

Evil, Karma, Fate and Free Will

© 2003 J. Lee Lehman, Ph.D.
ACVA 2003

A Common Basis, except for...

- ◆ There is considerable overlap in the subject matter of philosophy East and West, in no small part because of substantial cross-transmission during Hellenic and later times.
- ◆ However, each side has had one particular strand that the other has not shared (until recently):
 - ◆ The Western concern with Evil
 - ◆ The Indian concern with reincarnation

Pre-requisites for the Problem of Evil

- ◆ There is evil in the world – and it is real.
- ◆ There is a God who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.

The Problem of (Theological) Evil

- ◆ God is omnipotent.
- ◆ God is omniscient.
- ◆ God is completely good
- ◆ Evil exists.
- ◆ Therefore: what is wrong with this picture?

Epicurus (341-270 BCE)

"[God either wishes to take away evils and is unable; or] He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing, and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Of why does he not remove them?"

Translated by William Fletcher, cited in Herman. 1976, page 10

Plotinus (205-270 CE)

- ◆ The philosophy of the *Enneads* has much in common with Eastern philosophy.

"... the Plotinian concept of the One and that of the *Paramapurusa* are methodologically and metaphysically the same. Many Western thinkers have said that Plotinus's approach is psychological. The truth is that it is contemplative, Yogic, and intellectually mystic."

I. C. Sharma in Harris, Ed., p 98.

Neoplatonism

- ◆ Neoplatonism has much in common with Indian philosophy in its monistic aspect.
- ◆ The extent to which is it a parallel development, vs. (and?) a philosophy influenced by India, is unknown at this time.
- ◆ Had it not been eclipsed by Christianity and specifically Augustine, the Problem of Evil might never have developed as a conundrum in Western philosophy.

Augustine (354-430 CE)

- ◆ Tried in *Divine Providence* to argue:
 - ◆ Portions of an otherwise good creation may appear to be evil
 - ◆ Good comes out of evil
 - ◆ Evil is necessary to the harmony and goodness of the totality
 - ◆ The evil we experience may be much less obnoxious than the alternatives

Augustine (354-430 CE)

- ◆ In *Free Choice of the Will*, argued:
 - ◆ There are two kinds of evil
 - ◆ Evil done by man (sin)
 - ◆ Evil experienced by man (punishment)
 - ◆ Man's free will is the cause of evil: but how does this work, given that God is omniscient?
 - ◆ Augustine tried to get around this contradiction by distinguishing between *knowing* the future (which God does) vs. *compelling* the future (which man does)

Dionysius the [Pseudo-] Areopagite (5th century CE)

- ◆ Evil is a shadow (It's not real).
- ◆ Evil is Non-Being.
- ◆ Evil is necessary.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

- ◆ The best universe that God created has inequalities, which God deliberately created to increase the perfection of the whole
- ◆ Evil is a failure in goodness

Western Astrological Implications

- ◆ If God is just (and thus perfect as well as good), then each individual must have equal access to salvation, much like the idea of equal rights under the law.
- ◆ Yet astrology followed the Western system of examining the different levels of the soul, and had a system for examining the viability of the rational soul.
- ◆ A functional rational soul is necessary to distinguish good from evil, and then to choose good as the better long-term solution.

Western Astrological Implications

- ◆ One can distinguish the relative functionality of the rational vs. the animal and vegetative souls by examining the relative conditions of Mercury and the Moon.
 - ◆ A functional Mercury means that the rational soul is capable of rational choices.
 - ◆ The Moon shows the condition of the body and/or the animal and vegetative souls, and thus, the strength of passions.
 - ◆ Salvation can only come from rationality being strong enough to say no to passion.

Western Astrological Implications

- ◆ Thus, natal astrology could not only characterize but *predict* the ease with which the Native could rise above passions.
- ◆ Logically, this ability was correlated with the likelihood of salvation.
- ◆ This ability was *extremely* dangerous from the standpoint of Church doctrine, because it was vital that the Church view *all* Christians as redeemable (through its offices, of course).
- ◆ Thus, we see a major component of the ambiguity of astrology's place in Medieval times.

Western Astrological Implications

- ◆ A major reason that Islam did not have the same doctrinal objections to astrology was that *Allah* was viewed as completely above the system of natural laws – and thus able (and willing) to meddle over the smallest detail.
- ◆ The Christian God, having created natural law (which by definition was good), was much less likely to violate it.
 - ◆ If astrology can predict a “salvation quotient,” then perhaps God isn't fair!

