

DOES IT MATTER IF RELIGION MAKES BAD PEOPLE VERY GOOD OR VERY GOOD PEOPLE VERY BAD?

"The disengagement of moral self-sanctions from inhumane conduct is a growing human problem at both individual and collective levels" Albert Bandura, Stanford University, <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura1999PSPR.pdf>

It has been said that the only way to get good people to do terrible evils is to use religion to do it.

Culture always makes it easy for good people to enable evil and to do evil. Religious culture seems to have the most talent in that field. People who share a culture and share values and that conditions and intimidates the individual to go along with the culture even if it means denying your fellow-feeling for those who culture targets for demonisation and victimisation. Religion is a form of culture and the strongest form for it pretends to be set up by God. At least if you think your culture is man-made you can campaign for change. Religion is culture in its most toxic form. Culture is people so what kind of good person might do evil and what gets them to do it?

What kind of person?

There are three kinds of good people that do evil.

One is the good person who intentionally does a few terrible things. An example, would be the devoted wife who unexpectedly kills her husband.

Two is a good person who ceases to be good and does evil.

Three is a good person who does terrible things but who is brainwashed and thinks they are not wrong or they are at least okay.

All three can be found in any religion. How much the religion is to blame is what we will study in a moment. There may be reasons to blame it that we are not able to determine as faith and religious devotion in each person can be concealed and we do not see exactly what is forming another person's thinking and prejudices.

Exploring good people doing evil

Religion is not the only thing based on calling on good people to war against evil. This sometimes leads to and permits actual war against the enemy. But it adds something to this idea of us versus them as if there is not enough already. A person seeing themselves as killing the enemy for God's will decrees it has a reason to kill that the atheist fighting the same war does not have.

To get good people to do evil you have to make the evil seem to be the best if not the most desirable thing to do under the circumstances. So you get them to blame the victims for how they treat them. You dehumanise the victims by maybe labelling them or over-labelling them or refusing to recognise their true label and you do that so that you can concentrate only on them as an alleged threat. To see a group as a group can lead to you forgetting that there are individuals all different from each other in it and that is a form of dehumanisation too. It does not take much dehumanisation - a little of it can result in terrible things happening for the other is still seen as less than you.

The good will be got to feel that the responsibility lies not with the good people but those who have done the thinking for them such as religious/political leaders or god.

Make the good feel that if it is bad it is not that bad for there are others doing worse or find new ways of condemning faults in the hated party - eg their love of sex outside marriage is not only evil but means choosing to hate everybody but themselves for all eternity in Hell.

The good individual's part seems small to him or her when her or she is in the group doing the bad things. People who think God works through what we do even the bad will feel their part is small. Individuals do not feel individually responsible when they and the group make the decision together to do evil. The notion that God is involved in the decision and makes it makes them less liable to feel responsible or think they are.

The good person will deny that the bad results are their fault or really that bad or say the alternative is worse. Forgiveness

supposedly from God can lead to a person thinking they are better than others on the basis that the past is in the past but these people are unreformed while you are.

The manipulating of a good person to get them to commit atrocities has to be drip fed and gradual. It may involve methods of "treating" their growing aggression with prayers and sacraments in the belief that they will not work and thus add to the problem.

Magic includes things such as feeling that God is guarding you. A miracle is only an act of magic under a different name. Good religious people will only become very bad if they think coincidences or magical coincidences or divine protection will protect them from the consequences of being very bad. The killers think they will get away. Prayer more than magic leads to that thinking for even witches use prayers when there is no chance of setting up a spell.

The way we are made, our very biology, gives us the desires and tools to help others in need. We may not be very good people but we will be often good enough. We will help enough people. So why do we do terrible things despite our caring and social side? Are we in fact just inherently bad and doing the good to look good? Why are we able to be so heartless despite our brains being equipped to care for people and exhibit empathy? To hurt others is to risk bad things coming to yourself. People will not trust you and you will fear others. The only explanation is magic - we do not see how things can go wrong for us. We think they magically can't or won't. We never learn for we think that this time the bad thing we do will turn out okay for us. The voice of faith is heeded over and above the voices that shout the lessons of the past.

We see then that by giving a sense that the religion shares in your responsibility, your God shares, that you feel something is guarding you are ways the religion can get you to do evil.

Guilt by association

When some members of a religion do evil and claim that the scripture of the religion permit it or encourage it or even command it is wrong to say, "What they do is totally counter to the religion." The fact remains that some followers of the religion can accept it and even many critics of the religion will agree with them that their interpretation is valid or at least as convincing as more peaceful interpretations. Organised groups and organised religions should be considered just as guilty as individuals should be.

And what happens when you embrace peaceful religious extremists?

