The Semantics of "Good" & "Evil"

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1988

The late Laurance Labadie once told me a parable about a king who decided that everytime he met somebody he would kick them in the butt, just to emphasize his power. My memory may have elaborated this yarn a bit over the years, but basically it continues as follows: since this maniac wore a crown and had an army, people soon learned to tolerate being kicked fairly often, and even began to accept it philosophically or stoically, as they accept taxation and other impositions of kings and governors. They even learned to bend over as soon as they saw the king coming.

Eventually, the king died and his successor naturally continued the tradition and kicked anybody **he** chanced to meet. Centuries passed, and, in the usual course of things, the nobility as a whole had demanded, and acquired, the same "right" as the king: any baron could kick anybody of lesser rank, and the knights could kick anybody except the barons or the royal family, etc. A large part of the population spent most of its waking hours facing a wall, crouched over, waiting for the next boot in the bottom.

The coming of democracy, in that amazing parallel universe, could only be understood according to the traditional thought-forms or acquired mental habits of the strange people there. Democracy therefore meant to those peculiar folks that **anybody** could kick **anybody else** as long as the kicker could prove that he (or she) had a bigger bank balance than the person receiving the boot in the rump. Within the context of the gloss or grid or reality-tunnel in that world, "democracy" could not have any other **thinkable** meaning. (See Berger and Luckman's *The Social Creation of Reality* if this sounds fantastic to you.)

Of course, at first everybody rejoiced in the Constitution of the new democracy, for now "justice" (as they understood it) had been achieved: if you had good health and good luck, you could eventually accumulate enough money in a bank to have the "right" to kick as many people as had the "right" to kick you, and if you were especially shrewd or especially lucky, you could rise to the level where you could kick almost everybody and nobody whoso ever could kick you.

Of course, eventually Heretics appeared in that world, as in ours. These people wanted kicking abolished entirely, and they refused to admit that this constituted a "wild and radical idea." They said it just seemed like "common sense" and "common decency" to them. Naturally, no sane, sound person would take such loonies seriously for a moment. In order to avoid thinking about the arguments of the Heretics, the sane, sound citizens developed a vocabulary to dehumanize and discredit them. Anybody who objected to being kicked regularly was called a "whiner," a

"malcontent," a "coward," a "queer," a "gutless Liberal," a "loser," a "defective," a "deviant," a "nut," a "bum" etc.

You see, the people in that world had been conditioned to believe that if you pinned such labels on Heretics, then it was not necessary to think about any of their arguments. (I will pass over in silence the creepy possibility that certain contributors to *Critique* seem to have arrived from that goofy alternative reality with their ideas of what constitutes reasonable debate unchanged during spatio-temporal transformation.)

Larry Labadie had his own point to make in creating that parable: as an anarchist, he believed the State Socialists were carrying over the worst features of Capitalism in their proposed Utopia. To me, however, the parable has a more general meaning, which I would state as follows: If people have lived with something every day of their lives, and especially if they know it has continued for many centuries, it becomes almost impossible to question it without sounding like some kind of pervert or eccentric, or, at best, like an intellectual wiseacre who can be suspected of just playing head-games or merely "toying with ideas." At worst, the sane, sound domesticated people will decide you want to destroy the world or overthrow the deity or intend some atrocity equally drastic, and they will conspire to silence you.

To illustrate: after two centuries, most educated people can understand the philosophy of Deism as expounded by Voltaire. Historical research makes abundantly clear, however, that most of Voltaire's contemporaries did not understand Deism at all; references to him as an "atheist" can be found continually, not just in writers with polemical intent, but also in many who evidently thought they were writing objective expository prose. It seemed impossible at that time for most persons to comprehend that denying the Christian God (G_c, for convenience) did not mean denying any and all possible Gods (G_x).

Midway between Voltaire's time and our own, Theodore Roosevelt, in a celebrated speech, referred to Thomas Paine as a "dirty little atheist." Contemporary accounts describe Paine as clean and tall, and his own writings express a Deist, not Atheist, philosophy. It seems that c. 1900 many still found it hard to recognize that between Christian Orthodoxy and Atheism many other possible philosophical positions — Aristotelian "excluded middles" — can be found by the independent enquiring mind. To proceed from philosophical kindergarten to graduate school in one step, consider this more advanced illustration: between 1900 and c. 1926, quantum physicists discovered that certain Aristotelian "laws of thought" simply do not apply to the sub-atomic level. Specifically, one cannot meaningfully speak of a sub-atomic "particle" as a thing-in-itself possessing indwelling "properties" apart from the observer and the observational apparatus. Worse: a sub-atomic "particle" cannot even be called a "particle" without the quotation marks, since it acts like a wave as often as it acts like a particle.

