

On Evil

Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? - Amos 3:6

Inasmuch as this is a letter about evil, and evil is dry, this letter must be dry. It is also much needed. First I will explain what I mean by evil, and then I will give examples and suggest what to do about it. I must occasionally use Christian terminology; you may take it in a technical sense or as an illustration without loss of meaning.

Evil is the harm that befalls a soul. Many evils are mindless: storms, fires, famine, flood, plague, death, war. These are *evils*; they are not *evil*, for they do not have wills. Evil is not an alignment or a faction. It is, like natural evils, primarily a trespass or a blindness. All things are good, in themselves; it is the way they impinge on one another that accounts for evil.

When someone feels wronged by someone or something else, they pick up an emotional charge — indignation, frustration, rage. Each charge discharges differently, but the emotion must be discharged: To absorb it is painful and humiliating. The process of discharging spreads evil, creating new wrongs and new charges, multiplying as it goes.

Everything is painful the first time. If I am inured to pain, pain is no longer much of an evil; for someone else it may still be a great one. If I have great faith, and therefore cannot be broken, I must be more worried about evil befalling someone who has less. The one who understands suffers more happily than the one who does not, and therefore will suffer instead, as the parent suffers for the child.

Evil depends on one of two failures: a failure to identify souls or a failure to respect natural consequences. The way out of evil is to see souls wherever they are and to seek understanding (which is insight into how things work). The two must also be connected: It does no good to recognize a soul a moment too late to halt a consequence. Anyone concerned with fleeing evil-doing must take seriously all plausible souls. Evil may perceive an entity, but only dimly perceive its soul. We see dimly as through a brass mirror.

Evil, of the kind that lives in minds, is contagious. Live as a firebreak against it, taking blows without passing them on. It is natural, when abused, to abuse, when pressed, to become indifferent, when wronged, to seek vengeance. Waves of evil spread out from the moments where it emerges, which it does out of natural desires and understandable pressures. An unwillingness to lose, to get the short end of the stick, makes it inevitable: The harm must be passed on and often multiplied. Be willing to lose.

A bad mood begets bad moods. A loud honk begets loud honks. (You will know you should not have honked if someone honks back.) Some people become generators for these waves, through their indifference or childish demands. Some people amplify or convert the wave, and others dampen or absorb it.

One characteristic of evil is that it does not feel the full impact of its actions. This, together with pride and self-righteousness, accounts for the familiar bad reaction to being corrected: The original crime is not felt as particularly bad. So what should be a corrective is felt as retribution, and spawns new, diffuse counter-retributions. Wrong them back and, rather than receive correction, they will perceive a fresh wrong in it and go and wrong again in turn.

The game is not us versus them. It is all of us versus these pathogenic waves of evil.

Doing real harm because it is within the rules or even according to them is the fundamental law of devils. "But he deserved it," will not help you on judgment day. Nor will "I was following orders." Satan appears in Job (his *only* unambiguous Biblical appearance) as an accuser, to say Job might be following God only for the material goods God bestowed on him. The enemy is the *accuser*.

Let's get ready to look in the mirror.

Why is there Evil?

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of [birth pangs].

Matthew 24:7-8

An evil received, even accidentally, begets intentional evil. A belief in vengeance or vindictive justice will turn an evil received into evils dealt. The feeling that one has been wronged brings a charge, and wronging in turn discharges it.

Indifference also passes evil on. "Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people," is one of the worst beliefs there is. It is no accident that Job, the oldest book of the Bible, is devoted to debunking it. This belief is deeply evil.

When harm befalls someone, whether naturally, or by state or individual action, to think, "He must have deserved it," or, "He had it coming," is indifference. Sometimes harm must befall: but never think in terms of desserts.

Sometimes somebody becomes a generator of evil in such a way that they must be cut out. This may mean "kicked out of the club." It may mean prison or death. This is not a punishment. It is not to be dealt because someone has committed a particular crime, but because someone has become a creature predisposed to committing a crime. If you must kill a criminal, mourn him.

Not all things are compatible with each other. When one good oversteps another, the outcome is evil. For a real thing to come into being, there must be incomplete forms of the thing first, as it squeezes into reality. These incomplete forms are replete with pains and evils. Eternity is being born, and the Kingdom of Heaven with it.

God could trivially have placed each of us in a world where nothing good about us would cause evil. But we would have been alone. He places us here, in a neighborhood with others, where our good overruns us and tramples others. This is how Jesus can say, "Offenses must come, but woe to the man by whom they come."

