

The Hidden Nature of Evil

No question about it. Evil is a hard one to wrap our heads around simply because its so unfathomable. That leaves us with the dilemma of not knowing where to begin or better, allowing ourselves to become paralyzed from any efforts to reflect upon it.¹ Contributing to this dilemma is a whole slew of essays, tracts and books written over the centuries which can make you freeze up from offering any contribution. The rationale is as follows. Better minds than mine had wrestled with the problem of evil and haven't come up with any satisfactory answer. If they did, we would have heard about it. Problem solved. Evil has been eliminated. Despite the erudition of numerous saints and scholars, in the long run they reduce evil to one word, "mystery."² This intimates quite clearly that no one has a clue about evil despite the havoc it inflicts.

Many people will claim that nowadays we have far more examples to which we can attach the label "evil" than had been the case in the past. In one sense they are correct due, for example, to the technology of the gas chamber and the cool, efficient planning that went into setting up these instruments of death. Then again, earlier tyrants exercised terrible brutality which astounds us even today. The only real difference between then and now is that incredibly large scale atrocities have occurred in a fairly concise period of time and in a highly systematic fashion, more or the less the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time evil always has been a constant in human experience; only now we have the ability to report its effects with greater precision instantaneously from anywhere in the world. Perhaps that contributes to a certain preoccupation with sensational images that can detract us from the evil closer to home...very close...within ourselves. This instantaneous manner of reporting makes evil strangely familiar and remote at the same time. On top of this is the desire to create sensationalism by some of those giving an account of it. Closely allied to this desire lies another, a wish of drawing attention to themselves. Usually this wish hangs around pretty long after evil has done its work. By the time any self-aggrandizement comes on the scene, evil has pretty much receded, making them look like fools. This is exactly what evil wishes as an after-thought. If you were to ask them privately, they'd admit to having been duped and are now ashamed at having been taken for a ride. Yet evil will rear its head in other people and in other circumstances, often in unforeseen ways. And people will rush off to report it and set

¹If evil were a person, he (she?) would be thrilled at this prospect of our paralysis.

²"Mystery" is a catch-all word referring to what we don't know and thus involves an element of fear. The ancient concept of *mysterion* is quite different. It refers to the act of initiation by means of a religious rite, usually in secret, which grants a newcomer membership into a group. Hence this article will form a kind of initiation, a way of overcoming that just mentioned paralysis of not contributing anything to its understanding. We'll focus upon just one aspect of evil—its hidden character—which might equip us better to deal with its assaults more effectively, especially as we see them within ourselves. The goal, obviously, isn't abolition of evil but to understand it. That alone is worth the effort despite the inadequacies of this text.

themselves up to be duped all over again with evil having the last laugh.

So upon closer examination, all this talk about a very real entity immune to explanation (though in our pretension we think it to be otherwise) can only be suffered...or if you're on the side dishing out evil, busy as a participant. Hence suffering is the way traditionally offered as a means to comprehend the incomprehensible, and the literature on that generally is less than satisfactory. So while suffering is offered as the tried and true response, another approach may be available, hence the stabs at it in this short article. In an inverse sense, Jesus' words about the Spirit apply to the approach that will laid out here: "You hear the sound of it (wind), but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes." The similarity lies in the fact that both—the Spirit and evil—prefer to remain hidden which is a more accurate way of putting it than say they remain beyond our grasp. The fact that they are beyond our grasp is that we haven't learned, if you will, to relinquish this grasp. And what we can't grasp, we loudly proclaim as not existing.

So if you choose to participate in evil, you pretty jump into it spontaneously *sans* reflection and run with it full steam. You don't even start off voluntarily which is why when a person who had been so taken in is asked, he can't pinpoint the time and place he went off in that direction. It happens without being aware that you've lost your independence. Almost simultaneously with this loss, evil sheds its deceptive, alluring looks.³ You've stepped into a real bind from which there's no turning back nor escape. Never.⁴ This is because real evil, while limited in scope, has no idea of moderation and does everything wholeheartedly. Yet evil is limited, albeit extremely dense as opposed to being spread out which makes it difficult to recognize whether on the micro or macro scale. That's why a perception of evil is not only dark but heavy, occupying space in the darkness like a black hole, ready to suck everything into it.