When you pray for a sick person to recover your attitude as a believer will be, "God, your will be done". You are saying that what you believe is God's will, be it good or otherwise, comes before the fact that a person is sick. A belief comes before the fact. Your attitude is, "If there is no God then the person may get better or may not. I permit." The atheist gives no permission for anybody to be ill.

Religion undoubtedly gives "good" people bad attitudes. They say that God lets cancer befall a child. God will cure the child through your actions. It is really him that cures the child not you. So God then must believe the child should not suffer. He lets the child suffer so that you may put your holiness into practice. It is about giving you something to do. This not only insults your goodness but turns you into a hypocrite.

The believers who abuse and those who do good have one thing in common. Both feel that suffering and evil happen and have their place in God's holy and good plan. If nature torments a child and believers say it is God then they are going down to nature's level.

More wrong

Religious people do more "wrong" than just social wrong. To do what you think is wrong shows you intend to do wrong and that is bad even if it is not wrong. It is bad because of the kind of person it makes you. The atheist or non-religious person does not have this problem. The problem is a complete disproof of the notion that religion is not all bad and therefore okay. It is not okay. It is all bad in outlook and its core outlook - even if in practice it is not too worrying.

All people, people of faith also, are more likely to do nothing about people doing harm to others than they are to do harm themselves. Religion is bad for it exaggerates how many things are wrong and how wrong they are. Religion makes people enablers who love bad people doing their dirty work - and puts them above the norm. For that to enable religion is to enable this evil. There is enough evil without that contribution! And any evil is too much!

Does it matter if religion makes bad people very good or good people very bad?

The natural response is that as good as it is to see bad people convert anything that makes good people bad is inherently

dangerous. Something dangerous making bad people good makes us suspicious and there is no other possible way to look at it. The good cannot be as strong as it looks or stay strong. The evil person might think they turn good for the right reasons but how can that be certain?

So a religion should be judged on whether or not if it makes good people do bad things. If you want to minimise judging and attacking the person you will want to blame the religion not just the person.

But some good people do even better things than just good things. What about that? We have to trust them to be as good if they didn't have a religious bone in their body.

So we are sure that if a religion gets good people to do bad things then it is a bad religion regardless of any good it seems to do.

Objections (or should we say gaslighter distractions?):

Religion says, "It takes religion to make bad people good."

If that is correct, then religion is not the only thing that does that. Secular therapists help religious believers meaning you never know if the religion had much to do with it.

If that is correct, then we do not know if a religion is really that special or not.

If a religion makes bad people good, what about the good people it makes bad?

The good people are at risk by staying in the religion. So if it makes good people bad then the people allegedly who become good through the religion do not count much. And are they really to be trusted?

Another objection, "Religion has no inherent power to make good people do evil things or to open the door to them doing evil."

Most religions do believe that some religion if not all has this power. Catholicism does not regard paganism as a good thing.

The objection is only a dismissal of the argument. It is not dealing with it the argument. To dismiss in a matter so important means, "I don't care if it is inherently dangerous. I don't want to know." What does that say about you then?

Violent humankind will leave their mark on the faiths or religions they invent. Christians who show you the nice bits of the Bible and who ignore the bad or give them insufficient attention are honouring violent man. They are covering up for him.

If religion has an inherent power to make good people bad, we will never see it with an argument like that.

Another objection, "It is religious faith not religion that is intrinsically evil."

To suggest that religious faith is the evil entity is an interesting proposition. Why can't both be? If religious faith is evil so is religion for you cannot have a religion that doesn't ask for religious faith.

Also, there are more religious faiths than religions. Within each religion people believe different things even if they are not supposed to. That is the reality and religion knows that within its fold there will be believers who decide that violence is part of God's will.

A little faith can be dangerous and sometimes even more dangerous for some rather than others. Even thinking you believe would be as bad as faith. Jesus Christ praised the mustard seed of faith as long as the person could not do any better. It has been noticed that believers with weak faith might resort to wars and hate and violence to compensate for their lack of faith. A Catholic for example who thinks everybody should be Catholic but who suspects God is not going to help much towards that end (lack of faith) will be tempted to condone violent programmes to force Catholicism on others.

Another objection, "The good people who do evil things are not really good."

Irrelevant. The question is if religion helped make them evil. If they are hypocrites who turn evil then religion could be blame for making them hypocrites who end up becoming so smug that they hurt people viciously.

Another - "Religious people who do evil are making a mistake. It is not a reflection on their religion."

Calling people who do evil good if stupid or unthinking seems to mean they are not acting from a vindictive motive. Perhaps they are weak in some areas.

The argument is disgusting for it tries to trivialise evil when religious people do it. The implication is that the atheist doing similar things is automatically evil.

Good people may do evil by mistake for we live in a nasty world where disagreements about moral issues appear and sometimes we have to make the right choice and others cannot see that it is.