All evil is as mindless as an avalanche, for indeed, evil is mindlessness of souls and goods that it was never the evildoer's business to mind before. Apparently mindful evils, like revenge, are no less rooted in mindlessness. The soul that revenge would harm is wrongly beheld.

There is an outer darkness around the cosmos, a chaos where all entities are that are not within, never an inch away. Each entity has a nature, as a triangle has, and to draw it otherwise is not to draw it at all. When two entities find themselves in conflict within the cosmos, one of them may dip into the outer darkness to route around it. This we call pain. A trespass plunges one or the other into pain. Yet pain is more easily endured than bliss. Patience is the art of long enduring pain, and holds the door open for others to enter into life.

Generative Vice and the Concept of Sin

All activity is sin which crimps or cripples perfect love. Sinful desires are those that tread upon another soul. Sin is not a rule-breaking, but rules are meant to help us keep far (sometimes too far) from sin. Thomas Aquinas put it so: "All roots and sources of sin include disordered love of self." For the disordered love of self comes before and vanquishes the love of others.

A *vice* is a generator of sinful desire, a complex of habits of thought, perception, and action that overwhelms moral judgment. Gluttony, for instance, may see an animal only as a food. Vice will cause sin again and again, multiplying evil, just as virtue multiplies good.

The traditional capital vices are these:

1. **pride.** A love of self over other and the puffed up esteem that comes with it: an unwillingness to bear shame or be a laughingstock.
2. **greed.** A credulous gullibility about the value of things: to find gold, or money, or stock certificates, to be of value, other than instrumentally; or an elevation of social games over people.
3. **lust.** The drive to objectify, demean, and use. Lust can be satisfied by rape or prostitution. Lust is covetous; upright desire is not.
4. **envy.** Impotent covetousness for another's success, station, physique, or anything else that cannot even be stolen, taking pleasure in cutting others down, bringing them "down to size."
5. **gluttony.** Eating as an end in itself — without respect to the consequences for the body and without regard to the cost or value of the foodstuff (chiefly, its soul.)
6. **wrath.** A lust for destruction, especially vengeance. This violent lust is a perversion of a righteous desire for justice.
7. **sloth.** Or acedia. A failure to act, especially in spiritual and intellectual responsibilities, whether from forgetfulness, a distaste for action, indifference, apathy, stress, or "being too busy."

These you must tolerate in others but never in yourself.

A Vision of Hell

Imagine this. You find yourself in the afterlife, and the veil of illusion that hid other souls from you is withdrawn. You revisit real memories, powerless to change them, but now you love your victims deeply. You feel your body possessed as you are forced to disregard, belittle, mock, torment, maim, and kill, them. Their cries no longer stoke fury, but sympathy, and the look in their eyes could move you to tears. But no tears come: You carry out your deeds exactly as you did in life.

You are powerless to undo your mistake. You would take their place in a heartbeat, offer yourself up for them, but you cannot do it. Every dog is now your cherished dog, every man and every woman your dearest friend. Every moment is torment for you, as indeed it was for them. Your own hands forcefeed you the octopus you ate: But now you feel it for the sensitive creature it was. You wish you could throw up.

You could have known. You *did* know, if you're honest. But you pushed it down for the sake of gluttony or lust. I saw a video once of a young woman in a fine restaurant eating a live octopus by slicing off its tentacles one by one and boiling them: Imagine the horror. Then imagine her experience of that moment, here.

You will be revealed to yourself for the monster you were.

Hell is a natural consequence of the immortality of the soul. Its torments are not punishments. The veil is pulled away and you see the world as it is: And so begins the agony. If the traditional tortures of hell exist, they exist as a merciful escape from *this*.

Laws and Moral Systems

A moral system lays out a scheme of right and wrong actions. Every moral system smuggles in some evil as good and some good as evil. The problem is inherent in systematization: Once rules are drawn up, the generative principle, which is always love of souls no matter the law (though not always the love of *all* souls), is cast aside, and all further action is taken from the rules. It is also inherent in the division of *actions*, rather than *consequences to souls*, into the categories of good and evil: Actions can be better or worse than each other, but are only ever evil insofar as they impinge on souls.

Again, moral systems smuggle evil in as good. There can be no exception: The generative principle of love must be active or rot shall have set in. A system is a strategy guide, a playbook, and is very good when used that way. But when it replaces its own generative principle, it doubles back and becomes what it set out to destroy.