You know instinctively that while evil's effects are devastating, they have a limited shelf life. If it were otherwise, we and everything else would consist of raw, unadulterated wickedness, the stuff constituting a post-apocalyptic world. Or to put it more accurately, evil seems to pop out here, hangs around for a given duration, then pops back in...to where, we haven't a clue, a fact which contributes to its elusiveness and even denial. Evil is condemned roundly as in war and random acts of violence which enables people to situate it "out there" as opposed to within us. That's quite unfortunate because little reflection is required to see that evil almost always originates with the thoughts people entertain and is inseparable from them. As for the injustices we encounter, most are petty and can be dealt with. But can we say that they're actually evil or are representative of evil? As for more serious offenses, can we label them with that term? Perhaps on one or two occasions since our lives play out in rather ordinary fashion in accord with modern life's uniform dullness. The encounter stands out by reason of its radicalness from normal

³ Perhaps that's why the Easter Vigil service speaks of the "*glamor* of evil."

⁴ Well, almost never. There's always the chance held out for repentance, if you put it this way. To effect this, however, requires a power greater than anything human.

experience as well as having a certain personal character to it. This is not evil's nature *per se* but part of its ploy to lure us into its embrace. And that character is hard to label even though such common terms as "devil" or "Lucifer" are attributed to it.⁵

Instead of ordinary life being described as such, "banal" is more appropriate and hence a perfect disguise for evil to adopt. Perhaps this dullness is why so many people tend to deny the existence of evil. Those who advocate for its existence use the rather hackneyed, lame explanation that the perfect disguise of evil is to trick us into believing that it doesn't exist. For some reason that doesn't quite float with modern man. However, it contains some truth insofar as our predisposition to conceive evil as a person. Evil seems more inclusive than that. Rather, evil prefers the seemingly harmless guise of dullness because it's a characteristic of modern living which blunts our sensitivity to people and things around us. Once so primed, who cares whether such-and-such a person or event is evil or not? As long as it doesn't interfere with my dull life. And so this dullness is a vast, treeless plateau on which a huge ball...a weight...is placed and can't roll either this way or that. It just sits there, dull and sluggish.

The presence of evil—Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot are among the classic embodiments paraded before us—did give the impression to their contemporaries that the world is about to end through their supposed embodiments of the anti-Christ. And the presence of a given anti-Christ is greeted with a kind of muted joy because he singles "the end." But what does that worn-out expression mean? We don't know, to be honest, using it more as a filler to satisfy our curiosity while at the same time adding a sense of mystery and danger, all from a relatively safe distance. All three elements: evil, the anti-Christ and "the end" are thrown together into the same pot even though for modern man the original religious character to these elements have gone out of fashion. That gives a particular anti-Christ some distance from our lives, allowing the person presumably in this role to be transferred easily into a format suitable for our

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A note about the Devil and angels, good and bad...The word "angel" means messenger as applied to a being which is spiritual by nature. That means an angel conveys messages either from God or from the Devil, and the Bible has numerous accounts of them, especially the former. Judging from the tendency of human nature to evil, we could say that an angel from the Devil is kept far busier. He runs to and from constantly with messengers whereas angels from God don't have such hectic lives due to the less amount of information they communicate. However, quality is their hallmark, not quantity, as with evil spirits.

Once Jesus Christ has appeared on the scene, there's little need for these communications. As for the angels from the Devil, perhaps the best description is from the Book of Job: "From where have you come? Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it'" [2.2]. The Hebrew verb for the former is *shut* which fundamentally means to strike the water with an oar and more commonly, to run up and down frantically. So it is with the messengers...angels...of the Devil compared with the seldom-employed angels of the Lord.

entertainment. Thus the image each evokes no longer retains spiritual significance but is reduced...denigrated...because we've learned to tame all three. At the same time we pretend to let them run loose and amuse us, provided they don't grab hold of us.

