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When you bump up against the limits of your own honesty it is as though your thoughts get into a whirlpool, an infinite regress: You can say what you like, it takes you no further. (Wittgenstein 1984, 8e)

THE MORE WE learn about some things, the harder they become to define (James 1902/ 1982). Although language is an indispensable tool, what can be said in words is finite and necessarily approximate (Wittgenstein 1922, 1953). As Morton (2005) points out, when we choose a definition of evil, our definition will cover some aspects of evil and exclude others. This, however, does not necessarily mean that different definitions do not refer to things that are all part of the same phenomenon; it may merely reflect the limitations of language and the many perspectives on evil. Different definitions of evil can focus our attention (and potentially resources) on specific aspects of the phenomenon for detailed study.

Baumeister's (1996, 8) definition of evil as "intentional interpersonal harm" is perhaps the best definition for studying atrocities. "Militant ignorance"—exterminating the evidence for what one wants to be false—is only one of the definitions used by Peck. This definition is not limited to extremely abhorrent actions: evil is the enemy of truth, which dovetails with the notion of evil being connected with lies; but it includes a greater range of problems on which to spread, rather than focus, our limited resources. Some of these problems may not be amenable to scientific research, although they are not, for that reason, unimportant. Another definition Peck (1983, 42) uses is that evil is "live spelled backwards"—that which destroys life, and not only corporeal life but human spirit—evil is anti-love. (I once saw a bumper sticker that read "EVOL"—love spelled backward.) Yet another Peck (1978) definition of evil is using power to impose one's will on others by overt or covert coercion to protect a sick, unloving self. Ultimately, Peck (1983) believes that evil is a diseased will. According to Dostoyevsky (1864/1972), the human will is the one thing science will never be able to neatly categorize.

No one definition of evil will suffice. I also agree with Stein (2005) that rigorous research is likely to uncover details that cannot be accounted for by any one theory. This is the purpose of science, and for this very reason Peck (1983) explicitly states that nothing he says about evil should be taken as the last word.

We also do not define narcissism, the self, love, and truth because we are eager to impose the limits of language on realities that are not limited by our ability to express them in words, but because we must do so in order to have discourse with each other. Perhaps some things we define only because we need to defend our views of these things when they are challenged. Psychology has at least seven definitions of the self (Weston 1990). What definition of the self is deceived in self-deception, and what definition of truth is withheld? Western tradition recogniz-

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es four kinds of love (Lewis 1960; May 1969). If narcissism is self-love, which definition of the self do narcissists love, and with what kind of love? In pathologic narcissism, a false self—an unreality, a lie—is "loved," usually with something that, if scrutinized, turns out not to be love at all; the true self is ignored or even hated and exterminated, because it is not what the person wants to be true. Morton (2005) points out that we often maintain our self-respect if at all possible. One of the many uses of *narcissism* is as a synonym for self-esteem (Pulver 1986), but self-esteem is not the same as self-love. A thorough Wittgensteinian analysis, looking at how the words are used and how they came to have those uses, would be most helpful (Kubarych 1999).

Because of the extreme complexity of evil, Morton (2005) believes that a construct such as Peck's proposed "evil" subtype of narcissistic personality disorder would not fit any one actual person. In fact, this is the rule rather than the exception in psychiatric diagnosis, especially in personality disorders. Self-deception may help to distinguish between personalities lacking a conscience and personalities who are adept at anaesthetizing their consciences, presumably with many gradations in between. Different kinds of self-deception may add more fine-grained differential diagnosis. Further, Peck's analysis covers both the individual and collective levels. Perhaps sadistic or psychopathic personalities gravitate toward environments and positions that allow them to commit atrocities, while narcissists of Peck's proposed subtype are more likely to acquire political power positions from which they can order atrocities without having to witness them. Neither can succeed without the other, nor without a public that prefers not to know what is really happening.

Stein (2005) highlights a number of strands in cognitive-affective neuroscience that can give birth to a more detailed understanding of self-deception and human evil. Since attention is hypothesized to be the central factor in volition (May 1969; James 1890/1903; Peck 1978), the emphasis on attention to painful truths (Goleman 1997) is particularly important if evil does turn out to be a diseased will.

