage above, and there is a non-moral worth that people have simply from existing. Moral worth depends upon moral success. For example, a good or virtuous person has high moral worth, and a bad or contemptuous person has low moral worth. Moral worth is made possible by freedom. It is only after we have lost our innocence, gaining knowledge of good and evil, that we can become moral agents who can be judged morally. But Gelven adds, "the worth of the child does not depend upon moral success. Precisely because we cannot judge the very young child on moral terms at all we see that merely to exist matters on its own, so that morality cannot exhaust our worth" (*TSE* 70)

Although non-moral worth is most readily apparent in the innocence of children, Gelven adds, "Even as adults our worth is not reducible to our moral rectitude, else we could neither forgive nor be forgiven" (*TSE* 70). He maintains that forgiveness is made possible by what we are, not by what we do. He says, "I am forgiven solely because who I am–my existential worth–is independent of what I do" (*TSE* 73). Although this non-moral existential worth is not a reflection of our actions, it is not absolute. It can be diminished.

Non-moral worth is the birthright of innocence. Innocent children have non-moral existential worth unconditionally. But the loss of innocence makes it possible to lose this birthright. Unlike moral worth, it is not lost merely through wrongdoing or being bad. It remains so long as we keep what allows

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[9] This is the sense in which you are free if you have the ability to make different choices, and you have done something freely if you could have done otherwise.

us to be forgiven. According to Gelven, "being able to be forgiven necessarily includes the ability to do what is right and what is wrong" (*TSE* 73). This is a reference to freedom, which is the acceptance of guilt and responsibility. So long as we are free, through the acceptance of responsibility, we have the ability to choose either right or wrong. This ability allows us to be forgiven. Because freedom is required for holding onto our non-moral existential worth, this too is made possible by being free. Thus, freedom serves as the basis for both existential and moral worth, at least among adults.

But what about innocent children? As innocent, they are not yet free, and this suggests that freedom is not the source of their existential worth. Yet freedom is the source of existential worth even for the innocent. It must first be understood that innocence is not the mere absence of guilt and freedom. An inanimate stone is neither free nor innocent, and it lacks the existential worth an innocent child has. What actually makes innocence precious is that it is the ground from which full personhood arises. Gelven writes,

> **Innocence, however, is yet a propadeutic. The child is precious not only because it is now blameless, but because it is becoming a person. This becoming is a species of learning in which what we learn is how to become ourselves. Children seem designed by nature to learn prodigiously, and this very learning to become our own reality is a fundamental part of innocence. Thus innocence seeks to destroy itself by the very ability to learn, which is an essential part of being innocent. There is, in the existential understanding of innocence, a process of becoming non-innocent. To pretend innocence is a mere state of being precious therefore distracts, for it is part of the very essence of innocence to learn, and this learning must transcend its beginning. (*TSE* 70-71)**

So, instead of being the mere absence of freedom, innocence is really the unrealized potential for freedom. It has worth because of its potential, rather than for what it has become. But its potential is the potential for freedom, and in this respect, freedom lies at the heart of existential worth in the innocent. Thus, freedom is at the root of both moral and non-moral worth. Non-moral worth is made possible by the potential for freedom, and once innocence is lost non-moral worth is held onto through the exercise of freedom. Moral worth is made possible through the exercise of freedom. From all this it can be concluded that guilt, freedom, and responsibility are at the very heart of what Gelven means by the worth and meaning of existence. This answers the second and third questions.

Let's now turn to the fourth, which asked what it means to affirm the worth and meaning of existence. In his book *Truth and Existence*, Gelven distinguishes affirming from three other ways of knowing truth. These are accepting, acknowledging, and submitting. While summing up two chapters on these distinctions, he writes,

> **Knowledge qualifies as the intelligible satisfaction of some kinds of questions; for I can affirm the response as 'that which I want to know'; I can accept the response in recognizing that it is independent of what I want; I can acknowledge the response in recognizing that it is my own rationality and experience which reveals it to me; and I can submit to the response by yielding to the weight of evidence that demands my recognition of the response as true. (108)**

Given these distinctions, and assuming that Gelven's language is consistent across different works, the affirmation of guilt, freedom, and responsibility involves more than just recognizing these as part of the human condition. It also involves welcoming these as good things, which it is better to have than not to have. This seems to go beyond the mere agreement with Jean-Paul Sartre that "man is condemned to be free" (Kaufmann 353). With reference to Adam and Eve, it is to believe that their choice to eat from the tree of knowledge was the right choice rather than the colossal mistake many Christians have understood it to be.

8.3 Objections

8.3.1   Adam Was Better Off Before the Fall

It should come as no surprise that this last comment opens this theory up to a major objection from the common Christian idea that the Fall of Man, as they call it, was a very bad thing. If this theory really

entails a positive spin on what the Christians regard as the Fall of mankind, a long tradition of Christian Biblical interpretation stands against Gelven's claim. I could dismiss all of this by dismissing Christianity, but it will be more fruitful to answer the objection within the context of the story.

According to the traditional Christian interpretation of the story, God made Adam a perfect being and placed him in a paradise which he was meant to enjoy forever. But Adam ate of the tree of knowledge, thereby becoming a sinner, and he was cast out of the Garden and made mortal. According to the usual interpretation, Adam's life was much better before the Fall, and it took a dive for the worse after he ate the forbidden fruit. Those who hold this interpretation would surely proclaim that Adam's life was more worthwhile and meaningful in the Garden of Eden than it ever was after he became a sinner. Yet Gelven says just the opposite.

Let's take a closer look at the traditional interpretation. It asserts that Adam was perfect, yet the story suggests otherwise. For starters, Adam knew nothing about good and evil. This means that he wasn't a saint anymore than he was a sinner. He was just an ignorant innocent. Christians typically assert that it was better to be like Adam before the Fall than it is to be as they are now. Yet the ideal Christians want to emulate is significantly different from Adam. Christians want to be as they imagine Jesus was, completely sinless but with knowledge of good and evil. They don't go around praising ignorance of good and evil. They go around praising their idea of good over their idea of evil. Moreover, Christians often fail to understand the full significance of eating the fruit of knowledge. Many think that the sin of Adam was merely disobedience and that the tree was an arbitrary test created by God. Others imagine that the original sin was really sex.[10] The full significance is that Adam was initially ignorant of good and evil, and eating the fruit brought him knowledge. Christians focus on the fact that the Fall made him a sinner, but they ignore the fact that he wasn't a saint before the Fall. A saint is someone who knows good and evil and consistently chooses good, but Adam didn't know such a choice was possible until he ate of the fruit.

The advantage of Gelven's interpretation is that it explains a detail that Christians typically gloss over. This is the fact that Adam ate of the Fruit of the Tree of *Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Gelven's interpretation emphasizes that Adam was ignorant and then gained knowledge. The traditional Christian interpretation just emphasizes that Adam became a sinner. Furthermore, Gelven's understanding of guilt provides a new way for understanding what it means to call someone a sinner. On the traditional interpretation, a sinner is someone who has sinned, i.e. someone who is guilty of some transgression. Gelven's understanding of guilt lets us understand a sinner as someone who is guilty in the ontological sense, i.e. someone who has lost his innocence. This understanding makes better sense of the story, because it makes a direct connection between eating the fruit and becoming a sinner. On Gelven's interpretation, it was the knowledge delivered by the fruit that directly made a sinner of Adam, whereas the traditional interpretation draws no connection here and insists that Adam became a sinner merely by disobeying God. For all they care, God could have forbidden Adam from eating something ordinary, such as an apple. And that is often what they say God forbade Adam to eat.

The traditional Christian interpretation insists that Adam became a sinner, which was worse than he was before, and further away from God than he was before, since God is not a sinner, which for most Christians simply means that God does not sin. But on the understanding of sinner that goes with

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[10] In the "Evil" article in *Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown*, S. G. F. Brandon writes, "There has been much speculation about how the penalty was connected in the mind of the Yahwist writer with eating of the Tree of Knowledge. The most likely interpretation seems to be that to this ancient Hebrew writer 'Knowledge of Good and Evil' meant knowledge of how to reproduce life. This seems to be implied by the fact that the immediate consequence of eating the forbidden fruit was that Adam and Eve became conscious of their nudity, which meant their sexual potency; it is only after acquiring this knowledge that 'Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived' (Genesis 4.1). Such knowledge was fatal; for the first human pair thus created those who would inevitably replace them."

Gelven's interpretation of the story, God is a sinner, for he knows the difference between good and evil. In this sense, Adam became more like God by becoming a sinner, and the Bible actually corroborates this. The serpent tells Eve that when she eats of the fruit, she "shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (*KJV* Gen. 3:5). Although Christians believe the serpent is Satan, the father of lies, God corroborates what the serpent told Eve. In Genesis 3:22-23, "the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken" (*KJV*).