As I say, this sub-atomic non-Aristotelianism emerged from experiments and analysis in the first quarter of this century. The subsequent half a century has confirmed that the sub-atomic world acts in an even more non-Aristotelian fashion than appeared at first, and no attempt to hammer the data into an Aristotelian framework has succeeded.

What has emerged as the consequence of this? As Labadie's parable of the alternative world indicates, the consequence seems to be that quantum mathematics not only seems weird to laypersons but even to the leading physicists themselves, who have trouble understanding each other. If a scientific system cannot be stated in Aristotelian terms, nobody in our society is quite sure how it *can* be stated. To return to our metaphor, quantum philosophers seem to be trying to think

of a world without arse-kicking while their minds are subtly programmed by a world in which such arse-kicking remains a predominant feature.

Thus, the famous or infamous "Copenhagen Interpretation" of Neils Bohr and his students (c. 1926–28) seems to me to mean that we cannot talk meaningfully about any absolute Aristotelian "reality" apart from us, but only about the relative "realities" we existentially-experimentally encounter and/or measure — but that Interpretation of the Copenhagen Interpretation must be described as only the way it *seems* to me. According to Dr. Nick Herbert of UC-Santa Cruz, the Copenhagen Interpretation means that no such animal as "reality" can ever be found at all, at all. I do not mean to exaggerate: in *Quantum Reality*, Dr. Herbert actually states the Copenhagen view as "There is no deep reality." But, then, he dislikes the Copenhagen view, and has called it "the Christian Science school of physics." Prof. Mermin of Columbia, defending the Copenhagen Interpretation, does sound as radical as Dr. Herbert, attacking it; Mermin says bluntly that "the moon is demonstrably not there when nobody is looking at it."

John Gribbin, physics editor of *New Scientist*, also actually writes bluntly that the Copenhagen view means "nothing is real" on one page of his book, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*, but more restrainedly he says later that "'reality' in the everyday sense" appears not **useful** in physics. Nobel laureate Eugene Wiegner, meanwhile, says that the Copenhagen position proves that we create the manifestations we observe in a laboratory (by designing the experiments that produce those manifestations) and therefore cannot apprehend anything as itself but only as it appears to us. Or, rather, I *think* that describes what Wiegner says. Wiegner's critics claim that he says we create "reality" by thinking about it, which makes the old man sound like he has overdosed on acid or too many Shirley MacLaine TV specials.

John von Neumann, meanwhile, suggested in 1933 that quantum systems should be mathematically considered as having three possible states (yes, no and maybe, in nonmathematical language) in contrast to the two states of Aristotelian logic (yes and no.) Prof. David Finkelstein still argues that this makes more sense than any other way of talking about the sub-atomic world, but the majority of physicists think von Neumann merely performed a mathematical "stunt" with no physical significance.

The dominance of kicking in the thoughts of Labadie's alternative world, and of Aristotelian logic in our world, indicates the difficulty humans experience in trying to perceive, or communicate their perceptions, outside the grid or gloss of the conditioned reality-tunnel of their "tribe" or society.

For instance, we often hear, and perhaps ourselves say, "It is raining." Such a sentence illustrates what Bertrand Russell called the domination of subject-predicate grammar over Western "thought" or philosophy (or perception?). "It" seems to appear in that sentence only because subject-predicate grammar demands a subject for the verb-form "is raining." If you ask yourself what that mysterious "it" denotes, you will find the question rather puzzling (unless you believe in a primitive rain-god like Zeus or Jehovah...) The same subject-predicate structure underlies most pseudo-scientific thinking, such as that of Moliere's physician who said opium makes one sleepy because it contains a "sleep-producing property." Most folk-explanations of human behavior notoriously fall into this category — e.g. a woman does not work because she has a "laziness-producing demon" in her or "is" "lazy," where a functional analysis would seek a crisper, less demonological explanation in a depressed economy, in nutritional or endocrine imbalances, or, most likely, in some syngergetic combination of social and internal dynamics.