Many other areas of research are also relevant. Behavioral genetics provides some of the best evidence for the importance of environmental factors and their interaction with genes in the development of traits and diseases. If one has a genetic predisposition toward a disease or trait, the disease or trait will only be expressed in certain environments. If, for example, a person has genes that predispose toward drug abuse, but lives in a society where drugs are not available, the person does not become a drug addict (Neale and Cardon 1992). Statisticians compared refugee flow over time to killing patterns to establish that, consistent with the hypothesis of systematic expulsion and killing by Yugoslav forces under Slobodan Milosevic, refugee flow and killings occurred in a regular pattern (Kruse 2002). According to the anthropologist Geertz (1975), there was a positive feedback loop between brain, body, and culture in which each influenced the development of the other, so that there is now no such thing as an isolated individual, independent of any culture. If true, research on evolution can contribute to our understanding of narcissism, which is fundamentally concerned with the relationship of the individual to others and the environment (Kubarych 1999).

Peck also recommends historical research on atrocities (their frequencies in different wars or under different circumstances, failures to report atrocities, whether or not atrocities are equal at all points of a war, whether or not certain instances are unique, when and where they are more likely, etc.). Schama (1989, 631) highlighted the "intellectual cowardice and self-delusion" of historians in their treatment of the worst atrocities of the French Revolution, the "September massacres." The vast majority of the victims were Catholic priests taken from seminaries, colleges, churches, and private houses on the flimsiest of warrants. In dismissing the massacres as incidental or "irrelevant" to scholarly analysis of the revolution, one of the most renowned historians of the revolution argued that they were "no one's responsibility", and the inevitable product of impersonal historical forces and justifiable desire for revenge. In truth, Schama says, the killings were the work of identifiable agencies, and there

was no shortage of sources available to historians who chose to consult them. In not doing so, historians participated in what Schama called "the scholarly normalization of evil" (631).

Fischer's (1970) call for studying the logic of historical thought has much to contribute to research on self-deception. Many of the fallacies cataloged by Fischer are directly related to the defense mechanism of splitting (Gould, Prentice, and Ainslie 1996), which many theorists have hypothesized to be the primary psychodynamic defense mechanism underlying self-deception (Grotstein 1981). An example is the fallacy of false dichotomous questions, which frames a question so that it demands a choice between two answers that are not exclusive or exhaustive.

Peck (1978) offers a working definition of love, acknowledging that it will inevitably be inadequate in some ways: the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. Note that this definition includes self-love. Unwillingness to extend or exert one's self is nonlove or laziness, which Peck identifies with original sin. Laziness, says Peck, takes many forms, one of which is fear (Peck 1983). Thus, what most of us would call cowardice is included in laziness, as when Speer chose not to know what was really going on in Nazi death camps to protect his power and feelings for Hitler (Kubarych 2005).

In light of this definition of love and the identification of nonlove or laziness with original sin, Peck (1978) hypothesizes that the lazy part of the self may literally be the devil himself. On this hypothesis, the devil is not the "pernicious cultural stereotype of the evil-doer as a diabolical force utterly different from the rest of us" that Morton (2005) will not accept; it is a part of each of us that we often refuse to face, as in Jung's definition of evil as the refusal to meet the shadow (quoted in Peck 1983). This is how Dostoyevsky (1880/1976) portrays the devil in Ivan Karamazov's nightmare—lying on a sofa, resembling an idle landowner who flourished under serfdom, found others to sponge off of when serfdom was abolished, averse to any duties, and appearing to be good natured but, in fact, merely ready to assume any amiable expression the situ-

ation requires. Ivan, wishing to deceive himself, wants this devil to lie more convincingly.