Going by what it says in Genesis, God evicted Adam from Eden not to punish him for becoming a sinner but to prevent Adam, a mortal who had just acquired God-like knowledge, from becoming immortal. It seems as though God was afraid that Adam would become a rival god if he ate from the tree of life. This doesn't fit with the Christian interpretation, which says that God is all-powerful and not in the least frightened by anyone.

But it makes sense if you read this story in Genesis as a primitive pagan myth. Despite what some Christians assert about the Bible, I believe this story really is a primitive pagan myth. It is much like the Prometheus myth, with the serpent as the Prometheus figure. Zeus didn't want man to have fire, because he was afraid that the power of men would rival the power of the gods if they had fire. Against the wishes of Zeus, Prometheus gave fire to man. As punishment for this, Zeus gave Pandora to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus, knowing that she would open the box full of evils (Richardson 21-23). In the Prometheus myth, fire made man more like the gods, and in the Genesis myth, the knowledge of good and evil did the same. It is primarily the Christian spin on the story which leads people to think otherwise.

Understanding the Genesis myth as a cousin of the Prometheus myth, gaining the knowledge of good and evil can be understood as a good thing. It marks the transition from being like animals to being like gods. Gods, as the primitives imagined them, are the agents responsible for what goes on in the world. One thing which distinguishes humans from animals, or at least has seemed to, is an awareness of themselves as agents who can be responsible for what they do. I believe this myth was originally intended to explain why humans have this sense of responsibility seemingly unknown to animals, and I believe that some Christians have misunderstood this myth. Rather than being about a tragedy the befell humanity, it is really about what is most wonderful and special about humans: the knowledge of our own agency and the ability to shape our own destinies.

Besides all this, the standard interpretation is not held by all Christians. Peck, who is a liberal Christian, understands the Adam and Eve story as myth and interprets it in much the same way as Gelven does. He writes in *The Road Less Traveled and Beyond: Spiritual Growth in an Age of Anxiety*,

> **When we humans became self-conscious, we became conscious of ourselves as separate entities. We lost that sense of oneness with nature and the rest of creation. This loss is symbolized by our banishment from Paradise. And inevitably, as Adam and Eve developed a higher level of self-awareness, they arrived at the realization that consequences follow actions, and that their choices would be forever burdensome by virtue of the responsibility choice entailed. All of humanity has inherited this predicament. We have all been thrust into the desert of maturity.**
> **Thus, our evolution into consciousness has a far more profound implication than just guilt or shame. It is when we are conscious that we have free will. More than anything else, I believe what is meant by God's creating us in his own image is that, through the evolutionary process, he gave us free will. There is no free will when we are operating at a purely reflexive or instinctual level. But let me emphasize the word "free." One can also not be free when a gun is pointed at one's back. God or evolution gave us the freedom to choose what we think or do. Genesis 3 elucidates our need to continue evolving into greater consciousness. Given that human evolution is a forward-moving phenomenon and that we are creatures with consciousness, we can never go back again to the innocence of not knowing otherwise, however hard we may try to do so. The gate of Eden is forever barred to us by cherubims with**

a flaming sword. So, in many ways, we are both blessed and cursed by consciousness. With it comes the awareness of the reality of good and evil. (67-68)

According to Peck, this is a myth about the emergence of human consciousness, consciousness is what makes us aware that our actions have consequences, and this awareness burdens us with responsibility. Although he identifies consciousness as a burden and a curse, he also identifies it as a blessing, and he even asserts that consciousness is what is meant in saying that we were created in God's image. Thus, he recognizes consciousness and the responsibility it burdens us with as good things. The responsibility Peck speaks of is by all indications the same sort of responsibility that Gelven speaks of. It is a state of consciousness, not a relation to an action, and it is tied up with the recognition that our actions have consequences. So Peck is reading the same things into the myth as Gelven is. Since Peck is a Christian, his agreement on the interpretation of this myth helps mitigate the apparent outlandishness of Gelven's.

Overall, Gelven's interpretation makes better sense of the story than the standard Christian interpretation does, and that takes care of the objection that the story of the Fall represents a bad thing. If it represented a bad thing, it would be strange to say that Adam's life became meaningful only after the Fall. After all, having a meaningful life is a very good thing. But on the Promethean interpretation, the Fall represents a good thing, and it is no longer strange to assert that Adam's life became meaningful only after the Fall.

8.3.2   The Worth of Animals

Another objection to this theory is that it seems to base worth on something which distinguishes humans from other animals, thereby implying that the lives of animals have no worth. But animals do have worth, goes the objection, and this implies that something is wrong with this theory. If this objection maintains that all animals have worth, it is on shaky ground, because some animals seem to have more worthwhile lives than others. For example, an ape's life seems more worthwhile than a gnat's. But the objection does not have to maintain that much. All it has to maintain is that there are some animals whose lives are worthwhile even without the possession of any freedom or responsibility. The problem with this objection is that the animals whose lives seem most worthwhile also seem to possess freedom and responsibility, and the animals who don't seem to possess freedom and responsibility also seem to have relatively worthless lives.

Let's begin with our closest relatives, the apes. Some apes, notably Koko the gorilla and Washoe the chimpanzee, have been taught American Sign Language, demonstrating that their intelligence is closer to human intelligence than previously thought. The people who have studied these apes have come to the conclusion that these apes are persons, and they can back up these conclusions with compelling examples of the apes' behavior. Francine Patterson, who has worked with Koko ever since 1972, and Wendy Gordon have written a paper called "The Case for the Personhood of Gorillas." This paper covers many ways in which Koko has shown signs of personhood. Here is a relevant section:

We present this individual for your consideration:

She communicates in sign language, using a vocabulary of over 1,000 words. She also understands spoken English, and often carries on 'bilingual' conversations, responding in sign to questions asked in English. She is learning the letters of the alphabet, and can read some printed words, including her own name. She has achieved scores between 85 and 95 on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test.

She demonstrates a clear self-awareness by engaging in self-directed behaviors in front of a mirror, such as making faces or examining her teeth, and by her appropriate use of self-descriptive language. She lies to avoid the consequences of her own misbehavior, and anticipates others' responses to her actions. She engages in imaginary play, both alone and with others. She has produced paintings and drawings which are representational. She remembers and can talk about past events in her life. She understands and has used appropriately time-related words like 'before', 'after', 'later', and 'yesterday'.

She laughs at her own jokes and those of others. She cries when hurt or left alone, screams when frightened or angered. She talks about her feelings, using words like 'happy', 'sad', 'afraid', 'enjoy', 'eager', 'frustrate', 'mad', and, quite frequently, 'love'. She grieves for those she has lost–a favorite cat who has died, a friend who has gone away. She can talk about what happens when one dies, but she becomes fidgety and uncomfortable when asked to discuss her own death or the death of her companions. She displays a wonderful gentleness with kittens and other small animals. She has even expressed empathy for others seen only in pictures.

Does this individual have a claim to basic moral rights? It is hard to imagine any reasonable argument that would deny her these rights based on the description above. She is self-aware, intelligent, emotional, communicative, has memories and purposes of her own, and is certainly able to suffer deeply. There is no reason to change our assessment of her moral status if I add one more piece of information: namely that she is not a member of the human species. The person I have described–and she is nothing less than a person to those who are acquainted with her–is Koko, a twenty-year-old lowland gorilla. (58-59)

In an article for *Psychology Today* called "My Best Friend is a Chimp," Roger Fouts, a scientist who has worked with Washoe for thirty-three years, writes "She is one of the most caring and compassionate people I know. She's also a chimpanzee" (69). One good example of Washoe's freedom is that Fouts got the job because Washoe chose him. His interview for the job didn't go well, and when it was over he was sure he wasn't going to get the job, but he was at least given the opportunity to meet Washoe. Fouts writes of his first encounter with her:

Gardner and I strolled across the Reno campus toward a play yard enclosed by a 4-foot-high chain link fence. Within, two people were playing with what seemed to be a human infant. At first sight of us, the child began running across the yard towards us. It was then that I realized that this "child" was actually Washoe, a 2-year-old chimpanzee. She reached the fence and, without breaking stride, leaped over the top, landed in my arms and gave me a big hug. Gardner seemed as surprised as I was: Washoe had chosen a complete stranger to embrace over her surrogate father. (69)

Writing about chimpanzees in general, Fouts writes:

In the past few decades, scientific evidence on chimps and other nonhuman primates has poured in to support one basic fact: We have much more in common with apes than most people care to believe. Often cited is the statistic that humans have 98.4% of the same DNA as chimps, humans having branched off from chimpanzees just six million years ago on the evolutionary tree. Research suggests that, like us, chimps are highly intelligent, cooperative and sometimes violent primates who nurture family bonds, adopt orphans, mourn the death of mothers, practice self-medication, struggle for power and wage war. And that only makes sense, because the chimp brain and the human brain both evolved from the same brain–that of our common ape ancestor. (69)

The possession of these characteristics suggests that apes are indeed capable of freedom and responsibility. The exercise of freedom and responsibility is demonstrated in some of the examples Fouts gives of Washoe's behavior. Two of the most impressive examples are of when Washoe rescued young chimps who were in trouble. In one incident, Washoe saved a young chimp from snakes. Fouts writes:

