

## REVIEW: THE PEOPLE OF THE LIE BY M SCOTT PECK

Dr M Scott Peck a psychiatrist who is in the self-help genre wrote the famous book People of the Lie. It is about evil people and what he learned from his patients regarding what evil is and what it does.

He regards evil at being its strongest and most complete form when the person does not even realise they are evil. He points out how ordinary evil is. Evil people will see evil as good or justifiable or neutral. He sees your evil as a mental disorder for it is a mask for terror you are in denial about.

Of course there is no mention of,

- maybe I am evil and do not realise it? I know I am good and that knowing makes me evil. Do I really know anything?

- evil to fool me has to manage to look good and justifiable so is there is really any point in preaching morality or virtue? If there is you will never know when there is any point and that is going to ruin your resolve to do something. Evil does not just fool me, the one doing the main fooling is me.

- what if evil does not hide that it is evil but pretends that evil is to be understood as an abused good and not an evil as such? This makes evil rather vague and thus gives it power. It gives itself this power and you give it by understanding it as good that is not good enough.

- I may not realise the person I look up to most such as my spouse or God or Jesus is evil. If I can be evil for not seeing I am evil then I can be evil for not seeing how others I love are evil. Evil is evil and it does not matter how I manage to be evil - I may be evil in how I admire evil people or people perceived as evil.

- You cannot really just "know" you are evil. Others have to affirm you as good when you are not. Its a community or group effort.

### FOR PECK, WHAT DOES EVIL MEAN?

Peck says "all sins are reparable except the sin of believing one is without sin." For Peck sins do not make you evil. They are failures to reach a high moral standard. A good person can fall several times a day. What makes you evil is attempting to hide your sins and your evil from yourself. "Evil originates not the absence of guilt but in the effort to escape it." The book says pride which is the failure to see the evil you do and the sins you commit makes you evil so you need to see the truth.

My reply to that is you can use forgiveness as a tool for hiding from yourself that you are still evil and it is not in the past. This is the danger with religion's unique brand of forgiveness. In religion, God gives you the gift of forgiveness and thus you think and/or feel God has removed your sin and justified you - made you the same as if you never sinned. That is way beyond what forgiveness is supposed to normally do. Christianity then by teaching justification, the doctrine that God forgets your past so that you are acquitted of sin and declared good and righteous. Anything can be a means of being proud or hiding pride and forgiveness is the perfect cover! Feelings do not tell you what is true or false so feeling justified is enough to render Christianity a force for preaching against evil while in fact making sure it happens.

We are forced to treat moral principles as facts. If you say morality is just opinion and we should accept that we are calling that a fact. We are calling it a truth so we are approaching it morally as in truth versus lie. So we cannot get away from treating moral principles as truths and facts - as objectively right. Relativism which treats morality as mere opinion is just evil then under a fancy name hiding itself as tolerance and philosophy.

"Strangely, enough, evil people are often destructive because they are attempting to destroy evil." Peck says this happens because they worry about the evil around them not the evil in themselves. He says they must start to "hate the sinful part of themselves".

It is remarkable how when people have evil in common one is repelled by the other. Evil people tend to fight evil with evil. It is as if they think it is the only language evil understands and those who are evil understand is a dose of evil. A problem arises in calling somebody evil for trying to fight evil with evil. It is that the evil they see around them will have a hidden face. The sneakiness of evil is the problem and that is how it leads to some level of contagion. It puts on a nice face. They see evil as a largely hidden enemy that they don't know the way they do the evil in themselves. Evil then forces others to be evil towards you. Those who say they love their evil enemies are lying.

If we get people to fight evil with evil which amounts to fighting fire with fire, we won't have to worry about hating them for we can get them to hate themselves for us! That is an interesting way of hurting sinners while pretending to love them.

The religious doctrine that evil is not a real thing but a disorder that uses good - or you can call it good that is in the wrong place and wrong time - adds to the problem. It makes evil too hard to pin down and it forces you who fear evil people to try to harm them before they get a chance to get to you.

Why do we do evil if it is so boring and stupid and self-defeating? The answer has to be that it is because you know you are acting like any evil or sin you commit is seen as part of a good purpose. Instead of God having the mysterious ways you have them. Magical thinking happens when we are about to do harm for we think it will benefit us and is us taking what somebody else will get if we don't act. Magical thinking about our own good deeds and our bad ones - eg fate or some purpose makes them right and for the best - is what we do first and foremost and only then can we extend that dubious magic to divine agency. We see God as magic for we see ourselves as magic - its not the other way round.

Peck speaks of Fromm who thought evil in people was a developmental matter. They are not created evil or compelled to be. They just turn evil bit by bit over many many bad choices. Peck says his only problem with this view is that it fails to note just how powerful and overpowering the forces are that shape a young child before it has the chance to make its own choices. Peck thinks that Fromm is not giving the will enough credit - it can break the pattern, the series of bad choices that make you evil better than he thinks.