So let's say an earth-shattering manifestation of evil does take place as it is wont to do. Such events usually are carried out in behind closed doors, not necessarily in some obscure corner of the earth. Even if they happen nearby, we don't hear much about them. When we do, there's wall-to-wall coverage followed by intense hand-wringing after the fact. Then it's tossed away as quickly and as brutally as the evil itself. Time to move on to the next event. As for the propaganda bantered about by evil's proponents, a lot of intensive preparation goes into any manifestation of it as with Hitler's treatment of the Jews. Yet the perpetrators have become more sophisticated in disguising it. Once word leaks out—everyone knows the truth behind the propaganda but do their best to deny or mollify it—too late to take action. Before you know it, a generation or two passes by and the evil that has run rampant is relegated firmly to the past except for one major exception: survivors or direct recipients of this evil whose voices are blotted out despite TV specials and the like. Some voices persist as they try mightily to keep the memory alive and despite some success, it's amazing how many people turn a deaf ear. Many generations ago such events may have been installed in a people's collective memory, but with the growth in media coverage, the current manifestation of evil is to be put behind as quickly as possible in order to make room for the next one. Protestors of the first evil are forgotten even as the second evil is transpiring. So despite incredibly fine-tuned reporting, the spectacular nature of information generated has become instrumental in fostering our collective amnesia. One could argue this applies not just for these instance but for virtually everything that's reported.

Another feature about evil is the overall sameness of the physical places in which it had transpired, that is, they are not unlike own backyard. Although most of us had not been to the site of an infamous atrocity (Auschwitz, for example), we've seen plenty of photos and films about such places. These places contain visual records from the past, the incredible horror and suffering and the site itself often persevered as a memorial. The existing site is the same as anywhere else: blue sky, green grass, chirping birds. It is though this physical place had been and still is completely passive to the evil it had witnessed. This leads to the conclusion that beautiful things are indifferent. So it's easy to conclude that beauty is pretty much the same as evil, and at considerable risk, you can bring this a step further, that there's no difference between the two. Long ago evil dropped out of sight and is manifesting itself somewhere else in the world. Regardless of this flexibility on the part of evil, all the manifestations are essentially the same which makes evil rather boring: killing, raping, slander, betrayal, starvation and the rest.

Almost always evil is affiliated with religion, albeit indirectly, despite the fact that our secular society lacks this religious component. Despite this obvious fact, it might be more accurate to say that the response to

evil is as religious as it ever had been even if our secular culture doesn't report on it. We have in essence a schizophrenic condition, especially in the United States, which on one hand admits the religious element while simultaneously denying it. This disassociation between culture and religion took place roughly some two generations ago and happened more quickly than anyone had imagined. Nevertheless, that rupture is within living memory of many people which perhaps accounts why images of evil associated with religion remain quite popular. High on the popularity list are those associated with the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse. The same applies to "heaven" which is where God lives and where evil is forbidden to enter. Of course, everyone knows about the Other Place which is far more fascinating and gets more reporting.

As for the just mentioned disassociation, I wonder how many people, if any, were aware at the time that it was transpiring and could pin it down more precisely to a more localized period of time and even place, along with more information as to persons involved, all having contributed to tipping us in that direction. This is difficult to nail down even with hindsight. One event little reported upon is that the classics of Western Civilization came under attack for their relevance vis-a-vis other lesser known traditions. In the end, both sides became relativized. That, coupled with a certain disillusionment in established religion, set the ball rolling right down to the present day...and the ball hasn't stopped moving. And so the criteria by which good and evil had been discerned for generations were discarded: perhaps not so much deliberately (some of that was in play) but in favor of disciplines perceived as more relevant to contemporary problems. In other words, distractions.

Then, of course, we have the rise...the continuing rise...of technology and media, enough of which has been said in other places. This was embraced enthusiastically and uncritically resulting over time in the inability to concentrate or focus upon a given text (and I have in mind those primarily concerned with religion and culture). It seems that with every innovation in technology related to the media we go down a notch, culturally and religiously speaking. Some people have gone along with this trend but woke up at a loss to explain what they have forgotten. So under these circumstances outlined in cursory fashion we have evil manifesting itself as it always had done. However, the "tools" to discern it have been lost, again, with a rapidity that's astonishing. If you stick with the image of evil having a personal quality (for example, Satan) and stick with this image for a bit putting yourself in his position, the opportunity to create havoc couldn't be more opportune. This might sound similar to the popular argument for the Devil's existence, namely, his most clever trick is to convince us that he doesn't exist, but it is not. It is simply an imaginative projection of evil today and our inability...more our dumbness...in confronting it.