Chimpanzees are naturally afraid of snakes. One day, a resident chimp cried out, signaling that snakes were present. All of the animals moved rapidly away from that end of the island, except for Bruno. Washoe was halfway to safety when she turned and saw Bruno sitting on the snake-infested side of the island, blissfully unaware of impending danger. Washoe stood up and emphatically signed "COME HUG COME HUG" to Bruno, but the youngster remained sitting where he was, since he hadn't yet learned ASL. Amazingly, Washoe scurried back to the danger zone, took Bruno by his hand and led him to the safe end of the island. (70)

This rescue demonstrated that Washoe could think in terms of cause and effect, that she was capable of empathy, and that she understood the consequences of both action and inaction. An even more impressive rescue was when Washoe saved a young girl chimpanzee who had jumped over an electric fence into a moat. Before Fouts could take action, Washoe jumped over the fence and pulled her to safety (71). This was even more impressive, because Washoe put her own life at risk to save a young chimpanzee she

had met only that day. Her life was in danger from the electric fence, as well as from drowning, because chimpanzees cannot swim. It's also worth noting that other chimps were around during both incidents, and only Washoe acted to save the endangered chimps. This demonstrates that this is not automatic chimp behavior. Washoe was taking responsibility for other chimps and was freely choosing to act on her values.

Although apes are our closest relatives among animals, it is much harder to maintain the unique specialness of humans once it has been shown that apes are more like us than we thought. That has been done. Apes are capable of freedom and responsibility, even if to a lesser extent than humans. The main difference between apes and other animals is one of degree. It may reasonably be assumed that the more intelligent animals, such as the higher mammals and the more intelligent birds, do exercise some degree of freedom and responsibility. As for reptiles, insects, amphibians, fish, and other non-avian or non-mammal animals, I am less sure that they exercise freedom or responsibility. If some animals are just automatons who exercise no freedom or responsibility, their lives may have no inherent worth or meaning. Bacteria count as animals, yet the life of a bacterium is hardly worth as much as the life of a human–if it is even worth anything at all. How worthwhile an animal's life is seems to be a matter of degree, with humans at the top and bacteria at the bottom. As animals become more humanlike, they seem to live more worthwhile lives. And the possession of freedom and responsibility may be the relevant characteristic that determines how worthwhile an animal's life is. Thus, the objection that animal lives have value without possessing freedom and responsibility does not work against Gelven's idea that these are central to making life worthwhile.

8.4 THE EVIL PERSON

Let's now turn to the notion of an evil person. The basic idea is that an evil person is someone who fails to affirm what is fundamental to making life worthwhile and meaningful. Drawing from other writings by Gelven, we have learned that guilt, freedom, and responsibility are what he regards as fundamental to the worth and meaning of life. So, putting things together, an evil person would be someone who fails to affirm guilt, freedom, and responsibility.

As it stands, this is an inadequate definition, for it doesn't distinguish between the innocent and the truly evil. But Gelven did not give this as a definition of an evil person. It was merely one way in which he described an evil person. Knowing what he meant by this helps flesh out the conception of an evil person he was trying to convey with his ninth example, but it doesn't pinpoint exactly what an evil person is. So let's look at what else Gelven said in giving this example.

He also described an evil person as someone whose "existence itself is somehow distorted, twisted, or characterized by unworthiness," and he has said that to be evil means to "thwart or distort the meaning of existence, properly understood" (*ME* 215). Each of these are also incomplete descriptions of an evil person. One refers to unworthiness, and the other refers to thwarting or distorting the meaning of existence. Together, these tell us that evil has something to do with both worth and meaning. Both also refer to distorting worth or meaning, and each also refers to related ideas, such as twisting or thwarting. So an evil person would be someone for whom guilt, freedom, and responsibility have become twisted, thwarted, or distorted.

In *This Side of Evil*, Gelven provides more insight on what this might involve. He distinguishes evil from bad by recognizing in evil a diminishment of existential worth. He says that evil "emerges, not as the mere violation of what is moral, but [as] the existential diminishment of our worth as persons" (73). This diminishment in existential worth diminishes our ability to be forgiven, for it diminishes our freedom to choose between good and bad. He also says, "If then, we wish to distinguish mere immorality (which is contributive to but not determinative of evil) from evil itself, we say the immoral can be forgiven but the truly evil cannot" (78).

Evil, as Gelven understands it, assaults our very personhood. It weds wickedness of character with inevitability, so that immorality becomes the driving force rather than a choice freely made by a person. But how is it possible for a person to reach such a state? One idea Gelven brings up is that evil is a kind of betrayal. He says in *This Side of Evil*, "The provisional suggestion is that evil may be defined as the betrayal of our expectation that there are purposive answers for what we suffer or endure" (44). At this point, Gelven is speaking about evil as a description for things which happen, not as a description of people. On the next page, he says,

> **One advantage to this suggestion is a kind of descriptive ranking: the *immoral* (or: the morally bad) is that which ought not to be done but is explained by weakness in resisting human motives; the *wicked* is that which ought not be done but is explained by having a certain character; *evil* is that which ought not to be done but is inexplicable in terms of human motivation. (45)**

It hasn't come up until now, but I believe purpose and freedom belong together. Freedom isn't merely the ability to make choices; it is the acceptance of responsibility. Responsibility is an incoherent concept without purpose. In accepting responsibility, I accept that it is up to me as to whether I will succeed or fail in the endeavor of life. This acceptance is also the acceptance of purpose, that I make it the purpose of my actions to make something of my life. Without a purpose of any sort, there is nothing I am actually accepting responsibility for. Therefore, freedom presupposes purpose.

Gelven is suggesting that evil consists in the betrayal of purpose, not so much in the betrayal of any particular purpose, but in the betrayal of purposefulness altogether. It is one thing to betray one purpose for the sake of another. This is understandable in terms of normal human motivations, and it is not the sort of thing Gelven is suggesting is evil. It is a different thing to betray purposefulness altogether. This kind of betrayal uproots freedom by stripping it of purpose. So, I suggest that evil is the betrayal of freedom.

One advantage to defining evil in this way is that it makes a clear distinction between the evil and the innocent. Both fail to affirm freedom, but there is a crucial difference. The innocent fail to affirm freedom out of ignorance about what it is, whereas the evil fail to affirm freedom because they have known it and betrayed it. But what is the betrayal of freedom?

The betrayal of freedom is also the betrayal of personhood. So, to understand how this betrayal is possible, let's look more closely at what Gelven means by personhood. What makes someone a person, for Gelven, is the struggle between good and evil. This is made possible by the knowledge of good and evil, which comes with the loss of innocence. In the last chapter to *This Side of Evil*, Gelven writes "the essence of evil is the assault on the possibility of being a person; this anti-person force is recognized as inevitability, that of the pro-person force in all those attributes that transcend the inevitable: forgiveness, generosity, bestowal, grace, beauty, love, nobility, and laughter" (145-46). Thus, personhood consists, for Gelven, in the struggle between the forces which make personhood possible and the forces which threaten its existence.

Personhood is betrayed when a person gives up this struggle, succumbing to the forces of evil, rather than resisting them. Gelven maintains that there are both internal and external forces of evil. Within Christianity, internal evil has been represented by original sin, and external evil has been represented by Satan, though Gelven is not positing that original sin and Satan are the real forces of evil. He says, "It is of extreme importance to realize that evil as real must be thought both as internal and external" (*TSE* 64).

The world is rampant with external evils which threaten to destroy our personhood. The most basic one is the fact that each of us will one day die. The fear of death, as Peters has pointed out in *Sin*, puts people on the first step toward radical evil. But death is only the beginning of the external evil which threatens us. The twentieth century has witnessed external evil on a grand scale, with the Nazi holocaust being the paradigm of this evil. In Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe, countless people were put to

death for their race, religion, sexuality, or even for resisting the evil of the Nazis. People often had a choice between betraying their personhood to survive or dying in their resistance to the evil of the Nazis. Many people chose to give in to the evil of Naziism, acting as the agents of its evil rather than risking their lives by resisting it. This may help account for Hannah Arendt's famous observation, based on her observation of Nazi war criminals, that evil is banal. The banality was in the lack of resistance to evil among the people who succumbed to it.

Another outcome of the Nazi horror was the emergence of French existentialism, identified with such people as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. At the heart of their writings was a profound encounter with the specter of nihilism. The horror of the Nazis seemed to threaten the possibility for any value or meaning in the world. The Nazi holocaust was senseless and tragic, and it evoked an unanswerable "Why?!" This made it harder for people to believe in a world with real value and real meaning. The drive behind French existentialism was to find, reclaim, or recreate meaning and value despite living in a world which allowed such senseless tragedy.