Sometimes the very purpose of a moral system is to smuggle in evil. So it was with slaveholder morality. So it is with the morality that eagerly justifies war. So it is with the ideology of greed. Morality does not mean good: It means muddled good and evil. Do not heap shame, especially in the name of moral standards. You will wish you had not, when you understand.

As for that little voice you hear, that's not your conscience and it's not God. It's just you. If you obey it, you thereby do whatever you please, armored up against the pleas and advice of others. Do not disregard it, but challenge it according to love. (Your mind is a society of minds. It is normal to talk to yourself, within your own head.)

We make up rules to shape and pattern the future, to make it possible to live according to expectation. It is a great misfortune to rely on a rule and then find that others will not respect it. Understood as communication, rules are a serious expression of love. You must be willing to commit to your own disadvantage and not change, while remembering that you are always free to refashion rules together. Change rules to your own disadvantage, too.

Soteriology

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross - Colossians 2:14

There are three things necessary for the attainment of eternal life: the pardon of sins, the victory over temptations, and the crown of all graces, a holy death. These three things are accordingly the objects of our hope. - St. Alphonsos Liguori

Salvation is assuredly a great good. Therefore its disordered pursuit becomes a great evil. As a theological matter, the question of who is saved and how and from what, becomes a distraction from doing Jesus' plain and simple words. Hell rears up in the imagination as the great threat: but sin is the threat, and sin is simply a failure to love effectively, so that love will be felt.

The Christian must flee sin and leave death and hell to God.

Faulty Mental Models

At all times you live in the model maintained by your mind. It presents itself as being the actual outside world, but it is not. It is a prediction of the near future, combined with information about the importance of things to you. It reduces things (unless you have corrected it) to the roles they play in your life. In this mode of thought, you are easily managed by power and made party to the oppression of the poor. Jesus calls this model *the eye*, and it can be evil or clear. It is with the eye that you judge, and judgment both is an evil and brings evils on.

The way things appear to you is a fact about *you*. Your fears and anxieties, your dislikes and hatreds, your judgments and jealousies, are projected out onto the world as though they were facts about the world. Every soul shines out bright and *cannot* go unloved once it is perceived. It is possible not to understand an artistic expression, but impossible not to want to, when it is recognized as expressing something from a soul. But your judgment of the world, your "evil eye," hides them from you. They are incongruous with the underlying reality of the beauty of souls and their activity.

When someone looks demonic to you, it may only be fear. Many things are innocent that you now consider sinful. Clean your eye.

Your mental model is built for survival. It distorts things as necessary for your own convenience. It will tell you that what you are doing is reasonable and that what others are doing is unreasonable. It will tell you that other beings exist for your benefit (rather than for the good of their own souls.) It will tell you that compromising love makes you strong. It will tell you that what you have is so good that it is worth the evil you do another.

Seeing souls where they are and loving them is the first thing. Once you truly feel the presence of souls in others, it becomes impossible to wish them ill. (The corollary holds: If you wish

someone ill, their soul is hidden from you. Scrub your eye.) Gaining competence is the second thing. Because you value souls, you value what befalls them, and so you value reality and truth. You will do everything you can to expand the limitations of your mental model, learning math, science, history, philosophy, and theology, at the very least. It is inevitable. (I am not saying you *must* do these things. I am saying you will find yourself drawn to them.)

It hurts at first to be corrected. When people do not escape their limitations, especially when large groups share similar shortcomings, the outcomes are ugly. They do terrible things on purpose because of what they fear and foolish things by accident because of what they do not understand. At no time do they feel unreasonable. Do not judge and do not heap shame, for these flow from the evil of the eye. Do not be afraid or upset by what you perceive; but simultaneously, and with awareness of the contradiction, right all evil.

A commitment to truth (which follows necessarily from love) means a constant endeavor to overturn *your own* mental model, to chip away the lies. Your own feelings and your own claims must be under constant scrutiny. If you haven't been wrong about anything recently, you're probably wrong about everything that matters.

Learn to control your attention. Directing attention is an action you take, like moving your eyes or your hands, and you are responsible for it. Possible thoughts and feelings present themselves to you but *you* choose whether to grasp them.

Take control of your reactions. Stop using annoyance. Stop using frustration. Stop using stress to solve problems. Do not impute bad motives, however obvious they seem. Do not expect this of others.