Because modern technology makes everything it touches so immediate, the interval time between a person and his act of taking in the world about him is virtually abolished. This gives birth to a fascination

with the rise and fall of events which in essence is continuous and seems to have no end in sight. Here's yet another instance of our collective dumbing-down and the birth of non-reflectiveness. We can add that this is not just contagious...sticky-like...but more. It's an agent that abolishes our capacity to make distinctions.⁶ When something really evil latches onto you, it's all the more difficult to unglue yourself and shift back to the task of acquiring the good. It's still possible, of course, but our efforts become far more laborious because the task takes place in what's now uncharted territory. Rather strange to think of working at and for the good as something laborious. You'd think it would come naturally because the good is already present within us, so says Western religion and culture. Then again, this effort is in accord with what Genesis says: "to till the ground from which he was taken" [3.23].

Doubt as to our tendency to seek the good seems to have its roots in the Protestant Reformation which claimed that human nature was not only wicked but corrupt through and through. If you're inclined to reflection or given to philosophizing—and most people are—quickly you discover this isn't true even if you were to omit the religious component. But since this view of human nature had gained adherence in some quarters over the past five hundred years, no small wonder people were influenced by it. Putting this somewhat baldly, if I believe that I'm totally depraved, to act thus is to be expected. Hence don't be surprised if you see evil sprouting up from me as well as from other people. That juxtaposition never has been resolved satisfactorily and contributes to the anxiety we experience both within and all around us. And so it's not surprising that a misinformed teaching about human nature in the context of religion has had such widespread impact and continues to do so even though most people don't subscribe to (or aren't aware of) the Protestant spin about depraved human nature. As for the centuries before this teaching, people didn't act that much differently and struggled with evil. The image of a cosmic contest was never far from their minds. However, with the introduction of the teaching on human nature as being totally depraved we have an "excuse" for evil behavior.

As for the actual experience of evil, most of us don't encounter it even though we hear accounts of it through the media replete with images. Closer contact it reveals an unexpected surprise. Despite the graphic quality of evil's handiwork, it tends to be stiff and lifeless which must be true of evil itself. You'd think it were the opposite. True, evil might allure us with some kind of enticement but cannot disguise its boring side for long. You see one example of it, you see them all, so very repetitious. The same applies to video representations, all of which interestingly have in essence the same cover design. You can spot them a mile away.⁷ So once you've honed on this little appreciated side of evil, you're in good

⁶ Our fascination with evil has a sticky quality because the images we obtain about it are simply captivating. Once we attempt to reject them, they resist all the harder by not rejecting us but by coming back at us with a vengeance. A lot of effort has to be exerted to get this "glue" off us. Even when we succeed, memories of our fascinations can still linger.

⁷ Perhaps that's why you hear it said that torture doesn't work well for extracting information. The person

position to have the upper hand. You can throw back some of these boring, worn-out images, mocking evil as it makes its assaults on you. An added feature is the humor at work in all this. Quickly the boring images will recede because evil is seeing an aspect of itself it would prefer not to behold. Recognition of evil's boring side counters its' "wholly other" feeling, thereby overcoming a sense of awe which should be reserved for God alone. But as in all things related to evil...and the good...you have to really know what you're doing else you can be in serious trouble.

