

The Banalization of Evil

Excerpt from Universal Man Radio Show

with Dr. Norberto Keppe and Dr. Claudia Pacheco

KEPPE: Basically, there are two different types of people. On one hand, you have people who are virtuous and ethical, accustomed to goodness, who have more awareness, more attraction to goodness. These types of people are generally unable to see evil in others. They are naïve, easily swayed by dishonest individuals. They don't see dishonesty in others because they cannot see dishonesty in themselves.

On the other hand, you have people who are delinquent, evil, really sick. And these people generally befriend others who are similar to them. These delinquents know how to deal with one another just as a virtuous individual knows how to deal with another virtuous individual.

No matter how sane we are, we all have many traits in common with psychotics in the mental hospital. The only difference is that the healthier person knows how destructive mental illness can be, and since he is more ethical and inclined toward goodness, he holds himself back and keeps himself from engaging in the kind of destructive, corrupt or criminal behavior of the more seriously ill.

Today I was speaking to a Swedish client who told me that there is a big bridge in her hometown where so many young people were jumping off trying to kill themselves that they had to put nets on either side of the bridge to catch them. Man's pathology is violent in nature but it is generally repressed. Freud thought that repressing the instincts was dangerous. He believed that society was repressive. He thought that if you gave free rein to the instincts and removed this censorship, then mankind would get better. And indeed, child rearing, psychotherapy, psychology, have emphasized letting the individual's will run free. This orientation says that the individual should be free to be himself, to form his own opinion about everything, but this attitude has led to the disastrous situation we are in today, because instead of freeing only the good part, the negative part of the human being has also been released; this sick attitude of killing others, of killing oneself, of mistrust, of projection, of thinking another is a crook when he is not, of believing that we are worthless and that everyone else is worthwhile.

CLAUDIA: We see so many young people today making good and evil banal. It is so banal for a person to kill themselves. It seems that they are pushing away from the distinction between good and evil, away from the seriousness of evil, the seriousness of destroying good. For these young people who have a high regard for drugs and suicide, to commit suicide is something unimportant.

KEPPE: When we say that human beings are born with very serious problems, many people wonder, what is this? Is it the so-called original sin? Man's fundamental evil? Is this something instinctive due to repressed sexual urges? No. Our fundamental evil, the one that harms us the most, is our envy. What is envy? Many people confuse envy

with jealousy, that the individual would like to have what others have for himself. But envy is the process of wanting to ruin the life of others and oneself. Envy is not only the most useless feeling that exists, but also the most dangerous. For example, if a person is gluttonous he wants to eat; if he is lustful he wants sex; if he is greedy he wants money. But there's none of that with envy. In envy, the individual wants to render everything useless as well as to render others useless, to prevent them from having and prevent himself from having as well.

And we really must thank Freud because he was the first to perceive that the social life of human beings is mostly a mask. Often a person can have a fantastic image, like a famous actor or politician, a doctor or someone with a highly successful career, but if you were to analyze the inner life of this person you would see a terrible amount of anger, hatred, envy. I am remembering now something St Augustine said in the Middle Ages—he said, I have nothing to say about a criminal because I too could be a murderer, a thief.

CLAUDIA: You often cite St Augustine and the remorse he felt when he noticed how much pleasure he took from watching a spider kill a fly. But what is the difference between a Saint who notices the evil in himself or outside himself, who is shocked by this, who doesn't feel good about this—and a sicker individual who has made evil banal in his life and considers evil to be normal.

KEPPE: This is something incredible about our study of psychopathology. The individual who is interested in goodness, interested in God, interested in doing good, in truth, in esthetics, this individual sees evil. But if an individual sinks deep into evil, if he only thinks about stealing, extortion, ripping others off, this person no longer notices goodness. The person who is within goodness can perceive evil, but the person who is within evil can no longer see goodness because he has already descended deep into unconsciousness. This is very important for psychotherapy. The so-called Freudian unconscious is not a compartment in the psyche that has good and bad elements. The unconscious is where the individual represses all the ill intentions he has. If he does something good he is happy. But the evil he does, even if it is something society does or he himself thinks is bad, will be repressed. He does not want to see it. But after practicing a lot of evil after awhile, he will banalize it. Then he can do as much evil as he likes and it won't matter at all.

CLAUDIA: A person who is within goodness is shocked by evil. He finds it repugnant. But a person who is within evil thinks it's fine.