In general, traditional Western thought, especially on the folklore level, posits indwelling Aristotelian "essences" (or spooks) to explain virtually everything, where science — and, curiously, Eastern philosophy tend to find explanations in functional relationships described phenomenologically in terms of observed interactions. This may explain why science and Eastern philosophy appear equally absurd (or equally nefarious) to those raised in the traditional Western Christian reality-tunnel.

Specifically, we in our Western world have been conditioned and/or brainwashed by 2000 years of Christian metaphysics about "Good" and "Evil," and to question that system of thought or reality-tunnel — or to offer a phenomenological alternative — creates a high probability (of about 99.97%, I estimate) that nobody will understand what one wishes to communicate. Nonetheless, I intend to take that risk here. I will experience great surprise and no small delight if any of the negative comments this elicits show any comprehension of my actual meanings.

To begin with, it seems to me that, as Nietzsche said, naive or intuitive concepts of "good" and "bad" have a different history than, and can otherwise be distinguished from, hypothetical indwelling spooks like "Good" and "Evil." As probably used by our earliest ancestors, and as used by most people today, "good" and "bad" have the same meanings as they have for any other animals: "good" means "good for me" and "bad" means "bad for me." Thus, a dog "knows" somehow that foul-smelling food should be considered "bad for me;" an educated human knows further that some sweet-smelling food may act "bad for me" also. All animals, including humans, "know" at birth, and continue to "know" — unless (in the case of humans) counter-conditioned or brainwashed — that hugging, cuddling, petting and oral and/or genital embrace definitely act upon the organism in ways "good for me."

From this pre-metaphysical or phenomenological or operational point of view, I quite readily and easily identify many events or "things" in space-time that appear "good for me" (e.g. tasty food, freedom of the press, clever comedy, great painting, love-making, Beethoven, my word processor, money arriving regularly in large doses, certain drugs and vitamins, the above mentioned hugging-petting-fusion etc., etc.). I also observe easily many "things" or events in space-time that appear "bad for me" (e.g. Fundamentalist Christianity, Communism, Naziism, all other attempts to interfere with my liberty, toxic food, toxic waste, horror movies, certain drugs etc., etc.). I also observe that many things that seem "bad for me" seem "good" or harmless for others.

Continuing on this existential-phenomenological basis, it next appears to me that "good for me" and "bad for me" must be considered relative functions, in several senses. What appears "good for me" often appears "bad" for somebody else; or what appears "good for me" may sooner or later have consequences "bad for me;" or what appears "good for me" when age 20 may no longer appear "good for me" at age 50; and some recreations I judge "good for me" may later clearly appear "bad for me." In general, "good for me" always remains relative to my knowledge or ignorance at the time I make the judgement, and I know from experience that I judge wrongly at times. (Notably, although hugging, cuddling etc. always appear "good for me," the consequences of picking the wrong partner or the wrong time may clearly emerge later as unequivocally "bad for me." This probably underlies most sexual superstitions, phobias and fixations.)

Some animals seem at times genetically programmed to recognize, some of the time, "good for my pack" or even "good for my species," as documented in e.g. E. Wilson's *Sociobiology*, Dawkin's *The Selfish Gene* and similar works. With or without such genetic programming as hidden agenda, many humans clearly show the capacity to think about, and aim for, that which appears "good for my species" or even (recently) "good for the biosphere as a whole." Such judgements still remain

relative to the general welfare of the judger, relative to location and history in space-time (what appears good for the foxes will probably appear bad for the chickens) and, even in the case of "good for the biosphere" relative to the knowledge or ignorance of the judger.

Before proceeding, I beg the reader to notice that if human semantics had remained on this primitive phenomenological level, and the relativity of judgement remained obvious to all, negotiation and compromise would perforce play a larger role in history than they have hitherto, and violent "crusades" and religious/ideological wars would have played a comparatively smaller role. It always appears possible to negotiate about what appears good and bad to us in concrete situations; but it becomes increasingly impossible to negotiate successfully when metaphysical "Good" and "Evil" enter the universe of discourse. The tendency becomes then to fight, and to fight as violently as possible, as the blood-curdling history of Christian dogmatism clearly shows, and as such secular religions as Naziism and Communism have proven again in our own century.

