



Selected Resources on Evil

A Cherokee Legend: "Two Wolves"

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

from *What I Learned in the Gulag*

".... If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

"It is impossible to design a system so perfect that no one needs to be good."

- T.S. Eliot

from the play *J.B.*

"If God is God, he is not good, if God is good, he is not God, take the even take the odd."

-Archibald MacLeish

"There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."

-Henry David Thoreau

"Constantly choosing the lesser of two evils is still choosing evil."

-Jerry Garcia

"Understanding does not cure evil but it is a definite help; inasmuch as one can cope with a comprehensible darkness."

-Carl Jung

"I believe that, as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil."

-Robert Kennedy

"The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness."

-Joseph Conrad

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction."

-Blaise Pascal



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The Quest for the Historical Satan

“For evil to exist, and God to be acquitted of complicity and retain an all-loving and powerful nature, injustice must somehow be reconciled with God. For many evil exists because ... there is a devil, a father of misery and darkness who can be blamed for all the evil and injustices that exist in the world. Satan literally becomes a necessary evil—an evil that excuses God.”

-Miguel De La Torre and Albert Hernandez

The Kingdom Has Already Come

I stopped in the church to pray,
It was the middle of the day
And I don't even know if I believe in God
But I laid my soul on the table
and left that place believing I was able
to pull back the curtain old fears had drawn.

I was out on the fourth of July
when I saw those kids, and just had to cry
The whole town was blazing in the summer's heat
But out in front of a row of rundown shacks
they had that fire hydrant uncapped
baptizing their bodies right there in the street.

There's a tree outside my window
It sings when wind blows
I've got water and fire
I know sorrow, I feel desire
And could it be that the kingdom has already come.

We all see good or bad in everything that we have
But life is waiting just behind that veil
If this will be loved and that will be hated
the soul is left to struggle segregated
Trapped in the harbor too weighed down to sail.

There's a tree outside my window
It sings when wind blows
I've got water and fire
I know sorrow, I feel desire
And could it be that the kingdom has already come
And could it be that the kingdom has already come.

-Iris DeMent

“And I must believe that man has the power to know the right, to choose between good and evil and know that his choice has made a difference...”

-Marion Zimmer Bradley



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“Evil is unspectacular and always human, and shares our bed and eats at our table.”

-W.H. Auden

“Evil is the shadow of angels. Just as there are angels of light, support, guidance, healing and defense, so we have experiences of shadow angels. And we have names for them: racism, homophobia, sexism are all demons—but they are not out there.”

-Mathew Fox

“And this is the forbidden truth, the unspeakable taboo - that evil is not always repellent but frequently attractive; that it has the power to make of us not simply victims, as nature and accident do, but active accomplices.”

-Joyce Carol Oates

A Revolutionary Poem

A Revolutionary Poem does not tell you who or when to kill, what and when to burn, or even how to theorize. It reminds you (for you have known, somehow, all along, maybe lost track) where and when and how you are living and might live—it is a wick of desire. It is not programmatic, it searches for words that will burn outside the emotional theme parks. A revolutionary poem is written out of one individual's confrontation with his/her longings (including all that s/he is expected to deny) in the belief that its readers or hearers deserve an art as complex, as open to contradictions as themselves.

Any truly revolutionary art is an alchemy through which to waste, greed, brutality, frozen indifference, “blind sorrow”, and anger are transmuted into some drenching recognition of the What If?—the possible. What if?—the first revolutionary question the dying forces don't know how to ask.

-Adrienne Rich (adapted)