Peck writes, "I have seen cases in which an individual made an evil choice for no apparent reason other than the pure desire to exercise the freedom of his or her will." It is doing bad just because you can.

My reply to that is an exaggerated doctrine of free will can lead to that. We don't have much freedom or free will at all. We accept a lot in our lives that we cannot control much. Any control we get is really because something bigger - eg the social machinery is letting us have the control and this letting is just it controlling us again. A dog that is on a leash is controlled whether she can ramble for twenty yards or two. Control is just control no matter how it feels. It is even more control when you are led to think you are not controlled.

We want a religion, and a philosophy, that tells us suicide is wrong and thus keeps lives safe. That cannot happen for suicide is a social and health issue not a moral one. So free will is not useful when it cannot help us here. We sense how limited we are and how limited it seems to be and it is no wonder we rebel and do things that we feel free to do just because we can and even if they hurt others.

Peck says evil is revolting because it is dangerous and says that it contaminates you if you stay too long in its presence. In practice that would mean you try to avoid evil people. You must try to avoid seeing the evil they do for it may contaminate you. This sounds like magical thinking too. It is definitely saying that we have evil in our hearts and seeing others give birth to evil stirs that side of us up. Nature would agree with Peck for repulsion implies you have to react and get away from the evil for it will grip you in its spell.

He advises walking away if the evil you see others do starts to spread to you and starts to get a hold on you.

My point is that if Jesus was a false prophet and a fraud then you are in the presence of evil by being Christian. Same if you are something else that revolves around the presence of a dodgy saviour or deity. If there is no God there could still be some way the likes of Jesus gets the hold they have over people. It is frightening how some religions when they get to a certain size by default become virtually immune to any assault from the truth. (Parents are to blame for letting the religion get to that stage!) Islam is unharmed by Muhammad's abuse of Aisha a child. Christianity's bloodthirsty scriptures are respected and made sacred and God is insulted by being told the Bible is his word. So where does the sinister "hold" come from? It can be seen as some kind of natural force that cannot be detected or is not detected or that hides itself. Or it can be seen as a deceiving or perhaps malign spiritual or paranormal force. Maybe that is what baptism of babies, a rite that intended to put spiritual energy into a baby, is REALLY for! Why somebody so vulnerable?

The Bible says Adam and Eve ate the fruit of a forbidden tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God forbade them on pain of sin. Some say that Adam and Eve wanted the knowledge of good and evil thinking that like God they could know what evil is and know it deeply but not be contaminated by it. So they got their knowledge of evil and corruption set in. Corruption definitely set in for the first thing they did was deny responsibility and try to blame everybody else. The message is sin when it happens denies any blame. Every sin involves a lie.

Peck quotes Simone Weil who says evil looks glamorous and powerful and clever but the real thing is gloomy and barren and boring. He agrees with her.

How true is it that evil is boring? Many bad people disagree maybe totally, largely or slightly or whatever. It is very

variable. Religion conditions you to see evil (real evil) and sin (doctored evil, the evil it makes up such as missing Mass on Sundays being a mortal sin) as boring. If it is boring and if you are conditioned to find it boring then you will do more evil and worse ones to deal with the boredom and the emptiness. It is like a person who drinks vodka and gets no inner glow and who keeps drinking more and more in search of this elusive drunken bliss.

Good is often banal and if you think evil is banal you will soon give up on good! If both are banal does it really matter to you which one?

The banal argument helps illustrate Peck's contention that evil people suffer horribly despite how happy they think they are - so they are gloomy inside, bare inside and bored senseless. This doctrine suggests that if Christianity answers the question of the meaning of life and gives true meaning to people then any other religion must be evil - especially Buddhism which contradicts Christians about the meaning of life on every point. Buddhism comes close to saying there is no real life!

Christians say they do not promise a faith that will ever make you feel better but one that gives you a reason to exist and to love God no matter how terrible things get for you. If so, then it is vital for a religion to be true. Otherwise you might get more meaning being a Mormon than a Hindu or you might think Catholicism gives you meaning and be wrong. Meaning and truth go together so if you get meaning the wrong way it will prove very damaging.

Peck has a wish for the future, "Children will, in my dream, be taught that laziness and narcissism are at the very root of human evil, and why this is so."

The laziness of parents turning their children into members of the parental religion should be mentioned here! Only truth and loving it and being willing to face it root out laziness and narcissism.

Narcissists blind themselves to their self-love by telling themselves that they feel a presence in themselves guiding them and protecting them - God! If a narcissist can have an idol of stone he can have a better one of his own psychology. If you say there is a God and there is not you are inventing God with others. You indirectly exercise narcissism. "How great am I that I serve this God this infinite mystery that I have come up with in my head. The mind that invents such a great thing as God is greater than God."