By comparison, the Confucian ethic remains phenomenological; Confucius explicitly said that his system "was not against human nature" and compared it to "loving a beautiful flower or hating a bad smell, also called "respecting one's own nose." Taoism and Buddhism differ from Confucius chiefly in greater awareness of the relativity of judgements (and the possibility of trans-ego perception or detached-from-ego perception); but neither contains anything like the Occidental metaphysical concept of "Good" and "Evil." Indeed, some of the most famous passages in Taoist and Buddhist scripture hurl ridicule at any metaphysical notions of nonrelative "Good" and "Evil" — notions which apparently emerged occasionally in the Orient, among eccentrics, as Oriental pantheism occasionally appears in the Occident, among eccentrics.

Nietzsche, as most people know, believed that metaphysical "Good" and "Evil" not only contradict most intuitive organismic evaluations of "good for me" and "bad for me" but appear to have been devised with the intent of contradicting (and confusing) such naive or "natural" reactions. (Most priestly notions of sexual "Good" and "Evil," notoriously contradict and confuse naive or natural organismic evaluations, for instance.) In other words, Nietzsche claimed that priests invented "Good" and "Evil" to obtain *power over others* — to persuade people not to trust their own evaluations; to place all trust, instead, on the priests themselves as alleged representatives of a hypothetical gaseous vertebrate of astronomical heft and mass called "God." It appears to have been Nietzsche' opinion that since this hypothetical gaseous vertebrate could not be located in normal sensory-sensual (existential) space-time, the priests, in effect, intended to teach people, "Don't trust yourself; trust us" or, more bluntly still, "Don't think; we'll do the thinking for you."

According to this analysis, political tyrants, who only control our bodies and actions, exhibit less raw "lust for power" than Popes or Ayatollahs or other priests who try to control our thoughts and judgements, i.e. to invade our inmost sanctuary. (See Nietzsche's *Will to Power* for an extensive analysis of this phenomenon.)

Whatever one thinks about this Nietzschean attempt to psychoanalyze the motives of the ancient priestcraft, it appears historically that the "Good" and "Evil" metaphysics, as distinguished again from simple organismic judgements of "good for me" and "bad for me," has functioned to give power, and always more power, in horse doctor's doses, to priests and preachers of all hues and persuasions. (It seems easy to think of a Buddhist or Taoist monk or Confucian gentleman-scholar as possibly living in isolation, but a Christian clergyperson, by definition, seems to be somebody who tells *other people* what to think and what to do., i.e. has *power* over then usually based on raw fear and threat, e.g. "You will go to Hell if you doubt me.") After 2000 years of

Christianity, most people accept being told what "is" "Good" and "Evil" by an alleged expert just as automatically as the people Labadie's parable accepted being kicked.

Does history tend to justify Nietzsche's view that this system of otherworldly metaphysics (interpreted by alleged experts on that alleged other world) leads to "degeneracy," "decadence," "sickness," "neuroses," "lunacy," "epilepsy" etc.? Well, I don't know about epilepsy (which now appears organic or genetic rather than sociological) but Nietzsche's other terms all refer to the prevalence in Christian society of what he called "resentment" and "revenge" — envy or rage against those who live without Christian metaphysics, coupled with ferocious desire to punish or destroy such people. It seems impossible to real a page of St. Paul without encountering this kind of resentment-and-revenge compulsion almost immediately, and you can hear it on TV any night by turning the dial to the Fundamentalist channels in the high 40s, where the leading evangelists will usually be found fomenting hatred against non-Christians (when not tearfully confessing whatever personal sins or crimes have previously been unearthed and well-publicized by the pagan media). The Christian theologian, historically, seems a person intent on terrorizing others into doing what he wants them to do and thinking what he wants them to think, or killing them if they will not submit.

The animal, the child, the pre-literate society, the Confucian, the Buddhist, the Taoist, and most of the world live in reality-tunnels in which "good" and "bad" remain demarked by organismic evaluations of "good for me/good for my tribe" and "bad for me/bad for my tribe." Only the Christian sects — and such secular religions as Naziism and Communism which may be considered, as the historian Toynbee considered them, late Christian heresies — contain the idea of absolute "Good" and "Evil" and the **encitement to violence** implied in such a concept.