The point in this is that the evil of Naziism was of such magnitude that it brought many people face-to-face with the possibility of nihilism, with the prospect that there was no real meaning or value in the world. That some people would create new philosophies to deal with this encounter signifies the magnitude of the encounter with nihilism, giving us some sense of the horror this evil faced people with. Naziism wasn't just a threat to the lives and liberty of some people living in Europe; it threatened the very idea that there was any meaning or value in life. Faced with this threat, some people would resist (as the French existentialists did), but others would succumb to the horror, accepting the world as meaningless and senseless. This is the betrayal of personhood, and it marks one more way in which external evil threatens to destroy our freedom and our personhood.

Internal evil is that part of ourselves which makes it possible for us to choose evil over good. Christianity has represented it with the idea of original sin. Gelven doesn't provide much detail on what internal evil could be. But it could be ontological guilt, which I've already described in some detail. Guilt makes freedom possible, which is good, but it makes it possible by making us aware of our potential for doing evil. For example, I can conceive of really horrible things to do to people, and my freedom consists in my ability to choose between the horrible things I imagine doing and more beneficial alternatives.

More insight into internal evil may be gleaned from Gelven's previous book, *The Risk of Being: What it Means to Be Good and Bad*. This book is not so much about the definitions of good and bad, as it is about the experience of being good and bad. Of particular relevance is Gelven's description of the pathos of being bad, i.e. the emotional experience of being bad. He identifies the pathos of being bad with "the gleeful guilty: the one who is burdened by authentic guilt and yet is also delighted in the success of his guilty cunning" (133). As Gelven points out, there is a kind of pleasure in being bad. It is a gleeful pleasure in getting away with something we know is wrong. In a way, it is thumbing our noses at a reality which doesn't bend to our whims, glee in doing something we shouldn't do and in escaping the burden of responsibility. Even when we don't do bad things, we can experience what this glee would feel like in our imaginations. This kind of glee is part of the appeal of something like *The Itchy and Scratchy Show*, a cartoon Bart and Lisa Simpson watch on *The Simpsons*, in which a mouse name Itchy always brutally murders a cat named Scratchy in new and creative ways (for descriptions of several of these cartoons, see Richmond and Coffman 146-147). Although I refrain from acting on it, there is something like Itchy in me, and probably in everyone else too. This inner Itchy is a manifestation of the internal evil which resides in each person, making freedom possible, but also threatening to eclipse personhood if it goes unresisted.

Personhood, for Gelven, consists in the struggle against evil, both internal and external. A person may become evil by giving up this struggle. Giving up is the betrayal of freedom, which, for Gelven, is the foundation of life's worth and meaning. This is the sort of existence which may be characterized by unworthiness. This is how someone could thwart or distort the meaning of existence; and it is certainly a

failure to affirm what makes life worthwhile and meaningful. So an evil person, as represented in Gelven's ninth example (and also as echoed in some of his later writings), is a person who has betrayed his own personhood by succumbing to the power of internal or external evil.

8.5 APPRIZING THE THEORY

This theory distinguishes between an evil person and a bad person, characterizing an evil person as a kind of bad person. In this respect, it fits within the framework for the correct theory of evil. But there is also the suggestion in Gelven's writing that evil is not a matter of character, and so I should address whether this theory truly fits in with my working assumption that an evil person is someone with an evil character. Despite some apparent incompatibility, I believe it does fit.

Here is why it appears not to fit. Gelven says,

One advantage to this suggestion is a kind of descriptive ranking: the *immoral* (or: the morally bad) is that which ought not to be done but is explained by weakness in resisting human motives; the *wicked* is that which ought not be done but is explained by having a certain character; *evil* is that which ought not to be done but is inexplicable in terms of human motivation. (*TSE* 45)

It may appear from this that the notion of an evil character fits better with what Gelven is calling wicked. However, what Gelven calls wicked really corresponds to what I have been calling a bad character. All that distinguishes the wicked from the immoral, by this ranking, is that the wicked person does wrong because of a certain character. It is not setting aside one kind of bad character, as my understanding of an evil character does.

Another reason why it may appear that Gelven's notion of evil is not about character is that this passage suggests that something is explainable if it is attributable to a person's character, but that something is inexplicable if it is an act of evil. This distinction needs to be fine-tuned. What is merely wicked is explicable in terms of *ordinary human motivations*, whereas what is evil is not. Although evil actions may be inexplicable in terms of ordinary human motivations, a person's descent into evil may still be explained in terms of them. This is analogous to the breakdown of the laws of physics inside a singularity. We can understand that something gets sucked into a blackhole through the force of gravity without understanding anything about the laws of physics within a singularity. It's also an appropriate metaphor. Evil is something like a blackhole, sucking people who draw too near into an unfathomable darkness.

But it may be mistaken to assume that evil is completely unfathomable. As persons we possess knowledge of good and evil. Thus, we can have some insight into evil without turning evil. The rationale of evil may seem alien and inhuman, but that doesn't mean it is entirely unfamiliar. The main thing to be understood about evil is that it's inexplicable in terms of *normal* motivations, such as love, anger, or self-interest. For example, the Nazi who, in the movie *Sophie's Choice*, asked Sophie to choose which of her two children would die may have behaved in a way which these normal motivations cannot explain. We may never fully know why someone would do such a thing. Yet, knowing something about the logic of evil, we can explain how a person could choose to perform such a monstrous action.

Part of the explanation lies in the human need for power. People need to feel that they have control over their lives. In a healthy individual, this expresses itself as the acceptance of responsibility. But in succumbing to evil, an evil person has lost his freedom. If an evil person were otherwise fully cognizant, he would feel powerless. Feeling powerless, an evil person might realize something is horribly wrong, finally killing himself or seeking help. Besides this, someone who felt powerless in the face of evil would still feel separate from and opposed to the crushing force of evil. Evil can fully corrupt someone only when he does not regard it as the enemy.

The alternative to feeling powerless is to identify with the power that has overwhelmed you, imagining that its power is yours, rather than recognizing yourself as its helpless victim. At this point, an evil person will engage in acts of evil as the only way he knows of feeling power. In betraying his

personhood, he has cut himself off from the greater power of goodness. He now knows power only as force, destruction, and inevitability, not as love, grace, forgiveness, or hope. To satisfy his need for power, he behaves forcefully and destructively, mimicking the inevitability of natural evil. For example, a tragic accident might force a mother to choose which of her two children will live, as she might have time to save only one or the other. In behaving like a force of nature, demanding the same thing of Sophie as a horrible accident might, the Nazi may have felt that he had some sense of power. This does not excuse his action, and it does not make sense of it in terms of normal human motivations. Even after explaining it, I am left asking why anyone would do such a thing. Nevertheless, it does help us understand the psychological forces that could lead a person to behave in this way.

All that my notion of character requires is that there is a psychological reason why a person behaves as he does. It does not require that anyone's behavior be explicable in terms of normal human motivations. So I would regard an evil person, as Gelven seems to understand one, as someone with a bad character of some sort. Besides that, Gelven says, "Perhaps this is why evil is real, precisely because it weds the wickedness of character with the inevitability of fate, whereas immorality is seen solely as a quality of free agents" (*TSE* 103). In saying this, Gelven is suggesting that a wicked character is part of what goes into being evil. This also provides a way for understanding how an evil character differs from a merely bad character. An evil character has combined a bad character with a sense that wickedness is inevitable rather than a choice. So this theory of evil does describe a kind of bad character.

But there is still another issue. One of my guidelines is that evil is the most opprobrious term of moral censure. There is the suggestion that evil, as understood by this theory, is not a term of moral censure, because an evil person has forsaken his moral responsibility. The idea behind this is that moral censure is appropriate only for people who are free to choose between good and evil, whereas the evil person has lost this ability. However, this isn't an entirely fair estimate of this theory.

An evil person, on this theory, has not had his potential for goodness surgically removed from him. It is still there, even if it is entirely dormant or neglected. A person may betray his personhood, but he can't cease to be a person short of dying or something equally radical, such as becoming a cyborg whose brain is largely cybernetic. The qualities of personhood betrayed by evil could potentially resurface. Because this potential still exists, the evil person is still subject to moral censure. It may fall on deaf ears and be totally ineffective, but it is still deserved and appropriate.

Moreover, it is a more significant term of moral censure than calling someone bad or wicked, for it accuses someone not only of making wrong choices but of betraying his humanity and his personhood. Therefore, this theory of an evil person does seem to fit the criteria given for the correct theory of evil. It describes an evil person as someone with a kind of bad character, and there are very good indications that what it describes may be the morally worst kind of bad character. However, this conclusion is best made in comparison with other theories.

Chapter 9
Comparisons and Conclusions

9.1 EGOTHEISM AND BETRAYAL THEORIES

The last two chapters described some theories of evil that focus on particular characteristics. The chapter on pride brought up the theory that evil is egotheism, a strong form of pride in which a person assumes for himself god-like importance and moral authority. Peck's theories of human and demonic evil showed two ways of doing this. One way was to intransigently insist on one's own moral perfection, and the other was to vault one's ego above morality. The chapter on Gelven brought up the theory that evil is the betrayal of freedom, guilt, and responsibility–in which a person succumbs to internal or external evil by betraying the very qualities of personhood that make life worthwhile and meaningful.