Just before evil becomes present—whether in ourselves, through a person or an external event—for a brief second or two it's possible to perceive a heaviness in the atmosphere rolling in before making its presence felt. The sense is unmistakable since it falls outside our normal experience. And so this heaviness preceding a manifestation of evil shows up with some warning, but it's very short in duration and disappears only to reappear somewhere else.⁸ So the chief characteristic of evil is elusiveness even though the traces it leaves behind are unmistakably alien to our normal experience. It gets a bit tricky here. Because technology pumps us with constant images which in and by themselves are elusive, we can brush off the perception of evil as just another "thing" among countless many others which are out there. However, slowing down the assault of these images regardless of their quality enables you to pick out the one or two among the whole bunch that might not exactly fit in. To say that we catch glimpses of evil is inaccurate since we see nothing with our eyes. It might be better to say that by slowing down the continual assault enables another sense to kick in. That sense is the one of *feeling*. It is employed far less than the sense of slight and even sound. However, feeling literally rubs up against evil. Besides, touch is related to eating which is why people sometimes describe evil as gobbling them up.

So the brief observations this far relative to evil show our encounters with it is more complex than anticipated. Being wholly other with regard to our normal experience, evil remains hidden and therefore elusive. Often when coming off a brush with evil we look and feel pathetic, vowing not forget how we've been duped. Nevertheless, usually we end up repeating the experience. Since the divine is hidden, pretty much the same can be applied there. The major difference is that despite the embarrassment and shame involved, God doesn't hold them up in front of us like evil would. That's been the consistent experience of people down the ages which is why the temptation of Christ in the wilderness is so important in the Western spiritual tradition. Both the divine and evil are linked inexorably and are equally hidden though the quality of each hiddenness is very, very different. So our hapless inability to discern between the two is ideal fodder for an atheist, an interesting point but not an issue suited for this article. We don't experience evil in a continuous fashion (the same applies with the

inflicting it gets bored quickly and tires.

⁸We get a glimpse of this is found about the devil immediately after his temptation of Jesus in the desert: "he departed from him until an opportune time" [Lk 4.13]. *Kairos* is the word for "time" meaning more a special occasion.

good), but we function more in a neutral zone of sorts which strangely lacks identity, a pseudo-hiddenness, if you will. This mindless state (and I think even evil itself would have no part of it) makes us forgetful of where evil resides when it's not manifest. The same, of course, applies to the good. Thinking like this may seem child-like, but it's a good lead into our inquiry. Actually posing such simple questions are refreshing in an age marked by a desire to make things unnecessarily complex.

So if hiddenness characterizes evil, is it possible for us to become like that...not necessarily to become evil...but hidden? What exactly does that involve? Are we flirting with evil and therefore putting ourselves in jeopardy when there's no need for it? Of course always there exists the possibility of coming under evil's sway, but if we assume one of its most universal traits, we can get close to it without necessarily taking anything of it on. It's not unlike putting on a scuba diving suit, entering a wholly other medium (i.e., water) and swimming with the sharks. Working in our favor is the fact that hiddenness *per se* is neutral. Thus hiddenness is a tool at our disposal, and assumption of this characteristic won't cause us harm but allow a close approach to evil. The chief advantage is that hiddenness creates a kind of ambience which enables our entry into evil's presence and the ability to run parallel with it, so to speak. Adopting this ambience means we're less likely to be surprised by evil (if evil caught us in the act, we'd be sunk) since we're operating on the same playing field. In sum, we've hit upon the best disguise possible.⁹

The question whether evil is personal or impersonal turns out to be a much less pressing issue than it might have been when we had set out on our quest for it. Then it was tantamount due to the influence of popular culture but now pretty much irrelevant once we've examined ourselves or have looked deep within and seek it lurking there. Our first perceptions might have started off with evil-as-The-Devil-incarnate but gradually shifted to an impersonal force or even turned out to consider it illusion...secondary matters, really, compared to the issue of becoming hidden like evil in order to see what it is really like. Sounds a bit strange, perhaps, and a minimizing of its power but not so. We won't get anywhere unless these preconceptions are cleared up, some of which rest upon our innate preference for superstition. Still, we should respect the views of people who may not be inclined to adopt this approach. They will have to deal with evil in their own way which just might turn out to be better than the one proposed here.