Bad Psychology

The DSM-5 describes *behavioral* disorders, not *mental illness*. Psychology makes no claim to study the inner life, but intentionally and precisely *only* studies behavior (they say so in classes and textbooks). It is useful. But it must be understood properly. The DSM is a work of law like any other. A diagnosis is a life sentence without parole: Do not blame them for resisting it. And the punishments are worse than those for crime.

Many underlying causes get lumped under one disorder because they cause similar behaviors, and the trial-and-error search for medications eventually distinguishes them again. Yes; they throw medication at the problem until something sticks. Yes; this often works. No; diagnoses are not specific conditions, explanations, or mechanisms.

Every behavioral condition is needled and hounded by ordinary people. With understanding and patience, most familiar mental illnesses might lead to no behavioral disorder at all. Many nervous tics you think of as crazy are side effects of prescribed drugs, not effects of the underlying disease. Your fear of the mentally ill may be the very reason they go mad, for no one can long endure under constant scrutiny and suspicion. Have you considered that your solutions cause the problem?

When two are together and one is psychotic, how do you tell which one it was?

Do not confuse depression for sloth or anxiety for cowardice. Do not repeat the lie that says God has promised to cure all such conditions. Yet these must be addressed by cognitive interventions — bad dogma must be replaced. Anxiety and depression are hard enough without spiritual judgment. Heap no shame.

Bad psychology and faulty developmental models lead to stultifying classroom environments. Parents and administrators alike demand that children play poorly designed educational games flavored as mathematical drills or geography lessons. I heard from a social worker who visited a classroom for autistic children that everything she observed was clearly torture for the children, their coping mechanisms being treated as behavioral issues — all you needed was some insight into autism — but no one listened and no one cared. This kind of indifference compounds evils already present.

The use of psychological principles to condition and control, as for marketing and propaganda, is depraved. The people who do it make slaves of their fellow men, inculcating mindlessness, and wash their hands with stories of free will. They are guilty of other men's sins, who take part in such wickedness. Use psychology for emancipation instead.

Fear

Fear is the easiest cause of evil to forgive. It is also its single most effective generator. Always look for it as an explanation of the evil that others do; this will help keep them in your circle of empathy. In yourself, face it down. Learn to accept the loss of what fear says you might lose, and to endure what it says you might endure. Fear is not an expression of love. Worrying, even about your own children, wrongs them.

Your fear is real. Others *should* take it seriously and treat you kindly. But you cannot control what others do. Your fear feels like objective truth to you, but it is not. The claims it makes about other people's motives feel real, but they are not. Very often everyone in a situation is afraid, and very often they think everyone else is angry. Other people's fear forces you into a double consciousness: You must always be aware of how they will see you. You can never let your

guard down. Fear is terrifying in part because the fearful lash out. Yet do not cower before fearful rage: You will inflame it.

We leave wider berths around our fears than we need to, and when we try to protect ourselves we shield ourselves too violently. Within the mind, fear is contagious, and spreads from thought to associated thought. A fear of spiders means the murder of spiders. A fear of people may mean the murder of people. Fear does what it must.

You may also wound someone you love through your fear of them. It is an awful feeling to extend love and be rebuffed. Fear must be respected and tended and loved through like any other sickness. Forcing someone to do what they fear is a great evil. The exploitation of fear is the basis of all coercion and a serious form of torture. It must not be tolerated.

Why are you afraid? What do you stand to lose, and why are you not already willing to give it up? Fear insists on being nursed and flattered; it often comes to mind and will not leave. After the spider is killed, it warns of spiders everywhere.

Do not fear death. Our knowledge is limited; we who have not tasted it must stop cursing it. Neither fear shame, nor failure, nor any evil. Know that it will come, but do not fear it. When fear passes, ask yourself if the threat was real or if you made it up. You will often find you made it up.

("Fear" can also mean a healthy respect, as in, "the fear of the LORD," and in this sense it is to be encouraged. But though it is the same word, it is a very different thing. *This* kind of fear will still keep you away from things that bite.)

Flocking

Flocking behaviors emerge when individuals follow their neighbors' lead. In humans, these neighbors may be nearby or they may be televised or online. They may even be other hikers who have gone off the trail, leaving a new "desire path" behind them.

In the case of hiking, the principle is clear. It may be fine to go off trail if no one else is doing it, but if a desire path is forming, stay off. This is the opposite of how most people behave, and the result is flocking.

Doing something because other people do, or worse, because other people *would*, leads to runaway effects that no human mind would choose. Like an avalanche, the collective force is a force of nature. I know a libertarian who helped code the Great Firewall of China because "someone else would have done it." Do not be that man.