On one level, these two theories seem to clash. There seems to be no pride in the betrayal of one's freedom. Instead of building up the ego, it violates and demeans a person's very personhood. Nonetheless, this violation of one's own personhood may lead one into trying to preserve self-esteem through false pride. After all, with the basis for honest self-esteem pulled out from under him, he'll have nothing else to hold up his ego with. Furthermore, the examples of human and demonic evil given by Peck seem to be in line with the betrayal of guilt, freedom, and responsibility. Although betraying one's personhood may not give a person any reason to be proud, pride may lead to the betrayal. The people Peck regards as evil refuse to accept any sense of sinfulness. This is a betrayal of guilt, because they are refusing to accept it. It is a betrayal of responsibility, because they are refusing to take responsibility for their actions. It is a betrayal of freedom, because they are turning over their lives to an obsession with denying moral imperfection. Likewise, the anti-moral form of egotheism betrays guilt by refusing to give it any meaning. It betrays responsibility by dismissing any need for it. It betrays freedom by refusing to submit the ego to the limitations of reality.

So far, it seems that the egotheism theory and the betrayal theory could be describing the same thing from two different perspectives. The pride of egotheism leads to the betrayal of freedom, and the betrayal of freedom can lead to false pride. If there is any difference between them in terms of who is evil, it would be that people can betray their freedom without falling into the extreme pride of egotheism, or that egotheism does not always lead to the betrayal of freedom.

It seems likely that egotheism would not always lead to the betrayal of freedom if we consider that God, assuming that a personal God exists, must be an egotheist. God would naturally assume the importance and moral authority that belong to God. The difference between God and any other egotheist is that any other egotheist lays claim to what does not belong to him. It is false pride for any other egotheist, though it is not for God. Therefore, egotheism, per se, cannot be what makes a person evil.

But the idea behind egotheism is still valid. It just has to be described without reference to God. The idea behind egotheism is an excessive pride that (1) causes a person to think he is much more important than others, and (2) causes him to not question the morality of his actions, because he regards himself as either morally perfect or above morality. The second part just describes two ways of betraying freedom. Thus, it makes the betrayal of freedom an essential component of egotheism. The first part seems independent from the betrayal of freedom theory.

It doesn't contradict the betrayal theory if there are evil people who do not think they are more important than other people, but it does contradict the egotheism theory. One of the best examples of people who may be evil without being egotheists are nihilists. Nihilists generally believe that nothing has

any inherent value. Suppose a nihilist, believing that nothing has any meaning or value, chooses to live a life of brutal violence, because morality means nothing to him, and this is what gives him pleasure. So he becomes a serial killer. He regards all human life as worthless, as worthless as enemy space ships in a video game, but he likes real killing better than video games. Finally, after terrorizing people for years, he kills himself on a whim, because he doesn't value his life anymore than he values others.

So far, this person has been described mainly in the negative. He lacks any sense of worth or meaning in his life, and he pays no heed to morality. He also lacks the positive contribution of egotheism, which is excessive pride. Thus, he seems to be immoral without being wicked. He is so immoral that even his whims lead him into abominable behavior, but if he is not also wicked, he may not be evil. Although I concluded that the immoral/wicked theory was wrong, it was on the grounds that it included too many people, not that it excluded some evil people. As the description stands, the immoral/wicked theory seems to exclude this person, and that is a good reason for not regarding him as evil.

But this may not be the full picture. According to the betrayal theory, his betrayal of freedom has led him to succumb to either internal or external evil. As described, he hasn't succumbed to any external forces for evil. He is just acting on his own whims. This leaves internal evil. Is there an internal evil that he could have succumbed to? It may be arbitrary to just say there is in this example, at least if we presume that some do and some don't have internal evil. However, according to Carl Jung and many others, everyone has a kind of internal evil called the shadow. As John A. Sanford describes it in *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality:*

> **The term "the Shadow," as a psychological concept, refers to to the dark, feared, unwanted side of our personality. In developing a conscious personality we all seek to embody in ourselves a certain image of what we want to be like. Those qualities that could have become part of this conscious personality, but are not in accord with the person we want to be, are rejected and constitute the shadow personality. (49)**

If someone betrays freedom by abandoning any sense of meaning or value, he might succumb to his shadow, acting out whatever his shadow wants, instead of continuing to make conscious moral choices. This would be a combination of immorality and wickedness, and under this description, the immoral/wicked theory would identify him as evil. The immorality would be the betrayal of moral responsibility, and the wickedness would be the surrender to the shadow.

So, it seems, the betrayal theory describes as evil a kind of person who is missed by the egotheism theory. This is a nihilist who abandons moral responsibility and surrenders to his shadow. If there is a good reason for not regarding such a person as evil, then the egotheism theory will be preferable. Otherwise, the betrayal theory seems better. One reason against counting this person as evil is that he seems to lack moral responsibility for his actions. But this is not a persuasive reason, because this is very different than being forced into his choices by external influences. It is not that the he lacks moral responsibility; he has merely abandoned its exercise. He is still responsible for what he does, but he fails to acknowledge his responsibility. In the absence of other reasons why he would not be evil, my intuition is that this sort of person would be evil. So, in this respect, the betrayal theory seems better than the egotheism theory.

Nevertheless, the betrayal theory's superiority over the egotheism theory might not be total. If the betrayal theory wrongly describes anyone as evil who is missed by the egotheism theory, this will be a respect in which the egotheism theory is still superior to the betrayal theory. As it happens, nihilists and egoists aren't the only people who betray their freedom and moral responsibility. Under extreme circumstances, the fear of death may also lead a person to betray freedom and moral responsibility. In Nazi Germany, good people often had a choice between dying for resisting evil or living by joining in it. Willingly butchering Jews to avoid being butchered along with them may have been the kind of choice that involves the betrayal of freedom–and this choice was normally motivated by the fear of death, not by pride or nihilistic resignation. So, it seems, the betrayal theory, but not the egotheism theory, would

identify as evil numerous Nazis who participated in the holocaust mainly out of fear of what would happen to them if they did not. In choosing the evil of Naziism over what they knew to be right, it appears that they betrayed the essence of their humanity. The betrayal theory implies that these Nazis were evil, and the egotheism theory does not.

However, the validity of this distinction is brought into question by Robert J. Lifton, who claims in an article called "Doubling and the Nazi Doctors" that Nazi Doctors used a psychological process called doubling to hold onto their humanity while cooperating with an evil environment. If they engaged in some psychological process that allowed them to participate in Nazi atrocities without betraying their moral responsibility, then the betrayal theory will not describe them as evil. So Lifton's theory of doubling seems relevant to whether there is any further distinction between the betrayal and egotheism theories. Lifton describes doubling as "the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part self acts as the whole self" (218). And he describes five characteristics of doubling.

First, he distinguishes doubling from multiple personalities. When a person has multiple personalities, these personalities generally lead separate lives and remain ignorant of each other. This does not occur with doubling. Instead, according to Lifton, "There is [. . .] a dialectic between two selves in terms of autonomy and connection" (219). They are aware of each other, but they operate in separate contexts. The double, as Lifton calls the new self formed by doubling, arises out of a need to function in an environment that is antithetical to his previous ethical standards. This is how it was in the concentration camps. Doctors were called on to do abominable things to people, yet they also needed to hold onto their image of themselves as good people. So, according to Lifton, they created for themselves a double self which did the bad things, allowing them to keep their old selves unsullied by what they did.

Second, Lifton distinguishes doubling from schizophrenia and any kind of dissociation from reality. He says, "Doubling follows a holistic principle" (219). He means by this that the double is fully connected with its environment. Doubling is an adaptation to a bad environment, not a flight from reality into a land of make-believe and imagination. The double is aware of his environment, has full use of his talents, and in general is not impaired intellectually. In the example of the Nazi doctors, they made full use of their medical talents and knowledge, but they used it for evil instead of good.

The third characteristic is that "doubling has a life-death dimension" (219). A person creates a double for the sake of his own survival in a bad environment. Doubling allows a person to retain his humanity in a context which punishes humanity rather than rewarding it. The double does the bad things required of the person for survival, while letting the person disavow participation in the evil that is done. The fourth characteristic is that doubling allows a person to avoid guilt. To the person doubling, it is the double who does the bad things, not his true self. The fifth characteristic is that doubling is partly unconscious and involves a significant change in moral consciousness.