Enter the Modern Western World-view

- ◆ While it's hard to come up with a viable date for the beginning of the modern era, Neiman points to 1755 and the Great Lisbon Earthquake.
 - ◆ The reason that Neiman picked this date, was that it marked the first time that contemporaries took the approach that mass calamities could be random, and that the victims were not especially marked by sin.
 - ◆ Rousseau described the natural accident as morally neutral: disaster has no moral worth (and hence no moral lesson).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- ◆ The object of moral action is to help achieve a world in which happiness and virtue are connected.
- ◆ Yet knowing the connections between happiness and virtue can be disastrous, because you will be constantly second-guessing yourself.
 - ◆ Could you ever, for example, genuinely compliment someone higher up, without it being considered flattery?

Kant

- ◆ Human freedom is dependent on limitation.
- ◆ We must not know that our good intentions will be rewarded if we are to have good intentions at all.
- ◆ Kant gave the example of two shopkeepers who both never cheated their customers.
 - ◆ One did it because it was morally right.
 - ◆ The other because it would get or keep more customers.
 - ◆ One is moral, the other is not.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

- ◆ Explains evil because God is not omniscient: Mill would save his goodness at the expense of his power.
- ◆ Our job as humans is to fill this gap.

19th Century Philosophy

- ◆ 19th century philosophy moved away from a theistic system, first through David Hume's skepticism, then through Schopenhauer' atheism, and finally to Nietzsche.
- ◆ Nietzsche, by insisting that life can only be justified aesthetically, has given up on rationality completely.
- ◆ Freud then declared the religious quest to be infantile.
- ◆ While this takes away the theological version of TPE, it doesn't take away, or explain, evil itself.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima

- ◆ The evils of the 20th century have made it a challenge to maintain claims to the all-goodness of God.
- ◆ The philosopher Günther Anders stated that atrocities like Auschwitz are threats to the human soul because they involved *personally* killing people, whereas evils like Hiroshima are threats to our survival as a species, because bombing is easily made *impersonal*.

Auschwitz and Evil

- ◆ Auschwitz is a difficult problem philosophically, because assigning responsibility is so ambiguous.
- ◆ That it *is* a philosophical problem at all is obvious from the very intentionality and structural organization that was necessary to produce it.
 - ◆ The Nazis worked to make the extermination process routine, not a function of personal malice.
 - ◆ This wrecks havoc with traditional classifications of evil.

Eichmann and Evil

- ◆ Hannah Arendt's cataloguing of Eichmann's involvement with the Final Solution can be characterized as banal: which doesn't make evil trivial, but re-contextualizes it.
- ◆ Eichmann's obsession with belonging and his selective memory make it difficult to assess just how much he was ever aware of what he did.
- ◆ She sees evil as coming in packages from trivial to massive: and great evils are easier to recognize and resist than seemingly trivial temptations.

Carl Jung (1875-1961)

- ◆ Recounts the Set-Osiris myth: "It is significant that it is 'evil' which lures Osiris into the chest; for, in the light of teleology, the motif of containment signifies the latent state that precedes regeneration. Thus evil, as though cognizant of its imperfection, strives to be made perfect through rebirth." (V: 234)

Carl Jung

- ◆ In discussing Greek myths: “But when the world entered the aeon of Libra (the seventh zodiacal sign), the evil principle broke loose. In astrology, Libra is known as the 'Positive House' of Venus, so the evil principle came under the dominion of the goddess of love, who personifies the erotic aspect of the mother. Since this aspect, as we have seen, is psychologically extremely dangerous, the classical catastrophe threatened to overtake the son.” (V: 664)

Carl Jung

- ◆ “The Christian answer is that evil is a *privatio boni*. This classic formula robs evil of absolute existence and makes it a shadow that has only a relative existence dependent on light. Good, on the other hand, is credited with a positive substantiality. But, as psychological experience shows, 'good' and 'evil' are opposite poles of a moral judgment which, as such, originates in man. A judgment can be made about a thing only if its opposite is equally real and possible... and an evil that lacks substance can only be contrasted with a good that is equally non-substantial.” (XI: 247)

Evil in Modern Western Astrology

- ◆ Evil is not a popular subject in modern Western astrology, any more than it is in modern Western psychology.
 - ◆ Much of the psychology that developed after WW II attempted to transcend the uncomfortable questions raised by the Final Solution.
 - ◆ Behaviorism did not avoid it, but behaviorism has never been a primary model for psychological astrology.
- ◆ The only branch of modern Western astrology that is truly prepared to address Evil is Jungian astrology, because Jung himself addressed the topic.