Stampedes begin in crowds because a panic sets in. If enough members of the crowd can stand firm, they can dampen the stampede. Individual effort cannot cure a group's ills, but enough clear-thinking individuals, acting in concert, can. If you are pushed, do not push.

Responding to the same signals as too many other people, whether ads on television or Fed interest rates, makes you part of a swarm. Unlike flocks, swarms are coordinated. If you find yourself using an information stream that many other people are using, find another one. Fads spread by a combination of swarm and flock, and do many harms, specific to the fad.

Mobs are flocks affected with a mood. (A stampede might be thought of as a panic mob.) A mob taken up by rage is a uniquely destructive thing. It is possible to stand firm against one, within or without, and by kindness, to dampen the mood. A riot is a thing like a battle — it exists because its participants believe in it. It exists objectively because it is imagined to exist objectively. Be the proof that it does not.

Sheep that are unafraid to be bitten cannot be herded by bad shepherds. The multiplicative power of fear breaks down. Moral systems rear up and show their evil side in these situations: Many victims of the state seem to deserve it. A case can always be made, so judge not.

All of these are runaway processes. A wave of evil arises and its victims reinforce it rather than damping it out. Damp it out.

The Persecution of Evil

Witch hunts are ample generators of fresh evil, as the innocent are shamed, bullied, tried, and punished. Literal witch hunts were efforts to rid the community of a great evil, and they brought a great evil on. They are rooted in fear and based on faulty mental models. (Real witches might *try* to place hexes on their neighbors, but we are convinced that they cannot.)

The Spanish Inquisition was a runaway process, too, and it inflicted torture to obtain confessions (what use is a confession obtained through torture, anyway?) It meant to root out evil, contrary to Jesus' teaching in the parable of the wheat and the tares, and inflicted awful evils by consequence. Do you know what sorceries the Talmud was said to contain? You, who act on fear, would do the same, if you believed as they did.

When evil makes itself plain, dispose of it. But covert evils are something else. Do not hound them, but show them love. And if you judge evil poorly, as by a moral system, you will be spared (in this way) from heaping unjust judgment on a neighbor.

True evil believes it must inflict evil for its own good. These witch hunts and inquisitions are true evil. Likewise are the war on drugs, political blacklists, and every persecution of the anti-war minority in every war. As the soldier does, give up everything, and if you are not alone in it, the nightmare will end. Confess your sins publicly: Then what can they hold against you?

Utilitarianism

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. John 11:50

The belief that good and evil can be put on a numerical slider is problematic enough; the belief that my utility and yours can meaningfully be added is insidious, and a great source of subtle evils.

Good, simply put, hunts out suffering to alleviate it. It takes no solace in the great comfort of the many: It descends, laserlike, on the victims of injustice and circumstance. If a million were happy and one unhappy, it would give up its happiness to pursue the one. This is how Jesus tells us the Kingdom of Heaven is run.

Good and evil, as they befall souls, must be understood structurally, not numerically. Utilitarian and statistical tools can still be used to understand the big picture — used for the broad strokes in the background, but corrected by searching out suffering and oppression. Indeed, used for broad strokes, utilitarian reasoning is *necessary*. If there is a pervasive evil, these are the tools that will detect it.

Faulty Empathy

Empathy is an internal model of others' internal states, felt vividly. It is only as good as it is accurate. If you train your empathy by listening to all kinds of people and reading broadly, it may be an honest servant. But because it feels like objective truth, it may mislead: It may make pain seem less or worse than it really is, or assume someone is hungry who is not, and so forth.

Many evils begin with faulty empathy.

Empathy ends abruptly, in two senses: First, there is a circle within which empathy is felt, and outside of which it is not; second, in a vicious state like anger or fear, empathy gives distorted readings. A victim's fear may look like anger. A victim's screams beg for worse treatment. Be wary of leaning too heavily on empathy, for it will retreat when you need it most. Love absolutely instead.

Psychopathy is the absence of empathy. It is a cognitive defect, not a moral fact. Many psychopaths are kind and loving. They do not have the benefit of feeling what others feel — a great disadvantage, to be pitied, not feared. Empathy carries with it a catch, after all: One might show kindness because empathy makes it feel good to do so, which is not love. Lacking empathy, the psychopath is the perfect vessel for selfless love.

Prediction

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. Ecclesiastes 9:11

You probably attempt to predict the future.

