

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.”

ISAIAH V. 20

100% EVIL

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Introduction by CHIP KIDD

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INTRODUCTION

I KNOW IT ISN'T FAIR, but some time ago I came up with an all-purpose response to that question of questions that we are faced with so often that we've come to forget or overlook what we're really being asked. You know the one. It's usually raised when you're in a group, and someone in some sort of petty authority—say a waiter or a tour guide or a stewardess—is presiding. This person is talking to you all, explaining something—the daily specials, how we'll all meet back here at the bus in forty-five minutes, that you can't use the bathroom while we're taxiing—and at some point they finally stop. And then they ask it: “Does anyone have any questions?”

Now, if I am part of this group and feeling especially put-upon by this person or otherwise disruptive, I will raise my hand.

“Yes?” they will inevitably ask.

And I will say it: “Um, why does evil exist?”

And, wow, that really throws them for a loop.

“Um...”

Like I said, it isn't fair. Fish in a barrel, really. But they asked, and I'm asking.

“Uh, what do you mean?” They always say that, too.

“Skip it.”

It's certainly a straight-forward enough question, the meaning all too clear to me. What about it is ambiguous? Of course the problem is the context, but the intent is sincere—I really want to know. Now, if I brought it down to a more specific, personal level, it might be more comprehensible: “Have you ever cheated

on your spouse, abused a child, lied on your tax return, stolen a car, robbed a convenience store, smothered a relative, mixed plaids?” Maybe that would make the question easier to answer.

But, allow me the cliché, let’s look at the bigger picture. I don’t have an answer, but I have drawn the possible conclusion that truly evil people don’t believe that they’re evil at all. Whether they are murdering Russian school children or invading a Middle-Eastern country or condemning an entire race of people or using Enron as their bitch or commanding a mass of stupid “believers” to stop using condoms, they are convinced they’re all doing it for some greater good. Despite that the outcome is wrongful death and misery.

And the good people—they’re the ones who are usually made to accept that they’re evil. If you don’t believe me, consider the plight of the Catholics at the confessional, Baptists in the Revival tent, Jews at Yom Kippur, and countless others who are all meant to think of themselves as sinners, atoners, unworthies, self-flagellants. And why? Only because they believe it.

And it’s not natural. Nature doesn’t have any sense of evil. There’s nothing evil about a village being destroyed in a volcano. There’s everything evil about a village being destroyed in a fire-bombing. Evil involves forethought. It’s all in the planning.

Anyway, next time you’re seated between a waiter and a tour guide on a plane and the stewardess asks if there are any questions, you might as well ask mine. Who knows, you may just finally get an answer.

CHIP KIDD