Evil in Modern Western Astrology

- ◆ The inability to think in these terms has made it difficult for many astrologers to operate successfully in the area of mundane astrology, for example in the inability of Western astrologers to predict WW II.
- ◆ To an astrology that worries that answering a horary in the negative may “damage” a client, the concept of real live evil is just too much to even contemplate.

Samsāra in the *Rgveda*

- ◆ The soul is not of the body.
- ◆ The soul can leave the body.

Samsāra in the *Upanishads*

- ◆ The one who does not reach the goal reincarnates.
- ◆ Moral conduct results in either reincarnation or release from reincarnation. (Law of Karma)

Samsāra in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*

- ◆ Adds other pathways to the release of samsāra:
 - ◆ Intellectual (jñāna)
 - ◆ Devotional (bhakti)

Assumptions underlying Samsāra

- ◆ There is a soul, or some such entity, which can migrate.
- ◆ Some sort of residence for the soul is needed.
- ◆ There is a mechanism whereby a soul can transfer from one place to another.
- ◆ There are rules or conditions governing this soul transfer process (karma).

Karma

- ◆ Karma from a previous life determines the ground for this life (Samkara, *Bhāsyā*).
- ◆ Karma can be understood as either desire or attachment.
- ◆ Karma accrues based on my actions; not on actions done to me, or accidents I experience.

Parallel Principles East and West

- ◆ The **Law of Karma** encourages us to look for causes of moral occurrences
 - ◆ This then provides a rationalizing principle for reincarnation.
- ◆ The **Law of Causation** encourages us to look for causes of natural occurrences
 - ◆ This then provides a rationalizing principle for the development of what became known as science in the 19th century.

TPE doesn't apply to the Indian Systems, because:

- ◆ With the exception of certain Avaita Vedantist systems (such as that of Sri Aurobindo), God (*Īśvara*, *Indra* or *Viṣṇu*) isn't omnipotent; i.e., not above the Law of Karma or Samsāra.
- ◆ While most Indian systems have included omniscience, and even sometimes as a possibility for humans, the unreality of the time-space continuum means that no omniscient being, upon seeing future evils, would be inclined to stop them.

TPE doesn't apply to the Indian Systems, because:

- ◆ With emphasis on creator/destroyer dichotomy, there is no emphasis on positing that God is purely good or benefic.
 - ◆ The benefic requirement in itself tends to produce a limited God, a point not entirely appreciated in Western theology.
 - ◆ This also begs the question about whether God is perfect: if completely good, then God is limited, but potentially perfect. This paradox occurs in the theory of *saguna Brahman*.

Vedic Astrological Consequences of Karma

- ◆ It is easy to directly link Karma and the birthchart, as a manifestation of the karmic influences upon entering this life.
- ◆ Taken from this standpoint, the *entire* birthchart can represent not only Karma coming into this life, but the limitations the individual has in paying off old debts, and well as creating new ones.

Conclusion

- ◆ The Vedic mapping of Karma provides a simple linkage with the birthchart.
- ◆ The traditional Western system has the paradox of TPE built into that fabric of its astrological system, because Western astrology purported to show differences in rational capabilities between Natives, which implied that individuals were not all equally likely to achieve salvation.
 - ◆ This in turn threatens the question of whether God is just, and thus perfect.

References

- ◆ Arendt, Hannah. 1963, 1994. *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin: New York.
- ◆ Harris, R. Baine, Ed. 1982. *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*. International Society for Neoplatonic Studies: Norfolk, VA.
- ◆ Herman, Arthur L. 1976. *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*. Motilal Banarsidas: Delhi.
- ◆ Neiman, Susan. 2001. *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternate History of Philosophy*. Princeton Univ Press: Princeton.

References

- ◆ Read, Herbert, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Alder, Ed. 1956. *Symbols of Transformation. Volume 5 of The Collected Works of C.G.Jung*. Translated by R.F.C Hull. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Henley.
- ◆ Read, Herbert, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Alder, Ed. 1958. *Psychology of Religion: West and East. Volume 11 of The Collected Works of C.G.Jung*. Translated by R.F.C Hull. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Henley.