Like empathy, prediction can be useful. A prediction may feel like absolute truth, yet never come to pass. Actions based on a faulty prediction are therefore harmful, and a wrong prediction may lead someone (like a parent) to control someone else (like their child) unnecessarily, engendering spite and ill will.

Many of the woes of teenagerdom spring from faulty predictions and unnecessary restrictions meant to stave off bad outcomes. Feeling confined, the child acts out. Having lost trust, the child can no longer consult with the parent, and everything spins out of control.

When the future is uncertain, multiple outcomes must be considered. Do not predict one as "the most likely" and fixate on it. All possible outcomes, even the unlikeliest, must be deemed tolerable. (Even if the plan for it is to "cross that bridge when we come to it.")

To play Russian roulette is to tolerate suicide. To gamble is to tolerate losing all. One cannot have a "feeling" and bet based on that. Bad luck must come (time and chance happen to all) and the question is what happens when it *does* come. Financial systems, for example, systematically fail to deal with their improbable yet inevitable failures. And as long as we practice MAD, we *will* incinerate ourselves one day. (If they nuke you, don't nuke back. There will be enough suffering.)

Retribution

When a wrong is felt, the believer in retribution will be charged to return it. We are assured that this is the optimal way for self-interested actors to behave, in a strategy called tit-for-tat. Well we are not self-interested, and besides which, it is *not* the optimal behavior: Too often the parties involved misjudge the magnitude of wrongs inflicted and end up in a spiral of revenge.

No, do not return evil for evil, but repay evil with good. Even the worst evildoer do not harm out of revenge. To purge their evil it may be necessary to do them harm but you must pray to be spared this, loving them still. God's justice is not vengeance. It is a righting of wrongs, an uplifting of victim and perpetrator alike.

Even the smallest dissipative action can act as retribution and enrage another. A shake of a head or a small sigh will suffice to do great harm. Mind your reactions.

Training for Battle

Most people find it impossible to kill. They will take their rifle and never fire it, or deliberately miss. The traditional method of fighting was, after all, to herd masses of terrified men into situations where they would panic and kill. Military training is dedicated chiefly to overcoming this. The result is a soldier who can act quickly to kill, but who is likely to suffer mental illness later because of it. Inflicting cruelty on the soldier and demanding cruelty of the soldier is requisite. US Marines eat live scorpions and drink snake's blood as a team-building exercise; it breaks down reservations about following orders and inflicting cruelty.

Most soldiers are decent people. They have been through systematic, ritualistic abuse. They have no choice but to carry on, be locked up, or die. Never be unkind to one; that would be missing the point. But then, putting a bullet through an enemy soldier is not kind, so refuse to do it.

Do not drop bombs. Do not operate drones. Like leaving an infant to die by exposure, these are insulated deeds that might not feel horrendous. You *will* be made to feel the enormity of what you have done, in this life or the next.

If you meet your enemy unarmed, you might actually win, depending on their pathology. Why do you think fraternizing with the enemy is frowned upon? The combatants are natural friends, so fear and hatred must be stoked.

Now I do not deny that sometimes a war must, apparently, be fought. But the Christian must be the one who winces after blasting an enemy tank, not the one who huzzahs. At the same time, having genuinely overcome fear of death and hell, the Christian makes an excellent soldier — when it is right and necessary.

Infanticide

Parents kill their own children because they cannot support them, because they are used to comfort, or because the child is intrinsically unwanted, having the wrong father or being considered flawed.

One traditional practice was death by exposure — what a nightmare, to come into the world, to love your parents, and then be left alone to die in the cold. Oh, yes, your mother wails for you as she walks away. She cannot take care of you; that is the reality. As means of killing go, this one is easy for the killer. It is a terrible way to die.

Infanticide in the womb is still infanticide. Babies near term hear and know their parents' voices. Imagine being safe in the womb and then ripped limb from limb: It is torture. And what horror, what a profound feeling of being unwanted. It casts the entity back into the outer darkness, unformed and unprotected. It is with good reason that some gnostics said abortions became demons: After that experience, what can ever convince you love is possible?

Abortion, even if it is not infanticide early on, destroys something of awesome beauty and potential. Early Christians reasoned that what will become a man is a man already, so that to abort is to kill. There is room in arguments from development to quibble. Perhaps an acorn is not an oak. (Or perhaps a sapling *is*. Which analogy is stronger for a zygote?)