One interpretation of Lifton's description of doubling is that the Nazi doctors avoided the betrayal of freedom by relying on doubling to let themselves do bad things while still holding onto their humanity. Nevertheless, this may be the wrong interpretation, for Lifton concludes by saying:

> **In sum, doubling is the psychological means by which one invokes the evil potential of the self. That evil is neither inherent in the self nor foreign to it. To live out the doubling and call forth the evil is a moral choice for which one is responsible, whatever the level of consciousness involved. By means of doubling, Nazi doctors made a Faustian choice for evil: in the process of doubling, in fact, lies an overall key to human evil. (223)**

Although the goal of doubling may be to alleviate the guilt and responsibility a person would otherwise feel, Lifton's concluding words indicate that it does not relieve a person of actual guilt and responsibility. A person might feel less guilty, but he will still be guilty. Furthermore, the use of doubling to avoid guilt and responsibility is itself a betrayal of guilt and responsibility. It is also a betrayal of freedom, because it is a choice to abandon freedom by giving in to the potential for evil within oneself.

It is significant that Lifton does not describe doubling as merely giving in to external evil–especially considering that he is writing about people who did give into external evil. He describes it as a way of invoking the evil potential of the self. Instead of staying alive by letting oneself be the puppet of external evil, doubling, according to Lifton, involves giving in to one's own dark side. Before doubling, the dark side is there mainly as a potential, not as an active force. Doubling unleashes it, turning at least part of a person's life over to it.

The evil potential Lifton refers to is similar to, if not the same as, the shadow, as Jung calls it. Indeed, Lifton's article appears in an anthology on the shadow, called *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*. The process of doubling gives control to the shadow while still refusing to accept it as part of oneself. This ties in with Peck's theory of evil. Peck has indicated that his notion of refusing to acknowledge sin is the same as Jung's idea that evil is "the failure to 'meet' the Shadow" (69). The failure to meet the shadow is the failure to look at it and accept it as part of oneself. Doubling involves this, because, in spite of unleashing the shadow, it does it without taking responsibility for it, without accepting that what the shadow does is what I do. Despite this, doubling seems very different from what Peck has called evil. Peck has focused on intransigent self-righteousness, whereas Lifton has focused on something that is very much like Dr. Jekyll drinking the potion that turns him into Mr. Hyde.

Nevertheless, the difference may be more in appearance than in fact. In *The Strange Trial of Mr. Hyde: A New Look at the Nature of Human Evil*, Sanford maintains that Jekyll was more evil than Hyde, describing Jekyll in terms that square well with Peck's theory. Referring to a fictional character who represented his own views in a narrative that occupied the first part of the book, Sanford writes,

> **Mapleson defends Hyde by pointing out that Jekyll is the original source of evil in the situation. Jekyll's posture of being a good and dedicated person is nothing more than egocentricity. By means of this egocentric posture Jekyll presents a false front. He lives a lie and thus creates the fatal distortion in the personality that brings about the evil deeds of Hyde. What people mistake for Jekyll's goodness is only his persona, which has been distorted and brought into service of the egocentric ego. Hyde too is a distorted figure, a caricature of what the qualities he embodies ought to be, but he is the creation of Jekyll's false ego. (145-146)**

Like those Peck calls people of the lie, Jekyll is focused on thinking highly of himself, and he refuses to acknowledge his sinfulness. Despite his recognition that he turns into Hyde, he puts all the responsibility on Hyde, maintaining that he is innocent. Here is how Jekyll puts it in his own account of the events in Robert Louis Stevenson's story, "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered" (58).

If Lifton's description of doubling is accurate, then the Nazi Doctor's surrender to external evil was facilitated by a surrender to their own internal evil. By giving in to the evil inside, they could more easily fall in line with the evil required of them for their survival in an evil environment. Although Gelven has distinguished between internal and external evil, the suggestion from Lifton is that a surrender to external evil begins with a surrender to internal evil. If the Nazi doctors and other Nazis were all surrendering to their own internal evil, then the betrayal theory seems to describe them as evil. Lifton's description of doubling adds weight to this conclusion, supporting the betrayal theory over the egotheism theory.

The case of Nazis is controversial only if their submission to external evil did not involve any surrender to internal evil. This would be what happened if they merely let themselves become inhuman puppets of the Third Reich, giving up their will to their Führer. But people cannot become the mere puppets of each other, at least not without cybernetic implants or some other technology that will allow direct control of one person by another. People are always self-controlled, and a person can surrender to external evil only by directing his will to comply with the external evil. Someone who complied with external evil would do so mainly by carrying out orders or by turning his will over to an internal

representation of the external evil. The former might not be evil. Such people would hate what they did but follow orders to stay alive; their surrender to external evil would be in deed only. The latter would surrender a part of themselves to the external evil, and this seems to be the crucial difference.

Whether or not the betrayal theory recognizes this difference is open to interpretation. If the betrayal of freedom must include some kind of inner surrender to an inner representation of evil, then it recognizes this distinction. But if it includes the mere willingness to do evil deeds to escape death, it is more controversial. The main difficulty with the betrayal theory is that it may identify as evil someone whose character is immoral but not wicked. Someone who is merely choosing killing over being killed might be immoral without being wicked. Thus, it seems worthwhile to combine elements of the betrayal theory with the framework of the immoral/wicked theory.

9.2 The Modified Betrayal Theory

The betrayal theory primarily identifies the immoral element, which is the betrayal of moral responsibility. It also mentions a wicked element, which is succumbing to inner evil. But instead of fitting squarely into the immoral/wicked model, it also allows that a person can be evil by succumbing to external evil. A modified betrayal theory that fits the immoral/wicked model describes evil as the conjunction of betrayed freedom and surrender to inner evil. An evil person would be someone who has betrayed his own freedom and has surrendered to his dark side. Although he would remain morally responsible for his actions, he would behave as though he wasn't responsible. He would cease to behave as a moral being, giving in to any dark impulse that moves him.

The notion of surrendering to inner evil, however, makes the definition of evil seem circular. It would be best to describe the wicked aspect of being evil without referring to evil. Stephen Diamond and Rollo May describe a concept that seems to fit what I have in mind. Both describe an aspect of human psychology they call the daimonic. This is very similar to Jung's idea of the shadow, but broader, covering a person's potential for both creativity and destructiveness. Another difference is that the shadow is almost by definition unacknowledged, whereas parts of the daimonic may become acknowledged and remain part of the daimonic. Etymologically, the word is derived from the same Greek root as our word demon. But daimonic does not mean demonic. The daimonic, as May conceives it, is "*any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person*" (123).

This idea of taking over the whole person is similar to the concept of demon possession, but it is not a demon that does the possessing–it is part of a person's own mind that possesses the rest of the person. May maintains that the daimonic is not evil in itself, but he also holds that it may become evil. He writes,

> **The daimonic becomes evil when it usurps the total self without regard to the integration of that self, or to the unique forms and desires of others and their need for integration. It then appears as excessive aggression, hostility, cruelty–the things which horrify us most, and which we repress whenever we can or, more likely, project onto others. (123)**

What May describes here as daimonic evil is the same thing I was describing as surrender to one's own dark side. However, Stephen Diamond, writing in *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity*, emphasizes that the daimonic can be either destructive or creative. In its creative form, it can lead a person to create great works of art. For example, many artists have creative bursts where they put aside other concerns to focus on creating something. In the passage just quoted above, May does not seem to be making this distinction, but he does seem to be focusing his description on the destructive aspect of the daimonic. What I have described as surrender to one's dark side is best described, in terms of the daimonic, as destructive daimonic possession. This is when one aspect of a person usurps control over the whole person in a destructive manner.

Diamond also uses the concept of the daimonic to distinguish between different types of character. He distinguishes between the antidaimonic and the daimonic characters, and among the daimonic

characters, he distinguishes between eudaimonic and dysdaimonic characters. Diamond derives these types of character from a passage he quotes from an M. Sperber:

> **The daimonic individual experiences his state of being with unusual intensity. The antidaimonic person, in contrast, is anhedonic or apathetic; he has repressed his daimon. A comparison may also be made between the dysdaimonic person, whose entire personality is dominated by one or more components of the daimonic, and the eudaimonic, who has integrated the daimonic into all spheres of his being. (268)**

Eudaimonic is closely related to *eudaimonia,* the word in Aristotle that usually gets translated as happiness, and it is a good kind of character to have. It is a character in which a person's passions are in harmony with each other, such that one can generally enjoy life without getting caught up in obsessions. An antidaimonic character is a bad kind of character, but mainly because of its deficiencies. It is more of an immoral character than a wicked character. A dysdaimonic character has great potential for being wicked, though it isn't always so, for a dysdaimonic character could be creative or destructive. A creative dysdaimonic character will generally have its good points and bad points. It may throw a person into torment from time to time, but it can also lead to great creativity and moments of exhilaration. In contrast, a destructively dysdaimonic character is by its nature a wicked character. Such a character is marked by destructive obsessions, such as obsessive hatred, obsessive fear of self-recrimination (e.g. Peck's theory), or obsessive egocentrism (e.g. egotheism). Even seemingly positive obsessions could turn destructive, such as romantic obsession over a woman, which leads one to murder rivals or to try to control the woman's life. It isn't the content of the obsession that makes a character destructively dysdaimonic. It is the way in which the obsession takes over a person's life and twists around the person's character.