It seems that zeroing in upon the hidden character of evil is among the best ways of understanding it. This precludes any face-to-face encounters with a force we barely comprehend and protects us not just from evil but just as important, our own stupidity and arrogance. And there's more than enough of both going around. They were always present but in an amazingly short period of time people have lost the sense of things spiritual or incorporeal and ask rather embarrassing, downright stupid questions about it, a field day

⁹It should be remembered that hiddenness is a quality equally applicable to God and divine beings. What applies to evil applies to God, that is, as far as adopting this stance goes. Such is its neutrality.

for atheists and the like. However, we can't mock them because they have the simplicity, if not the courage, to ask. We could explore in some detail the reasons for this ignorance, but that would divert us from the theme of this article. As in the natural world, to become hidden necessitates finding the appropriate camouflage or more accurately, adopting the correct inner camouflage. That means knowing what to conceal and what not to. It's evident that when first conceiving this approach all sorts of thoughts run through our heads, namely, whether or not we will succeed or more to the point, fail, and what this means in the concrete. It's a prospect we're aware of but naturally scared-stiff to consider.

Yet we must press forward and take the chance because so much is at stake. Even considering the prospect of camouflaging ourselves shows we have the right idea about evil which works in our favor, that is, not to be sucked in by evil. One cue for this approach comes from the information about evil already in our possession. We've seen that evil makes its presence felt suddenly, disappears just as suddenly and comes back sometime later, usually when things calm down. This general pattern is always present and can be abstracted as a model to go by. In other words, rarely is evil sustained in manifest form over an extended period of time. This is a tactic designed to confuse us and even make us deny the existence of evil, a very effective maneuver. Also it's a weakness on evil's part. This inability to sustain itself is why evil is always so busy, never able to rest, as in the case of the divine good. So all along we've witnessed the way evil operates and have remained passive or more to the point, too dumb to adopt the same tactic. We're not dealing with any type of physical camouflage or weapons but are asked to fall back upon our own resources, admittedly a risky enterprise. However, it's all we have but sufficient to do battle.

So how do we in actuality camouflage ourselves, our very human nature, not our physical bodies? Keep in mind the principle of conventional camouflage. It doesn't mean going totally invisible but blending into a particular background: white for snow, sandy for the desert and so forth. A very keen eye can spot someone who is camouflaged, usually someone like a sniper, so discovery remains a risk. And that means if we're caught, we end up fully in the grip of evil which gives no quarter. We should narrow down our inquiry as to exactly what to camouflage, "human nature" being too general an object. So let's begin by examining with care what part precisely within us is attracted towards evil. Some of these parts may be identified with fatigue, hunger or overall laziness. They contribute to softening us up to evil but are too nebulous. That means evil requires something more specific into which to sink its teeth. Once we locate these parts (certainly they're not physical) which are susceptible to evil we see the more precise point of contact with it and know how to avoid the pitfalls. You can't really put a label on the parts as though our faculties were things existing out there independently on their own, one here and another over there. Generally speaking, they are elements which contribute to making us consider ourselves as independently existing beings. In other words, they belong to an exclusive identification with an "I" opposed to other "I's." And that usually consists in memories, some more intense than others. Thus we may call the work

required to camouflage these elements “dis-identification.” This consists in withdrawing from all the elements which comprise one’s identity not only as distinct from other persons but from the rest of creation. Another image that comes to mind pertinent to water is a submarine traveling on the surface. The sub moves along like a surface ship, but once it receives the signal to dive, it does so quickly and gracefully. In other words, the sub has left one environment for another which requires adapting to a hidden, stealthy manner of moving about.

So let’s say you’ve gotten up sufficient courage to “dive” like this submarine, leaving the surface¹⁰ behind, albeit temporarily (even a nuclear powered sub can’t remain submerged forever). But upon acclimatizing yourself to a new environment, one prerequisite is to look around and observe how other people handle evil as well as those who’ve been victims of it. In other words, you learn from both as much as possible. If you’re not sure whether or not you’ve encountered such persons and their struggles, look within to see where you may have strayed off the beaten path and compare notes. That usually works for most of us because our consciences have a relentless way of pricking us. By repeated exposures to our consciences we learn to shake off attachments to what was most familiar, namely, believing ourselves to be a clear-cut, distinct entity from among everyone and everything else. Shedding this mis-identity, if you will, is the best way to camouflage ourselves yet the one most people are reluctant to adopt. The problem? They fail to distinguish between “giving up” something instead of becoming free. Once free, that which you’ve relinquished is scorned. In reality we are making an exchange: an ensemble of conditioned reflexes which border upon addiction or compulsion for the freedom of directed movements. And some of those directed movements are what we here are calling camouflage.