To fight infanticide and abortion at all stages, make sure parents can afford to raise their children. Only take part in the generative act if the resulting child would be welcome — no matter the measures you take, you only change the odds.

Sexual Immorality

There are many pleasures more intense than sex, but few more gratifying. Sexuality involves the approval of someone who is, in turn, highly desired. There is little quite as sweet as mutual desire. The objects of desire are good, but people do evil to get them.

Consider four categories of sexual immorality.

The first is narrow. It is partaking in the generative act when the child would be unwelcome and the outcome of fertilization would be infanticide. No matter how far you lower the chances by birth control measures, the chances are not zero: Is the woman willing to undergo pregnancy and birth? Is the child welcome? (Birth control is opposed by its opponents chiefly for the consequences of the illusion of consequenceless sex. Are several methods of birth control in play at once? Even so there is a tiny chance, and I ask: Is the child welcome?)

The second is broader. You must do nothing your partner does not want. The desire must be love, that is, the good of the partner. It should not be possible to *want* something your partner does not want. Yet it *is* possible, for many, and the result is considerable evil as the tools of love are fashioned into tools of torture and shame.

The third is broadest of all. It is the artless or loveless application of sexuality, including its use in bargaining or repayment, or as an entertainment. When the mere gratification of lust is the whole object, or worse, when the object is to control or demean, sexuality is diminished as an expression of love and object of beauty. If it does not matter with whom the act takes place, then the act is undertaken in error, and evils will accumulate. Do not exploit lust or use desire to get hooks into people, as pornographers do.

The fourth is to understand affection as transactional and to worry about who has given more. To give joy to another is a great satisfaction; there is perfect balance from the beginning, if balance were a concern in love. Who benefits more from a kiss? The question is preposterous.

Do not believe that all intimacy culminates in penetration. Too much potential for the expression of love is squandered by that deeply held lie. No, not all lovemaking is sex. Do not imagine that they had sex because they slept together. No longer imagine that making love means penetration.

It is worth sparing a word on the *judgment* of sexual immorality. With Paul, I must observe that you have no standing to judge your brother or sister, and worse standing to punish. Perpetrators and fantasizers alike of nonconsensual and grudgingly-consensual sex must be corrected or cut out to limit the evil they heap, especially if their victims are children. Other behaviors, as per Jesus' teaching in the wheat and the tares, must be suffered in others for a time. What you do yourself, you can and must judge, by standards of love, beauty, and natural law. What is done to you, you must forgive — but you must also root out evil before it is dealt again.

Hierarchy

Resist the natural human bias that elevates one person over another. Approach social structure in a spirit of cooperation. Respect the offices of the hierarchy and love their occupants: Do not inwardly equate the occupant with the position. Often a bishop needs correction, which must be given in love. Many a serpent wriggles into a hierarchy and puts on a show of being holy, for such serpents love power over people. True servants do not desire power in this way; it is for the benefit of serpents that blind obedience is demanded.

This is true of secular hierarchies, too. A police officer is still your neighbor, whatever the costume and whatever the training. Cooperate in that spirit, with sympathy for his need to fill his official role, but do not bow to the man or the office. When you put yourself under authority, do not imagine it as anything but love of neighbor.

No honest office holder desires your subordination, so do not offer it. Correct those who do offer it, for they create dangerous power dynamics. You must relinquish all coercive power and you

must not abet those who wield it. It is not possible for a Christian to desire power over people: By their fruits you shall know them.

Narcissism

The narcissist manipulates other people as pawns, pitting their failings, jealousies, and faults against each other. He will make up stories as needed, and tell slightly different stories to different victims to sow discord. The skilled narcissist will rarely be caught out.

Do not manipulate. Do not tolerate pleasure in yourself at another's humiliation. Do not desire to control. Do not fall, step by step, into the trap of becoming a narcissist. A narcissist is a dismal thing to be.

As for facing a narcissist, the way is easy: Be prepared to lose much, and sincerely want the best for them — which is not the same as wanting them to win. Be prepared to be shamed. Be prepared to be threatened. Be ready to take a blow. Be trusting of good rumors and untrusting of bad ones (but goodness, take them seriously.) Build bridges to other victims. Pity the narcissist his isolation. Do not make narcissism an accusation: Simply untangle the mess.

Ignorance

What you do not know cannot stop you doing evil. Whether it be ignorance of an animal's soul, of epidemiology or climate change, or of government policy and wars of regime change, it serves the same function. You may go on according to your sinful desires, ignoring the reality of the consequences of your actions.