## PECK ON RESPONDING TO EVIL

Here is what Peck says about judging:

"Evil people are easy to hate. But remember Saint Augustine's advice to hate the sin but love the sinner. Remember when you recognize an evil person that truly, 'There but for the grace of God go I.' In labelling certain human beings as evil, I am making an obviously severely critical value judgment. My Lord said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' By this statement—so often quoted out of context—Jesus did not mean we should never judge our neighbour. For he went on to say, 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.' What he meant was that we should judge others only with great care, and that such carefulness begins with self-judgment."

Unpacking this then we should be automatically suspicious of Christian love for sinners. If all that is stopping you hurting and hating sinners is that you could end up the same without praying for God's grace that is a flimsy and thin barrier. It is not going to work. And the doctrine just leaves you pretending that it does work. How can it work when you always think others are worse than you? When you do wrong you are confident of staying in control of your character. Nobody really thinks they will be a Nazi style scientist or warmonger even if they could be. And if you think you are totally evil but the grace of God is curbing it, that means you will have no real trust for anybody else. You are not saying the grace is changing you but curbing you. The difference is important.

Peck quotes the following with approval in the book. It is from Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon*, page 192:

The effects which follow too constant and intense a concentration upon evil are always disastrous. Those who crusade not for God in themselves, but against the devil in others, never succeed in making the world better, but leave it either as it was, or sometimes even perceptibly worse than it was, before the crusade began. By thinking primarily of evil we tend, however excellent our intentions, to create occasions for evil to manifest itself.

My comments are as follows. At times all we can think about and all we have to think about is primarily evil. He is accusing the victim of a child sex abuse of being evil. The victim has to think of the evil first and foremost.

If thinking of the evil first or mostly is solved by God then that backfires. Nobody can expect anybody to be mainly or completely about God. God alone matters for he makes all and is the one true good and the perfect good so putting him

first is a sin for it weighs most love for God and the rest goes to everybody else.

Peck may ask for a person to be more about crusading for God than against evil. But for our own protection and because we have fears, we will stress battling evil more than doing good. It remains true that doing something about evil matters more than doing good as important as doing good is.

Suppose Peck is right. It will be impossible to tell if a person is 51% for God or 51% for battling Satan. You will only know by the end result and by then the damage will be done. A bad person will centre on battling evil for that is the best and craftiest way to do harm.

Peck is pitting "hate or battle the evil or sin (sin for him is a subset of evil)" against "love the sinner and do good deeds for her or him." We can be sure that when people say they love sinners and hate the sins the hate bit is the bit they really do.

Here is another quote from *The Devils of Loudon* (page 260) that Peck cites for us:

No man can concentrate his attention upon evil, or even upon the idea of evil, and remain unaffected. To be more against the devil than for God is exceedingly dangerous. Every crusader is apt to go mad. He is haunted by the wickedness which he attributes to his enemies; it becomes in some sort of a part of him.

Comment: You are in some way partly responsible when you know of somebody's sin. The other person's responsibility for his evil reflects yours for your evil. There is a link and in that way you share responsibility. The evil of the enemy becomes you. Imagine then how your own evil becomes you!

Evil is contagion and thus God then if he looks at evil without being sullied is not really looking at evil. He is either evil himself or evil in the sense that he cannot identify evil correctly to deal with it correctly.

Being the same species as the people who are evil leads to solidarity in the sense that the evil done by others reflects on us for in terms of species there is no us or them. It is us not them. Plus there are evils in human nature or nature in general that we are happy about so that is our yes to evil. Evil is evil so there is no this evil or that evil. Its just evil. You are glad that your mother suffered to give birth to you and risked her life. See the point?

Back to the quote. It claims that thinking about evil as a reality or an idea contaminates you. And if the contamination is not as damaging as it might be it still potentially is very dangerous. It is still like playing with a bomb. Not only do you have to worry about loving x and hating his sin you have to worry about how x's sin becomes part of you as well. This is a new thing: to love x the sinner and hate his sin is to love the group he is in and hate their absorption of his sin and how they are somehow in it too. If love the sinner and hate the sin is a hoax or a futile enterprise then that explains why we tend to love our group and nation and hate other ones.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN SOMEBODY IS EVIL?

The book says that therapy is not about helping the client get rid of guilt feelings if the guilt is appropriate for there are things you should feel guilty about. It is like there is no such thing as a bad feeling or bad wish or bad thought for it is only the action that can be bad. He says that it is fine to judge as long as it is about helping and healing and not just you trying to show you are better or know better.

Those who say faith in God is needed for affirming morality or at least is recommended cannot judge the sin of another without claiming to know better. The atheist can judge without that problem. God and the alleged morality the idea brings come to you through your experience that there is something there that you interpret as God. So you are necessarily claiming to know better than the atheist. And you know that not all who say they experience God really do so you can really only speak for yourself. Again you are clearly asserting you know better. This may explain why holy critics of anybody's morality get such hostility in return. People sense that there is a little condescending going on. Or a lot!