One overlooked element that hinders assuming our camouflage with the intent to create a disguise is fidgeting. Like its physical counterpart, the fidgeting at hand is not unlike scratching ourselves all the time as well as not being able to sit still. The problem lies not in major assaults but little jabs: a little itch here and an little itch there, not knowing when and how to stop. We may not be aware of this except when seeing the need to assume a new way to comport ourselves as is being discussed now. The keener we feel the need to rid ourselves of fidgeting and the more we put it front and center to our attention, the greater the challenge. Part of the difficulty is that fidgeting is an offshoot of modern life which is enhanced by the influence of electronic-social media. We tend to take fidgeting as a sign of life whereas the opposite is true. Fidgeting is a dissipation...a wastage of energy...from our thoughts and emotions which for the most part run wild, a mis-identification of its energy as a sign of life. To get a better handle on this, experiment by voluntarily confining yourself in a room for an hour or two (no more is required), resisting temptations to step outside these limited bounds. In other words, you take the initiative of reducing yourself to hanging around with nothing to do. Short of being tempted to go out and murder someone, we have here an ideal situation to behold the emergence of evil within ourselves. Straightway

¹⁰“Surface” representing our daily, unreflective lives.

temptations will hit quite hard, many of which will offer one damn excuse after another...incessantly. Might as well get used to it. We're dealing with a permanent way of life.

The reason for bringing up fidgeting is that it shows how resistant we are to remaining still, so it's a good barometer of our inner life. We're all attracted to inner stillness which is essential for adopting the camouflage required to confront evil but often don't get beyond this attraction. Fidgeting is more or less compulsive where repetitive assaults weaken us not so much immediately but over a period of time. We fidget against our will with varying degrees of intensity and don't enjoy it, longing to be free from this affliction. At the same time we strangely get acclimatized to its wearisome presence. Fidgeting as presented here is a sign that we've encountered a realm unlike our customary one. And for now let's call this realm one of transcendence because it's so wholly other. Yet we resist it not voluntarily but automatically in favor of a continual flow of thoughts and emotions. Little or no forethought comes to bear on the situation. Nothing bad about this, really, but the more we're aware of the contrast (fidgeting vs. this new realm we label transcendence), the more inclined we become toward evil...or more precisely, to making a choice between good or evil. Because fidgeting tends to dissipate our resources, evil stands a chance of winning out. However, our resistance to it remains which means that for the most part evil recedes rather quickly. As for the good, it's too naive, if you will, to know when to seize the right opportunity. Possibly that's why Christ says the children of this world are wiser than those focused on the kingdom of heaven.

We could say that fidgeting isn't far from the threshold of evil. Resistance to fidgeting usually takes the form of two unpleasant feelings: fear of being stationary as already noted and fear of darkness. In both instances we don't feel comfortable because reliance upon our primary sense, sight, is curtailed severely, pretty close to being put out of commission. Instead of taking this as a handicap, it's an opportunity to shift to reliance upon other senses—hearing, taste and touch—in order to pay attention to what they are saying as they've been doing so all along. In sum, being stationary and acclimatizing ourselves to the dark is the essence of the camouflage required to confront evil. Obviously making the shift is awkward, but we can learn as from blind persons who get around quite nicely and have an appreciation of people and the world which is unknown to us. When relating to them, sometimes it is we who feel deficient, of not having access to such precious information. Many blind people have an unmistakable expression on their faces. What strikes you is not so much is the blankness of their eyes but a full-throated awareness that quickly would exhaust a person endowed with sight. Such is the blindness we are to adopt in our new state in life or when we go in camouflage in preparation for confronting evil. The voluntary blindness, originally designed to wean us away from the faculty of sight and to sensitize us to other senses, as it were, now works to our advantage since it primes us for being hidden.