A lot of the time we ignore the argument. We class people who hit their children as evil. We use the argument only when it suits our prejudices and agenda.

Good people need to tell themselves that evil is somehow for the best. Both religious and non-religious people can do that.

You can be extremist in outlook all the time but rarely extremist in action.

The person who obeys too much without question enables evil more than any other.

Only religion can give a rationale for such obedience. Atheists obey blindly too but they cannot give a plausible reason why they should. Religion can say that it has unusual or unnatural ways of knowing things - perhaps divine revelation or psychic powers. Once you say that you are asking people to take things on trust alone. You are asking for a leap of faith to be undertaken.

Few people classed as evil are really evil - very few do evil just to see others suffer. We need to realise that religious believers can rationalise evil better than any atheist can. They can believe that God wants them to do evil for its his plan.

If most evil is done out of misguided belief that it is going to result in great good then religion encourages it.

Consider how the lamb turns into a lion overnight

When religion can generate extreme good and/or extreme evil then it seems we are better off with a moderate religion that inspires neither. But in that case it is not religion for it is clear that religion makes at least some good people to turn them bad. So it makes them good to destroy it meaning it is evil. And some religions will inspire extreme good and extreme evil while others will be better at inspiring extreme evil.

You cannot count on extreme evil to be balanced by extreme good. Evil by definition can go out of control.

If anything has a dark side at all, there is a risk of it going off the rails. Good people do not usually decide overnight to murder heretics or whatever. Some do and that is important as well. Religion or ideology can cause such a fast change. Religion does it best for if there is a God then it is unsurprising if that God asks you to do maybe scary things just because he says so for he cannot tell you the reasons. So good religious people can suddenly or gradually do evil things and faith is to blame. A religious system that leads to sudden transformations from good doing to evil doing is necessarily bad. It is as bad as poison in the water that does not kill all drinkers but one or two.

Other ways in which religion is evil

Religion sees sin as a crime against God. It states such a crime is more vile than any crime against man's law. So much for innocent until proven guilty!

Religious humility is fake.

Believers think God makes people suffer so that they can help them! How much God values their works!

They are judgemental: not to judge is to judge. When we decide not to take a position on an issue, we are in fact taking a position: if we don't disapprove, we are offering our tacit approval.

Modification

Some suggest a modification of the argument that it takes religion to make the good person do evil.

Here it is. "With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for

SOME good people to do evil things, that takes religion.”

This still tells us that religion has no justified existence. It tells us the risk is lower than it is with the original argument but the risk is still there and it is not an acceptable risk.

Religion in this view is inherently evil for some members. It is inherently risky for all.

What is said could be modified by many. They might say, “But for good people to be lazy and pray for others instead of helping them properly, that takes religion.” That is true.

FINALLY

Does a religion being able to generate extreme good and extreme evil mean the existence of the religion is justifiable? No. It means the existence of the religion is unjustifiable. Some non-religion community should do for we need community but religion is not a must have.

If all religion is bad not all religion is equally bad. The religion that teaches good and leads to moderate good but no unusual violence is more bearable than one that turns the saints into jihadists.

Religion is bad so the extremely good works of the religion are irrelevant. It is overall good that counts not the few super-good deeds of a few. If a religion is not really doing anything for the world but a few in it are, it is simply not as good as a religion that shows no extravagant good works but overall enhances goodness. And goodness is never perfected but only enhanced. The imperfection means that there is still room for concern. It is a concern if a religion is good but not perfect. The imperfection means harm and badness - its the dark side. There is still something wrong with the religion. The few saints in it could be put down to luck and some saints have been good fakes and actors. Hyper-good deeds are nothing in the bigger picture. How much good is spread and diffused in the bigger picture? That is what matters. And no matter if the works are good or heroically good, nobody really knows if the person as a religious person or a person as a human being is producing those works. The kindest position is that they are being good as people not as devotees of some God even if they think the God thing is making them good. It is easy to think your faith is behind your goodness when it is in fact just you and only you. Do not degrade your human nobility by saying your nobility is not naturally yours but is given to you by God and religion and its magic. Do not discourage the non-religious philanthropists by saying you need God in your heart and his grace to make you good.

Nobody should promote a religion that produces extreme good in some and extreme evil in others. The extreme good is not a use if the extreme evil manages to drop a nuclear bomb on Mecca or Rome. There is still something flawed in a religion that produces extreme good when it can produce extreme evil. The extreme good is a matter of luck. It would be terrifying if Mother Teresa were in reality an example of extreme good if she could just as easily have become a mega-terrorist. It takes the shine off her halo and rouses disgust at those who adore her.

Extreme good could be based on fanaticism. It is not really good then. Extremely good mothers can take it too far and stop their children having a life. It can turn evil in the blink of an eye.