Peck writes: "Since I distinguish between evil people and ordinary criminals, I also obviously make the distinction between evil as a personality characteristic and evil deeds. In other words, evil deeds do not an evil person make. Otherwise we should all be evil, because we all do evil things. Sinning is most broadly defined as 'missing the mark'. This means that we sin every time we fail to hit the bull's-eye. Sin is nothing more and nothing less than a failure to be continually perfect. Because it is impossible for us to be continually perfect, we are all sinners. We routinely fail to do the very best of which we are capable, and with each failure we commit a crime of sorts—against God, our neighbours, or ourselves, if not frankly against the law. Of course there are crimes of greater and lesser magnitude. It is a mistake, however, to think of sin or evil as a matter of degree. It may seem less odious to cheat the rich than the poor, but it is still cheating. There are differences before the law between defrauding a business, claiming a false deduction on your income tax ...."

Comment: This text says that civil law is not truly just. It treats minor cheating differently from major cheating. It is about driving you to follow a certain social order and not about changing you inside. And more importantly, we are left with no way of telling if somebody really is evil. Hitler could have been good but just a sinner who we misjudge as evil. If so, then by saying he is evil we are being evil. We show our own evil and its really about our evil not his.

Peck asks if an evil person can feel revulsion for another evil person and their evil.

My response to that is affirmative. Religion says that you go back to God in steps. Repentance involves a process. So seeing this evil in another is the start of you maybe seeing your own and abandoning it. It shows that hatred of evil is in you or growing in you despite the presence of evil in you. Religion encourages that. It says it is good to take the step even if no other step is taken. Its better than nothing. Peck would see that as dangerous if he thought about it a bit better.

Peck defines evil as "that force, residing either inside or outside of human beings, that seeks to kill life or liveliness. And goodness is its opposite. Goodness is that which promotes life and liveliness." Peck sees anything that turns others into your "obedient automatons" as evil for that is killing their lives not by killing them physically but robbing them of their spirit.

My response is that literally there are no such things as human automatons. What happens is the person works within limitations to their freedom that are imposed by another. An automaton if we listen to Peck is a person whose freedom is limited. Life can impose that on you or people can or both can. We are all automations to a greater or lesser degree. In this view who is not an automaton? How does that affect God's gift of free will? If free will does not take away your responsibility - and sinners by default want no responsibility - then are you an automaton? If so then God is tricking us. He is evil or is an invention worshipped by evil hearts.

Peck says the primary thing evil does to be evil is to disguise itself. That is why evil people will be stuck in a church and even the ministry. He declares, "One of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one's evil from oneself, as well as from others".

My response is that is that maybe the Christian religion is just about being a cover? What if you join it in case you need a cover or because you simply need a cover? What defines Christianity depends on what it is for. Only the evidence can define so if that is how the religion is being used then that is what it is for!

How do evil people use covers such as religion to look reasonably good? Evil can only do that by pretending to be good or at least to be a necessary evil. Christians say that evil as an outright power cannot exist - it is just good in the wrong place and time. If evil is a thing then God cannot make it any more than God be absolutely pro-red and make black. If evil is a power it will pretend to be a misplaced good! It is easy to cover if you define evil as a good that is misdirected. The doctrine virtually forces that abuse to happen.

## HOW PARENTAL EVIL CAN DAMAGE A CHILD

He writes, "Treated badly by its parents, a child will usually assume that it is bad." He says the child is not able to assess a parent correctly so he or she will naturally think he or she is to blame for the poor parental treatment. He or she deserves it. "When a child who is grossly confronted by significant evil in its parents, it will most likely misinterpret the situation and believe that the evil resides in itself."

Peck does not realise we are doing that with God especially when we are children. We do it when we grow up as well for the scars never heal completely. He virtually admits that if a child gets sick and sees that God must have made the sickness the child will blame herself. That will happen in its most tragic form when the child is suffering sexual abuse. Original sin teaches you are born estranged from God simply because that is what you would choose to be if you could. That adds to the pain and guilt.

Christians say that baptism forgives original sin but forgiveness if real does not take sin away but tries to leave it in the past. A forgiven murderer is still a murder. Baptism calls you an original sinner and that is insulting.

Finally, the good thing about the book is the originality of the ideas. But they are quite odd when you unpack them. He writes about evil in a religious way but tries to use the word in a medical way which will not do. He is trying to make spiritual and religious ideas take over psychiatry and that is an abuse. It is too exclusionary to atheists and sceptics and to religionists who do not see evil in the way Christians do. His account of evil shows despite himself that Jesus and the religion of Christianity are evil themselves. Jesus was a person of the lie.