Morton (2005), however, could not be more right than to worry about the potential for abuse of a psychiatric diagnosis of "evil." Actually, there are many dangers inherent in studying evil, which may outweigh the benefits, at least at present. Nazi Germany (Lifton 1986) and the Soviet Union (Solzhenitsyn 1973, 1975) both claimed to be building better societies based on science; indeed, the Nazis claimed that Nazism was nothing more than applied biology. The Nazis would have been extremely interested in research on self-deception, which would have been extremely useful in enabling doctors to perform the horrible acts described by Lifton (1986). Peck (1983) insists that the only legitimate reason for the research he proposes is to heal evil when we can and, when we cannot, to study it further in the hope that it might be healed in specific instances in the future. He is adamant that evil individuals deserve our compassion and help. Our attitude toward them must be the one Solzhenitsyn (1973) came to:

And just so we don't go around flaunting too proudly the white mantle of the just, let everyone ask himself: "If my life had turned out differently might I myself not have become just such an executioner?" It is a dreadful question if one really answers it honestly (Solzhenitsyn 1973, 160) . . . Confronted by the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm, we halt, stricken dumb: it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we weren't. (Solzhenitsyn 1973, 168)

This emphasis on healing and "there but for the grace of God go I" (Peck 1983, 10) leads Peck to say that any legitimate psychology of evil must be a psychology of religion, not in the sense of rigidly adhering to the doctrines of a particular religion, but in the sense that it cannot be value free. The definition of truth tends to be much broader in religion than in science (Buber 1956; Iyengar 1966; MacDonald 1889/1997). God is truth, but love and truth are ultimately not separate in this view; they are reality itself. Using fragments of truth to hurt rather than heal is evil (Peck 1978). Addressing the objection that scien-

tific study of evil violates the "value-free" status of science, Peck (1983) replies that in an age where the majority of scientific research is funded by governments and special interest groups, value-free science is untenable, and that the end result of value-free science is the Strangelovian lunacy of the arms race. The central point of Nietzsche's (1973) much misunderstood and maligned perspectivism is that value-free scrutiny of the world is impossible.

If science cannot be value free, we have an obligation to be explicit about what our values are so that we do not deceive ourselves or the public. Evil is a value judgment, as is the judgment that healing must have priority over knowledge, or that health is better than sickness. If advancement of knowledge or special interests is given more value than healing, the study of evil will do great harm (Peck 1983). But Peck has already said that we live in an age where most scientific research is funded by governments and special interest groups. He further states (1983) that he chaired a task force to make research recommendations to study the My Lai massacres in order to learn how the massacres occurred and prevent future atrocities. The recommendations, he says, were rejected, reportedly on the grounds that the results would be too embarrassing to the agencies funding the research. Avoiding embarrassment was valued higher than truth and healing. And Peck says that anyone engaging in research on evil is likely to find the results embarrassing when applied to themselves, and that the more we learn about evil, the more difficult we will find it to distinguish "them" from "us."

The conclusion, I think, is that, at least at present, rigorous scientific research on evil exceeds the limits of our honesty. We can say what we like, but we will get no further. We can say that massacres were no one's fault, the result of impersonal historical forces or justifiable revenge. We can say that we don't know what is going on in those concentration camps. We can construct elaborate explanations as to how, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, our ideology is absolutely correct. If we have enough power, we can overtly or covertly impose these accounts of reality on others, and act as if power decides what is true or false, right or wrong. But these are lies, and fear is the consequence of every lie (Dostoyevsky 1880/1976). The truth remains what it is, whether we make the effort to find out or not; and at some level we know that.

If we can admit this, and still treat ourselves with love, it will be a great point gained. For self-love is not the same as self-esteem. If we love ourselves we will want to become better people. Peck calls narcissism and laziness the "twin progenitors of evil" and says that we need to significantly reduce our laziness and pathological narcissism. A program of research that can help to reduce our narcissism and laziness is the burgeoning research on virtues (Baumeister and Exline 1999; Exline, Worthington, and Hill 2003), positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), and forgiveness (Worthington 1998; McCullogh, Worthington, and Raachal 1997).

In sum, I believe that Peck's analysis sheds much light on evil, and that the research he proposes could shed much more, but that this research is too dangerous in our society as it currently exists. A first step would be to acknowledge that this research exceeds the limits of our honesty. A second step would be research in positive psychology, including the virtues and forgiveness. Perhaps then we could become the kind of people who could safely carry out the research proposed by Peck.

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