To prime ourselves for this voluntary hiddenness we don't have to go out in search of evil nor wish it to

come our way. Actually it's best not to provoke evil as though it were a person but reflect upon personal experience of how we had responded when confronted with it. As intimated several times within this article, evil is either external or internal. If evil is within, most likely it's the same case with everyone else. Therefore we'd be better off looking there since it's right under our noses. We don't have to go far to reach it, just examine our thought processes which never cease churning out all kinds of "stuff:" wandering thoughts during day and dreams at night. Should we linger (an appropriate word which means deliberately coming to a halt, not abruptly but gently) here at the threshold of where this "stuff" comes to birth, shortly we'll come up with an amazing discovery. Nobody is home. Yes, nobody is home or ever had been at home. This is a discovery open to anyone who wishes to look. However, most people who hit upon it recoil because the notion of a self-existing entity relating to other entities (persons) is rooted so deeply in our culture. Knock that out and you've knocked out quite a lot that is dear...at least that's how we think about it. However, gentle and repeated exposures to this odd new perception, very difficult to articulate, tends to soften what's in us that can succumb to evil, rather, that is, our predisposition. If no one is home, evil goes to the next house and so forth down the line until it finds a welcome.

So let's say you've learned adopt that special type of camouflage and go undercover in order to confront evil which, as noted, already prefers to keep itself hidden (almost for fear of discovering its horrible, true nature). It's not unlike approaching a huge beast lying in its lair awaiting an unsuspecting prey to cross its path. You sneak up to the lair and enter while the beast is sitting there. It perceives some kind of alien presence but not clearly because there's "nothing" to latch onto. Your goal isn't to destroy this beast...evil...but to be close to it to understand how it operates, something which rarely is accomplished. Perhaps evil never will be abolished completely, just held in check, so to think otherwise is unrealistic. What you do gain, however, is an understanding about evil which otherwise is incommunicable. Concretely speaking, humility is part and parcel of this venture. It seems humility or recollection of one's humiliations fosters, not hinders, being the other side of thoughts and emotions. Why is this so? This unfashionable awareness brings to fairly constant attention all those elements which are contrary to the good and ultimately God. At the same time they are not evil in and by themselves but border upon it. That means the camouflaged person has hit upon something that actually works. In fact, always he has had it but failed to recognized that humility is *the* camouflage. The proof resides in going out and trying this out.¹¹

An advantage of camouflaging oneself is that it prevents us from getting all fluffed up when we hit upon something good. This excitement, certainly understandable, can play into evil's hands because it's the

¹¹You'd be hard pressed to find a healthy discussion about humility. Perhaps the best is found in the **Rule** of St. Benedict where he goes into some lengths about it. Highly recommended even though it's couched in language that may not appeal to everyone.

opposite of being hidden. It's almost like a fully camouflaged bird in the bush. Once disturbed, it flies up and becomes an easy target. While rejoicing in the good is commendable, remaining with thoughts about it can make you susceptible to evil because now you have in play two opposites. The good, being somewhat naive, doesn't know when to back down which is why it's easy prey.

Mention of this age-old conflict between good and evil brings the article at hand to a close. While no one person can exhaust the subject of good or evil, let alone both, the hidden side of evil can be overlooked even if it's acknowledged. And that side allures us to summarily dismiss its reality out of hand which usually assumes the familiar guise of a devil, horns, pointed tail and the rest. In essence, the easiest of all targets. Even if this article turns out not to be helpful, an extremely important point has emerged, one which came on the scene without deliberately setting out to expand it. We moderns are quite sophisticated in many departments yet close to being hopelessly naive when it comes to philosophical and religious matters. We dismiss them as belonging to children or a more primitive era, the usual approach. Yet fascination with things spiritual...with good and evil, God and Satan...remain as popular as ever. Overcoming the ignorance relative to all this is a daunting task, not unlike a wholesale attempt to recover the basics of Western Civilization. Short of that, just one little insight into dealing with evil might make a small difference by preparing us so we won't be caught off guard and sucked down the drain.

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