

THE SCIENCE OF EVIL
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Evil is a reality that most of us here acknowledge and have encountered.

“Original sin is the one doctrine for which there is abundant evidence” – G.K. Chesterton

The science of evil seems to be a contradiction

Speaking here of science in the modern sense (dates to about 1700CE)

The question arises because of our modern understanding of science, as a focus on evidence (physical) that is uncovered by experiment, with outcomes that can be repeated. I.e., Physical matter and laws of nature brought together to test and repeat.

Gives rise to distinction between science and religion/humanities. Very different kinds of truths with different evidences.

Example of car, broken down in driveway: approach with reason, logic, science, not religion. You open the hood, see what's going on with the wires and lights, etc, take it to a mechanic. You don't pray over it or lay hands or exorcise a demon.

I. Science vs. religion

These two domains construct the world we live in (Science v. religion, or in older terms, reason vs. faith). There are times in society where each seems to swim in its own ocean.

Some ways of understanding science “appear to make evil **invisible** to us.”

TYPES OF EVIL:

“Natural evil” - storms, earthquakes, disease, aging, death. “Evil that is knit right into having bodies and being a natural animal.”

All of these “can be explained in irreducibly scientific terms” with causes that are not sinister in themselves, even though they cause suffering.

This suggests incompatibility between science and religion.

“Moral evil” – human decision making and desires. Some explanations of these evils also render evil invisible.

e.g., seeing sociopaths as having psychological illness, perhaps with biological causes, rather than a matter of will.

Here we are right on the edge of a religious issue because it involves our interdependence, relationships to each other, and responsibility to each other.

A third way that scientists can be blinded by the **“objective” and “morally neutral”** power of science. E.g., those working on destructive weapons can feel removed from the ethical issue. Ex: Manhattan Project; genetic engineering by Monsanto, which has patents on seeds that are either sterile or whose descendants are considered property of Monsanto. This is before the Supreme Court this year with profound moral and religious implications, but those are not part of the case. The separation of science and religion thus carries great risk for humanity.

“Harvard mouse” – genetically engineered to be susceptible to cancer (“oncomouse”)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oncomouse>

II. Now to area where science and religion join.

Some scientists say evolution itself is a sign of evil. There is such suffering and waste in this model, that it demonstrates there cannot be a benevolent, creating God.

Waste of generations of creatures not adapted and relying on a genetic mutation to produce adaptation which can then be passed down. Suffering of the weak.

III. How Theology Responds

One thing we might say as Christians: Religion and science need each other and need to be integrated.

Allow science its autonomy, but if completely untethered from the moral and ethical, it is subject to exploitation and abuse.

For the medieval world, "science had its part to play in the theatre of God's glory." Also in early Islam, and some would say in modern Islam, faith was/is a larger worldview into which science fits.

Christians should say, Science is not free to speak with no constraints.

Science is doing us a favor by being silent about evil.

Sin and evil are irreducibly religious in nature

We recognize them because we have been encountered by Jesus Christ.

Sin is like the shadow that falls outside his light.

In light of his obedience, submission, love of God and neighbor, mercy...We understand what natural evil and sin are because of HIS revelation.

Karl Barth's view of evil is that it's "fundamentally irrational."

Cannot be explained, domesticated, or treated.

An irrational power that undoes the good work of God.

We want to treat it like a good creature of God (subject to reason, order) but Barth says it's so opposed to the good that we can't do this.

It's nothingness – but both is and is not

Irrational force that only God can combat.

A science of evil is impossible because evil does not deserve this kind of dignity, being examined in light of order and reason.

"Science shows us that we can never seek to understand evil but only beseech God to deliver us from it."

Q&A;

Reference to Stanford Prison experiment <http://www.prisonexp.org/>

and Milgram experiment http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment

- both scientific studies focused on the problem of evil - attempts to understand scientifically why people do evil,

Sidenote: These are fascinating experiments that I didn't know much about. Worth reading about!

Question we often ask in tragedy (Why, Lord) seen as lament that “can only be brought to the crucified and risen Christ”

The way Christians respond is to say this beloved and innocent one, who has tasted this injustice, has taken it to the cross in such a way that it becomes risen life.

The only thing we can say is that our suffering is nailed to the cross.

SIN – a little mote in someone’s eye can become a log. Why do we take that first step, why we agree to certain things (cf Milgram experiment), why we don’t understand what we do. There is an “irrational core” to sin and evil.

“Only good things have answers.” (i.e., evil not explainable by the good and ordered discipline of science). **“Only good things have answers.”**

(Sidenote: Isn’t a lot of good is also not explainable by scientific method, can also be considered “irrational”) Including Jesus’ life, ministry, and death, and the actions/decisions of millions of Christians since. I wonder . . .

Notes by the Rev. Dr. Rosemary Beales