With dysdaimonia understood as the wicked part of an evil character, it is the obsessiveness and compulsiveness of a person's desires that can make her evil, not the mere content of those desires. This idea is shared by F. Forrester Church, who writes in *The Seven Deadly Virtues: A Guide to Purgatory for Atheists and True Believers*,

> **Evil is not the privation of good; it is the perversion of good. This is why our "virtues" are so dangerous, both collectively and to us as individuals. Any given quality or value, if lifted above the scale of associated values and weighed independently, becomes an evil. (26)**

Church seems to be disagreeing with Augustine, though he is really disagreeing only with a superficial reading of Augustine. Church's point is that even the virtues can become perverted and misdirected, becoming evil rather than good. Although they are distinguished by the most praiseworthy content, they can become dangerous when the content of a virtue is overvalued. Church drives this point home with the example of Hitler. He writes,

> **Here, what's good for the goose is also bad for the goose, and may be devastating to the flock. This is true of all the virtues, even temperance. Adolf Hitler was a teetotaler and a vegetarian. This helped keep his mind and body pure. Hitler was devoted to purity. This same devotion, wildly misunderstood and misapplied, ultimately led him to commit genocide. (26)**

The idea that virtues can turn bad is only one side of the idea that the content of one's vices or virtues is not what makes someone evil. The other side of this idea is that the mere content of vices is not enough to make someone evil. In *The Satanic Bible*, Anton Szandor LaVey tries to whitewash the seven deadly sins, describing each in a way that doesn't make it seem so bad. He writes,

> **A Satanist knows there is nothing wrong with being greedy, as it only means that he wants more than he has. Envy means to look with favor upon the possessions of others, and to be desirous of obtaining similar things for oneself. Envy and greed are the motivating forces of ambition–and without ambition, very little of any importance would be accomplished. Gluttony is simply eating more than you need to keep yourself alive. When you have overeaten to the point of obesity, another sin–pride–will motivate you to regain an appearance that will renew your self-respect.**
>
> **[. . .]**

Being reluctant to get up in the morning is to be guilty of sloth, and if you lie in bed long enough you may find yourself committing yet another sin–lust. To have the faintest stirring of sexual desire is to be guilty of lust. In order to insure the propagation of humanity, nature made lust the second most powerful instinct [. . .].
The strongest instinct in every living thing is self-preservation, which brings us to the last of the seven deadly sins–anger. Is it not our instinct for self-preservation that is aroused when someone harms us, when we become angry enough to protect ourselves from further attack? (46-47)

Of course, other works on the seven deadly sins do describe real sinfulness. In general, I'm in agreement with Christian writers who have condemned the seven deadly sins, but I also understand each of them in a much more destructive way than LaVey is representing them. The important point is that LaVey is distinguishing between these sins merely by their content, not by what makes them truly sinful. The content of these sins is recognizable in LaVey's descriptions, and, by itself, the content of these sins is not enough to make anyone evil. Self-preservation, sexual desire, wanting stuff, enjoying food, and thinking well of oneself are not, in themselves, inherently immoral. They become immoral, indeed deadly sins, only when they become obsessive to the point of taking over, or at least interfering with, a person's life. They become their most sinful when they become dysdaimonic.

The relative insignificance of content can also be seen by comparing destructively dysdaimonic versions of Baumeister's four roots of evil with eudaimonic versions. Consider sadism, which is taking pleasure in causing someone pain. Some people may have a sadistic streak but keep it under control, indulging it mainly through harmless outlets like watching cartoon violence and playing violent video games. In a eudaimonic character, a sadistic streak would be tempered by one's concern for other people. In contrast, someone obsessed with sadism couldn't keep his sadism under control. It would dominate his character, leading him to regularly try to hurt people.

If someone with a eudaimonic character wants revenge, he may let the law take care of it, if it is for a crime, or he may temper his revenge with a sense of proportion, meeting out only what is due. If there is a cost to exacting revenge, he may also cut his losses and not seek revenge. If he wants revenge against someone he cares about, he may turn his energies to forgiving the person, not seeking revenge at all. In contrast, someone who is dysdaimonically obsessed with revenge will usually seek revenge at whatever cost without tempering it with any sense of proportion. Such a person would be prone to hurt the injuring party more than his offense merits, as well as hurt himself and innocent parties to exact his revenge.

If someone with a eudaimonic character has certain ideals, he may spend a fair amount of time fighting for them, but he will also keep a sense of proportion about them, leading him to avoid doing anything too drastic. He will remember that other things are important besides the ideals he is fighting for. In contrast, someone who is dysdaimonically obsessed with certain ideals will go to great lengths in fighting for his ideals. In times of war or revolution, for example, obsessed idealists may commit atrocities against people for the sake of their ideals. Terrorism is also generally rooted in an obsession with ideals.

If someone with a eudaimonic character has self-interested desires, he will keep them in proportion, recognizing that it sometimes isn't worth the cost to go after something you want. This will sometimes be because of what it will do to his own life, and it will sometimes be because of how it will affect the lives of others. Someone with a eudaimonic character recognizes that there are valid concerns besides his own personal concerns. But someone who is dysdaimonically obsessed with any of his desires or interests will usually fail to consider the needs of others or even his own competing needs. This will predispose him to hurt others or even himself to get what he wants.

As the distinction between eudaimonic and dysdaimonic characters shows, it isn't the content of a desire that corrupts a person's character. It is mainly how much any particular desire is out of proportion with other desires. Any desire, whether or not it is for something inherently immoral, can corrupt a character when it usurps control. Yet desires for what is immoral, such as hurting people for fun, can be

kept from corrupting the character by the presence of competing desires, such as concern for other people's welfare. It is the obsessive nature of some desires, not their particular content, that plays the decisive role in corrupting character. Furthermore, desires for what is immoral, such as the desire to hurt people for fun, are still generally for something positive, such as, in this case, having fun. Having fun is not immoral; it is only the means to having fun (causing pain) that makes sadism immoral. Therefore, calling someone destructively dysdaimonic is more damning than merely calling someone a sadist, a misguided idealist, or an egoist.

Overall, the modified betrayal theory identifies an evil person as someone whose character is marked by the betrayal of freedom and the destructive kind of dysdaimonia. A character that combines these two elements may be the morally worst kind of bad character anyone can have. One reason for this is that such a person will generally be often enough prone to commit acts of evil. This is not to say that every evil person will be often enough prone to commit acts of evil. Some might be paralyzed, locked up, or otherwise unable to do much evil. Some may also be afraid of getting caught and punished. But generally speaking, an evil person, as described by this modified betrayal theory, will be often enough prone to commit acts of evil. Furthermore, this theory seems to bring together the morally worst kinds of immorality and the morally worst kinds of wickedness. The betrayal of freedom normally leads to a lack of moral concern, which Milo has identified as the moral fault behind the two morally worst kinds of immorality: amorality and moral indifference. It also seems that destructive dysdaimonia is morally worse than other kinds of wickedness, for it grotesquely distorts the character, pushing it firmly in the direction of destructiveness, whereas the types of wickedness distinguished by content can range from hardly wicked at all to very wicked.

It may be objected that the obsessively self-righteous people Peck identifies as evil, who are still generally identified as evil by this theory, do not lack moral concern and are not often enough prone to commit acts of evil. Rather than lacking moral concern, it would seem that they are obsessed with morality. Actually, they are obsessed with avoiding self-recrimination, and this leads them away from honest moral evaluation. Instead of duly noting relevant moral considerations, they assume their own moral goodness and rationalize what they want to do. This is in effect amorality, because it is a failure to apply moral principles.

Their evil actions may not always be in the form of gratuitous violence, as was seen in the example of Deprov, but they may regularly be prone to evil acts of a more subtle sort. Deprov, for example, enjoyed humiliating people. Besides that, self-righteous people sometimes do enjoy acts of violence, and part of their pleasure is in believing that some miscreant is getting what he deserves. For example, racists sometimes enjoy tormenting people of another race, and part of the reason they take pleasure in this is that they believe they are getting back at people they have some legitimate grievance against. They are usually wrong in this, but the belief is there nonetheless.

Overall, there seem to be two main ways in which a person may become evil. One is for the betrayal of freedom to unleash one's dark side. This is allegorically represented in Stevenson's story "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Jekyll creates a potion that will unleash his dark side, and he betrays his freedom by drinking it. The other way is for destructive dysdaimonia to push a person to a breaking point, at which he betrays freedom and turns evil. This is allegorically represented in a description Russell gives of Iblis, the Muslim Devil. He says, "The essence of his sin was rebellion against God provoked by pride" (*Lucifer* 55). Based on this description, pride was not sufficient to make Iblis evil. It led him to become evil, but it was his rebellion against God, which is tantamount to betraying what makes life worthwhile and meaningful, that made him evil. Pride was the dysdaimonic force that drove his character to a breaking point, and his rebellion was the breaking point.

