

## “Good?” versus “Evil?” Differences

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Concepts of good and evil are important because they influence individual behaviors, religions, and political processes. Most people want to be good people and do good things. Most, but not all people (psychopaths and some mentally disturbed people are exceptions) want to avoid doing evil things or being evil people. Governments are often empowered by people to prevent people from doing “evil” things to others and to punish those who do. Religions often promise that good people will be rewarded (in Heaven, Paradise or by reaching Nirvana, if not secularly) and that evil people will be punished (in Hell or Purgatory or other punitive state before or after death). Some religions also punish people (such as by killing infidels, torturing or burning heretics at the stake, etc.) secularly if they are judged to be evil according to the dictates of the religion. Thus, concepts of good and evil importantly influence peoples' behaviors and the behavior of governmental and religious institutions.

The problem with concepts of good and evil is they are not universal and are subject to religious and political interpretations. Thus, different people have different concepts of what they should do in order to be good and not evil. A prime example can take the form of religious wars where people can be made saints, knighted, or otherwise rewarded for being “good” at killing other people who belong to another religion. Unfortunately, often “good” or “evil” are defined by religious or political entities. What is regarded as “good” behavior by one side is regarded as “evil” by the other side in a religious war. Furthermore, by other definitions, it is evil rather good to kill other people except in self-defense.

As noted above, some definitions of good versus evil can be determined by people who have power or influence over others. Those definitions may be self-serving in various ways for the influencers. In the religious sphere, people may be considered good not only if they are proficient at killing “infidels” or apostates, but also if they are religiously observant in various ways. For instance many religions consider people to be “good” if they “tithe” by giving 10% of their income to the church. However, one must ask oneself, who benefits from the tithe. An all-powerful deity does not need pieces of paper or material goods donated by ardent “believers.” However, the religious establishment and church authorities can clearly benefit from such contributions—and those are the institutions and individuals who may define what is “good.”

In the political sphere, people may be considered “good” if they willingly pay taxes without seeking loopholes, or sign up to serve in their nation's military. Tax payments enable government employees to finance their work and pay themselves good salaries. Military conscripts enhance governmental authorities' power and influence relative to other countries and governmental entities.

Because of the potentially arbitrary nature of good and evil definitions, humans need to seek some more universal set of definitions before they can easily engage in cooperative behaviors. One approach to this appears to be via the concept of “Natural Law.” The concept of natural law underlies the statement in the US Declaration of Independence that, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” In a later treatise titled *Natural Law*, Lysander Spooner in 1882, noted that natural law required people “To live honestly, to hurt no one, and to give to everyone his due.” Thus, he wrote: “first, that each man shall do, towards every other, all that justice requires him to do; as, for example, that he shall pay his debts, that he shall return borrowed or stolen property to its owner, and that he shall make reparation for any injury that he may have done to the person or property of another. The second condition is that each man shall abstain from doing, to another, anything which justice forbids him to do; as, for example, committing theft, robbery, arson, murder, or any other crime against the person or property of another.” In brief, in my opinion, Spooner considers that natural law requires that people follow the “Golden Rule”—do unto others as you would have others do unto you. He also notes that natural law applies to one's property as well as to one's person—as people have a right to the fruits of their labors.

In contrast to “natural law,” which Spooner thought was inherent in peoples' consciences and sense of “justice,” he thought that much statutory law often reflected an attempt by the “elite” to gain and retain control over the non-elite members of society. He noted that in previous years and in many societies, “serfs” owed allegiance, payments, and various labor requirements to the lords and landowners, creditors, or warlords to whom they were responsible. Because they did not always voluntarily comply with such requirements, the authority in charge might have to devote efforts to enforcing those obligations. However, by developing statutory laws, the enforcement of various obligations (such as military service, tax payments, debt repayments, etc.) could become the responsibility of various governmental authorities rather than by numerous separate members of the “elite.” Thus, in many ways, statutory laws provided an efficient way to enforce the power of the elite over the non-elite. They did so by using government power to enforce requirements on the non-elite. This is not a new process, as even in Roman times, one of their perceptive scholars (possibly Cicero or Cato) noted that, in essence, “the more laws that exist, the less freedom exists.”

I would argue that the greater the extent to which statutory laws codify and enable the enforcement of natural law, they serve an important function. However, statutory laws that primarily exist so the “elite” can control, regulate, and arbitrarily reduce the freedoms and wealth of the non-elite should not be tolerated by a society that values individual freedom and responsibility. Thus, statutory laws that help enforce the rights of people to their life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, and property rights against the violence, encroachment, or fraudulent behavior of others can be considered to be “good.”

In contrast, statutory laws that restrict individuals' freedom in order to facilitate the control of the elite over others' lives and property can be considered to be “evil.” Examples of the latter would include “civil forfeiture” laws that enable civil authorities to seize individuals' property without due legal process but merely on the suspicion that the property might be used for potential wrongdoing. They also would include “money-laundering” laws that restrict how much cash people can carry or use at any one time or in sequence. People should have the right to use their personal property as they wish unless or until it has been shown in a court that it has been used for wrong doing. In addition, people should have the right to behave as they wish unless their behavior is likely to harm others. Thus, people should be allowed to ingest whatever foods or substances they wish unless their behavior is likely to threaten others (as is the case with driving while drunk or under the influence of mind-debilitating drugs). Restricting people's rights to consume whatever foods or drugs they wish may profit pharmaceutical companies who pay off the “elite” regulators, but may deprive people from obtaining cheaper remedies for whatever ails them. The government could play an advisory role in warning people against consuming foods or drugs that may not be good for them, and it can play a role in preventing others from marketing harmful goods to consumers, but it should not restrict individual freedoms if a person's behavior will not harm others. Similarly, governments can play a legitimate advisory role in recommending qualified providers of various personal services and in providing tests to ensure that the service providers are adequately qualified, but it should not prevent people from offering various services without first obtaining expensive governmental permits, as the restriction of permits may allow the “Elite” to obtain monopoly rents to the detriment of the public.

Additional statutory laws and regulations that may help the “elite” subjugate the non-elite” by reducing their freedoms include laws against freedom of movement and laws against freedom of speech. The elite may want to restrict freedom of movement for their own benefit. For instance, people in the US may not be allowed to expatriate without paying substantial fees or taxes to the US government. In a sense, such requirements parallel past payments required for people to escape their serfdom or slave status. Restrictions upon freedom of speech may be imposed so people cannot voice displeasure against the conduct of their governmental overlords as well as to prevent people from organizing resistance against arbitrary governmental actions and rulings. Such protests may cause people to be accused of disseminating “misinformation” and to be treated as “domestic terrorists.”