It appears to me, then, that by "turning everything upside down" (Nietzsche's phrase) — i.e. by denying organismic and relative evaluations of "good" and "bad" and replacing them with **definitions** of "Good" and "Evil" decided by some priestcraft or some Central Committee — we have strayed far from sanity and into the realm of fantasy and madness. Concretely, when I decide to class something as "good" or "bad," I remember that I have done the classifying, and also that I have no overwhelming evidence of personal infallibility; I take **responsibility** for the judgement, in the Existentialist sense, and I remain open to learning, and to changing my mind, if new data indicates that I should revise my evaluation. But if I classify something as "Good" or "Evil" in the metaphysical sense, defined by some priesthood or Party Line, I do not "take responsibility," I become virtually a ventriloquist's dummy through which the priests or ideologists speak and act, and I abdicate all possibility or learning more or revising my mistakes. It does not seem terribly exaggerated when Nietzsche calls this "turning everything upside down" because in submitting to such an abstract system and denying my own perceptions, I have reversed evolution and "resigned" as it were from the human race. I could easily be replaced by a robot or servo-mechanism at that point. Humans generally do not behave like robots unless they have been indoctrinated with some metaphysical system like Christianity or its close relatives, Judaism and Islam, or its late heresies, Nazism and Communism.

If this essay can escape being regarded as intemperate polemic or wild exaggeration, I must explain in more detail the concrete functional difference between organismic "good" and "bad" evaluations — "respecting one's own nose" in the Confucian sense — and metaphysical "Good" and "Evil." Then my point will perhaps appear clear, even to those who most vehemently reject it.

I propose that the organismic, intuitive, primitive, "naive" evaluations of "good for me or my gene pool" and "bad for me or my gene pool" — even when condensed into the simpler "good" and "bad" — reflect our actual situation as bodies moving in space-time. Evolution has given surviving species an assortment of genetic programs that roughly inform each individual organism about "good for me" and "bad for me." These genes do not appear infallible — as witness the dog who drank spilled paint because paint smells more like good food than like bad food. These genetic programs may tolerate modification by learning experience, in dogs, cats and other higher mammals, including some (non-dogmatic) human beings. Empirical learning itself may be modified by careful reasoning from inferences, etc. All of these (genetic programs, learning, reasoning) reflect an endeavor to gather the data for an accurate map of our position in space-time and of what profits or harms us or our tribe or species. On the other hand, the metaphysical doctrines of absolute "Good" and "Evil" do not reflect our trajectories as bodies in space-time in any respect. Metaphysics and its language structure reflect rather a fantasy-world or world-created-by-definitions which does not meaningfully refer to our concrete existential history in space-time at all. If this point appears as recondite or hermetic as the most inscrutable pages of Heidegger, I will try to make it more simple with the following two columns of examples.

I	II
The electron is a wave.	The electron appears as a wave when recorded by this instrument.
The first man stabbed the second man with a knife.	The first man appeared to stab the second man with what appeared to be to be a knife.
The car involved in the hit-and-run accident was a blue Ford.	In memory, I think I recall the car involved in the hit-and-run accident as a blue Ford.
This is a fascist idea.	This seems like a fascist idea to me.
Beethoven was better than Mozart.	I enjoy Beethoven more than Mozart.
This is a sexist movie.	This seems like a sexist movie to me.

The first column consists of statements in ordinary English, as heard in common usage at this primitive if of evolution. I believe this column contains the same structural implications as Aristotelian logic and the Christian metaphysics of "Good" and "Evil." I also believe this column reflects a fantastic view of the world in which we assume ourselves not "personally" involved in the act of evaluation but paradoxically able to discern the spooky, indwelling "essences" of things.

The second column consists of parallel statements rewritten in **E-prime**, or English-prime, a language proposed for scientific usage by such authors as Alfred Korzybski, D. David Bourland and E.W. Kellogg III. E-prime contains much the same vocabulary as standard English but has been made isomorphic to quantum physics and modern science generally) by abolishing the Aristotelian "is" of identity and reformulating each statement phenomenologically in terms of signals received and interpreted by a body (or instrument) in space-time. In short, believe that E-prime contains the same structural implications as science, radical Buddhism (Zen, Mahayana) the naive evaluations of "good" and "bad" that seem natural to most people who have not been indoctrinated by Christianity or its totalitarian modern derivatives.

Concretely, "The electron is a wave" employs the Aristotelian "is" of identity and thereby introduces the false-to-experience notion that we can know the indwelling Aristotelian "essence" of

the electron. "The electron appears as a wave when recorded with this instrument reformulates the English sentence into English-prime, abolishes the "is" of identity and returns us to an accurate report of what actually transpired in space-time, namely that the electron was constrained by a certain instrument to appear a certain way.