This second way of becoming evil is also echoed by Peters, who describes seven steps to radical evil in his book *Sin*. The main idea expressed by Peters is that a person becomes evil by going through several steps of ever worsening corruption until she reaches the breaking point of blasphemy, which Peters

identifies with radical evil. Although described in religious terms, blasphemy is more or less a religious analogue of what I have called betrayal of freedom. Peters describes two kinds of blasphemy, only one of which he actually identifies with radical evil, and his distinction between these two kinds of blasphemy reveals a distinction between two kinds of evil. He distinguishes between covert and overt blasphemy. He says, "covert blasphemy [. . .] involves using the name of God directly or indirectly in order to hide behind a veil of righteousness" (217). It is called covert, because it doesn't represent itself as blasphemy, and a person may be guilty of it without even being aware that he is blaspheming. For example, it would be covert blasphemy to invoke the name of God to justify mass murder, such as was done during the Crusades or the Inquisition. This is very similar to the sort of evil Peck has described as human evil, which roots evil in obsessive self-righteousness. It uses morality and moral language to hide any sense of moral imperfection behind a veil of self-righteousness.

Peters describes overt blasphemy as

the dishonoring or reviling of the name, being, or work of God through slander, cursing, or showing contempt. It is denial of God's holiness. It is repudiation of God's saving work. It is a rejection of God's grace. It is a defamation of God's character. It takes the form of employing divine symbols for the purpose of disavowing all loyalty to the God of love and salvation. Worse, it employs these symbols to prevent others from gaining access to the God of love and salvation. (218)

This is the sort of blasphemy that is associated with Satanism, understood as Devil-worship. It is the form of blasphemy that Peters specifically associates with radical evil. He says, "By deliberately advancing the symbols of evil, it repudiates the sham allegiance to goodness found in hypocrisy. I call it *radical* evil because it cuts the soul off from consolation; it vitiates goodness at the roots" (219). This is very similar to the kind of evil Peck associated with Satan. This kind of evil rejects morality outright without claiming any kind of sham allegiance to it. It's a more radical betrayal of freedom than even the hypocritical betrayal of freedom committed by the obsessively self-righteous.

In line with Peters' distinction between covert and overt blasphemy, I propose that there are two main kinds of evil. One kind, which may be the more common, is covert evil. This kind masquerades itself as morality, making use of morality for self-justification and scapegoating, mainly out of an obsessive fear of self-condemnation. The other kind of evil is overt evil, which may also be described as radical evil, as it is the most extreme kind of evil. It combines destructive dysdaimonia with the outright rejection of morality, and it is probably a lot more common in fiction than it is in reality. Nevertheless, some people find some kind of romantic appeal in radical evil, and this may lead one to become radically evil. Romantic glamorization of evil can be seen in some Heavy Metal music, Satan worship, and horror movies. Although glamorizing evil does not automatically plunge one into radical evil, it can make the path to radical evil seem more appealing, leading more people into evil.

Since overt evil is the most extreme kind of evil, it might be objected that evil, as the morally worst term of moral censure, should be reserved for overt evil, what I have also called radical evil. In practice, it often is reserved for people who consciously and openly align themselves with evil. Nevertheless, covert evil and overt evil are not different enough in kind to warrant the use of evil only for overt evil. Both types of evil are due to a betrayal of freedom and surrender to one's dark side. They differ mainly in how these are expressed. Covert evil hides these behind sham allegiance to morality, whereas overt evil openly flaunts them. This is like the difference between a man who cheats on his wife in secret and a man who openly cheats on his wife. In cheating on his wife, he betrays her–whether or not she knows about it. Likewise, the betrayal of freedom, whether open or concealed, is still betrayal. The same goes for surrender to one's dark side. Whether hidden or acknowledged, it still is what it is. Overt evil is more radical, because it involves a conscious identification with evil, but covert evil still possesses the morally relevant features that distinguish evil.

Besides this, overt evil is not morally worse in every respect. Covert evil is generally worse in one important respect: it is more insidious. By disguising itself as goodness, covert evil can go undetected,

giving it time to grow strong and sink its roots into a person's character. Even worse, it can direct the remaining goodness of a person toward evil ends, such that one's good side naively cooperates with one's evil side, failing to oppose it. By mixing itself with virtue, covert evil can even take on the strength and respectability of virtue. Church points this out in *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, writing,

> **The four philosophical and three theological virtues[11] are only deadly when malpracticed, but then devastatingly so, for they lend the appearance of nobility to evil. As one great theologian, John Scotus Erigena, wrote in the ninth century, "No vice is found but in the shadow of some virtue." Those of us who face some chosen light (justice, faith, or whatever) may be blinded by it. Basking in its reflected glow–"we are just, we are faithful"–we may fail to notice that as long as we face the light, we cannot see our shadow. Blinded by our virtue, we forget that we *have* a shadow. And when we forget that, we become dangerous.**
> **Shakespeare wrote that, "Our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues." As it is, our virtues not only cherish, but also camouflage our crimes. (3)**

Indeed, some of the most infamous people in history seem to have been covertly evil, not overtly evil. For example, Adolf Hitler believed he was preserving Germany from foreign corruption. In contrast to covert evil, overt evil will generally meet opposition from whatever is left of a person's good side. Because of this opposition, it will be harder for overt evil to grow strong and take root. Even if the good side is weak, a person may, upon recognizing such evil in himself, muster up whatever goodness he can to resist it. So long as any goodness remains in a person, and some usually will, it will be harder for overt evil to make a foothold in a person's character. Insofar as overt evil does have any foothold in a person's character, it could even lead one to another breaking point, the one at which he hates himself so much he seeks to turn his life around, repenting of his evil and turning good. But this option is less available for covert evil, because it hides from a person the need to change himself. Insofar as it is more insidious, covert evil is morally worse than overt evil. It corrupts a person's own goodness, it parasitically augments itself with the strength of one's goodness, and it makes a person less liable to repent. These qualities give covert evil greater strength and staying power than overt evil. Indeed, these qualities make covert evil so terrible that some writers on evil have identified evil with covert evil rather than with overt evil. Peck's theory was one example. Church also does this. He writes in *The Devil & Dr. Church: A Guide to Hell for Atheists and True Believers*, "The devil's true nature is evil disguised as good–which is to say, he almost always appears in drag" (x). Overall, though, overt evil and covert evil are each morally worse in their own ways, and there may not be as much reason as originally supposed to call only one of them truly evil.

One more reason in favor of this theory is how much an evil character, as described by this theory, is destructive of personhood. This is significant, because it underscores that an evil character is not bad merely in some moral sense; it is also bad in the sense that it is a bad sort of character to have. The immoral aspect betrays the qualities that give worth and meaning to personhood, and the wicked aspect fragments the personality. In a dysdaimonic character, some aspects of a person's mind usurp control over the rest. A dysdaimonic character treats many aspects of a person's own self with callousness and indifference. An evil person is his own worst enemy, not just the enemy of others.

Apt words for describing an evil person's character may be inhuman and monstrous. Inhuman captures the immoral aspect of betraying the qualities that give value to personhood. Monstrous captures the wicked aspect of destructive daimonic possession, because it makes a person into something like a monster. These two words also work well at a gut level, distilling into two words the qualities one may naturally feel the most repulsion for. They also capture the potential an evil character has for destroying one's personhood. An evil person betrays his humanity and becomes a monster.

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[11] "Dividing them into their customary groupings, the philosophical virtues (as codified by Plato), and the theological virtues (which were added by Gregory the Great in the sixth century), the seven deadly virtues are as follows: *prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude;* and then, *faith, hope,* and *charity* or *love*" (Church, *Seven Deadly Virtues:* 28).

Insofar as evil is destructive of personhood, this also reveals that the qualities which contribute to personhood are contrary to evil. These include options such as forgiveness, love, community, empathy, guilt, and repentance. By remembering and holding onto these options, most people avoid becoming evil. To some extent, an evil person is an oxymoron, because evil and personhood are so contrary to each other. Nevertheless, it is also a real danger. Personhood can become corrupted, leading one to become the sort of person who betrays his humanity and behaves like some sort of monster. Fortunately, evil can be averted when we know what to look for and how to counter it. With the humility to accept our imperfection, the courage to face what we don't like about ourselves, and compassion for ourselves and others, we can avoid becoming evil.

We should also remember that being evil is not the only explanation for why people hurt each other. In understanding the difference between evil and other causes of wrong-doing, we may be able to treat people who hurt us more compassionately. In understanding how evil people hurt themselves, we may even be able to face evil people more compassionately. Although they deserve condemnation and should not be placated, understanding what they have done to themselves may allow us to condemn them with some sadness for what they have become, rather than with abject hatred. Indeed, abject hatred for evil people is a bit too close to evil itself. It seeks destruction without compassion. True condemnation of evil must involve an honest appreciation of the qualities that evil corrupts. It is no less condemnation for being compassionate. The fullest condemnation of evil decries what evil people have done to themselves, and it deplores what has been lost in the corruption that makes someone evil. Hopefully, the insights this dissertation has provided on the nature of evil will lead to an appreciation of what is at stake and what is lost when a person becomes evil.

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