Choosing news media that flatter your opinions, seeking tenuous connections and parallels, skimming history without a loving understanding of what people were up against, declining to learn math, mockery, and closing your ears to your political opposition, are all ways to maintain devilish ignorance.

Instead, seek challenging discussion. Listen intently to opinions you do not agree with.

Drugs

Drugs are not a source of evil on their own. But they may help a coward overcome compunctions and commit evil that was already stored up in the heart. They may confuse the feebleminded or lead to lapses of judgment or control. All of these result in harm.

Responsible drug use is possible with research and help. There are risks involved with even the most innocuous drugs, but they can be mitigated. With the help of a guide, a careful drug user can extract value from an altered state of mind without taking undue risk. Yet always the worst

outcome must be accepted from the outset. If you do use any drug, maintain self-control and bring a memory of the experience out with you, to use in your ordinary life.

Animal Cruelty

I cannot enumerate the evils visited on animals by humans. I will name a few: We take them from the wild, keep them in small cages, maim their bodies, inject them with solutions, declaw them, pluck and debeak them, dismember them, brand them, prod them, violate them sexually, neglect them, bereave them, shock them, horrify them, and slaughter them in terror. We have builded real Hell.

We do these things to them because they cannot talk — because they cannot beg for mercy. We were called to offer mercy freely. Their vocalizations and their writhing call for mercy wordlessly, and it only inflames us, like the devils we are.

Their pain, their horror, and their grief are the same as ours. We have hope of a resurrection: They have the one body, once. Like a rich man preying on a poor man, we, who have much, justify our predation because they have so little. By rights we ought to serve them.

"It's just an animal." The words themselves are odious. To be an animal feels very much like it feels to be a human. That is, their souls are different from ours in rationality, but not in consciousness. (The argument that their consciousness is different is very common, but uses the word "consciousness" in a different sense, that is, to refer to what they are conscious *of*.)

We must, regrettably, manage animals whether we like it or not, and we must perhaps kill them. But the evils we visit on them for their good, like veterinary work, are different in kind from those we visit for our sake. It is not impossible to eat meat, when animals are treated well while they live, but it is impossible to eat as much as you now do. If you must kill them, do not asphyxiate them with carbon dioxide or drown them, which is torture, but consider nitrogen, carbon monoxide, and nitrous oxide. Bleeding them out by the neck causes hypoxia and probably bliss; it might not be a bad way to go.

Recently, HIV, H1N1, and COVID-19 are a few of the diseases that came upon us because of someone's cruelty to animals. There will be more. The overuse of antibiotics in US agriculture (to make up for the miserable condition of the livestock) will inevitably produce antibiotic resistant pathogens that will, eventually, transfer to the human population. Rarely is nature so just.

Battling Evil

Evil is not well fought with the implements of evil. Rather it is fought by putting aside all recourse to it, learning to accept harm, and loving unconditionally. Loving does not mean an end to strife, but active and genuine good will. When my enemy habitually does evil, perhaps because of training, it is love in me to stop him. If I am about to commit a great evil, why yes, put a bullet through me in the moment — if there is no other way. If I were as randomly aggressive as my dog, it would be loving to harness me so I could take a walk. Love is challenging in the presence of evil. Love is impossible in the presence of ignorance.

Learn to suffer. Learn to wait. Learn to endure hunger, thirst, discomfort, frustration, indignity, and boredom. Learn to see evil, and the emotional charges people carry, as separate from them. Hate no one for it.

Make no attempt to compel. Do not pry; let go of an inquiry lightly, and only look for information you mean to use for good. Get out from under the systems of incentive other people build for you to obey. Treat money as an instrument, not a terminal good: Do not be the man with five-hundred million dollars who is sure things would really change for the better at a billion.

Until you love everyone, you *are* evil. That is the inconvenient bar that Jesus set for us. Change your way of seeing. Reanalyze the world, looking for evil as occupying but distinct from the people you hated. Act in such a way as to win enemies, and then love them.

Most of all, shine a light. Do good. Make your love felt. Do not be afraid. Learn and do the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Love the LORD your God and love your neighbor as yourself.

☛ *Joshua Day*

Yes, please do share this letter.

You may also read two other letters I wrote:

A Fierce Christianity

<http://paleoludic.com/a-fierce-christianity.pdf>

Doing the Sermon on the Mount

<http://paleoludic.com/doing-the-sermon-on-the-mount.pdf>

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