In English we talk blithely about things or entities that may or may not exist, and often about things that a never be proven to exist or to not exist; in E-prime we can only talk about what has actually been experienced and by what method it has been experienced. Aristotelian English encourages our tendency to wander off into worlds of fantasy; E-prime brings us back to concrete phenomenological recording of what we actually experienced in space-time.

Similarly, "The first man stabbed the second man with a knife," even though lacking the formal "is" of identity appears Aristotelian English to me, because it assumes the non-involvement of the observer and of the observer's nervous system. The proposed E-prime translation, "The first man seemed to me to stab the second man with what seemed to be a knife," scientifically includes the **instrument** (the speaker's nervous system) in the report, recognizes phenomenology, and, incidentally, often happens to accord with brute fact. (This example refers to a well-known experiment in General Psychology, in which a banana in the first man's hand performs the "stabbing" but most students, conditioned by Aristotelian habits, nonetheless "see" the knife they expect to see. This experiment dramatizes the fact that hallucinations can be created without hypnosis or drugs, merely by taking advantage of our habit of thinking we see "things" when we only see our brain's **images** of things.)

"The car involved in the hit-and-run accident was a blue Ford" again contains Aristotelian absolutism and ignores the instrument used — the brain. The E-prime translation reminds us that the brain often "remembers" incorrectly.

"This is a fascist idea" contains the Aristotelian "is" and asserts that the speaker has the mystic ability to discern the hidden "essence" within or behind phenomena. The E-prime translation reminds us that the speaker has actually performed an evaluative act in interpreting signals apprehended by his or her body moving in space-time.

"Beethoven is better than Mozart" contains the usual Aristotelian fantasy about indwelling spooks or essences. The E-prime translation, "I enjoy Beethoven more than Mozart" places us back in ordinary space-time where the speaker's ears and brain can be recognized as the source of the evaluation, and we realize that the statement actually refers to said ears and brain and not to the two collections of music seemingly discussed.

"This is a sexist movie" (standard English) again assumes a fictitious uninvolved observer mystically perceiving inner essences, while "This seems like a sexist movie to me" (E-prime) returns us to Earth and ordinary face-time by including the existential fact that the observer has been involved in making the evaluation.

It has been claimed, by Korzybski, that the neurolinguistic habit of regularly using E-prime trains the brain to avoid common errors of perception, uncritical inferences, habitual prejudices, etc. and to show increased capacity for creative thought and greater enjoyment/involvement in life. This has not been proven, since few have taken the trouble systematically to retrain themselves in E-prime and they have not been exhaustively tested by psychologists. However, it remains my impression that those scientists and laypersons most apt to use "the spirit of E-prime" (if not always the exact letter) do exhibit the positive traits claimed by Korzybski, or at least exhibit these traits more than a random sample of the population.

On the other side, those most apt to use and over-use the "is" of identity, historically, make up the major part of the world's long, tragic list of fanatics, paranoids, Crusaders, Inquisitors and Ideologists, and have responsibility for the bloodiest and most horrible atrocities recorded in human annals.

In summary, I suggest that existence never contained "Good" and "Evil" — or "inches" or "pounds" or "ergs of energy" or "degrees Fahrenheit" — until complicated primate brains ("human minds, "in more polite language) put them there as systems of classification. I suggest further that the "naive" view of "good for me or my clan" and "bad for me or my clan" contains all that can meaningfully be said about our actual experience in space-time, and that metaphysical "Good" and "Evil" speak fantastically of mythic realms beyond any possible verification or refutation in space-time.

I will scarcely find myself surprised if this article inspires heated and fervent rebuttals. I await such ripostes with equanimity. I do hope, however, that nobody raises the spectre of the old, hackneyed argument that without the metaphysical concept of absolute "Evil" we will lose our desire or will to protect ourselves against such monstrous gentry as Hitler, Stalin, Jack-the-Ripper, etc. Nobody but Ahab himself ever seems to have believed the whale was absolutely "Evil" (for biting off his leg while he was trying to kill it) and one does not have to regard tigers, polio microbes or other natural entities phenomenologically "bad for us" as also metaphysically and absolutely "Evil" in order to combat them. It does not take metaphysical dogma to fight the patently nefarious; it only takes quick wits in spotting the "bad for me" as soon as it appears on the horizon. Animals literally do this, and humans figuratively do it, by the method of Confucius: respecting one's own nose.

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1988

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