



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
**Volume 19 Number 31**  
**August 21, 2024**

**When is Something Evil?**

By Freddy Davis

Most people are aware of the fact that Nazi Germany was responsible for the genocide of six million Jews. But it was not only Jews that they murdered. They also killed many other people whom they deemed enemies, or simply were not useful to the state. They murdered men, women, handicapped, aged, sick, prisoners of war, forced laborers, camp inmates, critics, homosexuals, Jews, Slavs, Serbs, Germans, Czechs, Italians, Poles, French, Ukrainians, and many others. In total, it is estimated that they killed around 20 million people – simply because they were deemed "not worthy."

Most people looking at this from the outside find it hard to imagine that anyone could justify killing people off like that. However, from the vantage point of the Nazi regime, this was actually considered a good thing. In their mind, the greater good was a pure race. Eliminating those who were inferior was seen to be the moral thing to do.

During his rule, it is estimated that Joseph Stalin killed somewhere between 9 and 20 million of his own citizens during the "Great Purge." He also had a rational motive for his actions. As a committed Communist, he was convinced that in order for society to advance and a true communist utopia to emerge, capitalism had to be eliminated. For him, the class struggle had to play out. He also had to make sure that no other constituencies emerged that could possibly overthrow him. Based on those principles, he viewed his actions as completely moral.

It is estimated that Mao Zedong was responsible for killing around 65 million Chinese. A large per-

centage of those died from starvation due to his "Great Leap Forward" policy. This was a program designed to move China from an agrarian economy to an industrialized society based on communist principles. Millions more were killed as he eliminated those deemed to have not properly supported his goals.

Mao, like Hitler and Stalin, believed that the ends justified the means. For him, the moral thing to do was to radically transform China into a leading world power. If many people had to die to achieve that end, it was a small price to pay. Promoting the Great Leap Forward was the moral thing to do regardless of the toll in human lives.

We could easily go on with this list of those who committed genocide. There were the ancient Romans, Genghis Kahn, the Japanese during WWII, Cambodia's Pol Pot, the Ottomans as they worked to spread Islam, and on and on. What is important to note in all these cases is that those who perpetrated these genocides had reasons that they considered moral.

As we look at this from our Christian worldview perspective, we deem all of those acts to be evil. They were completely contrary to the teachings of the Bible. So where did all of these other people get the idea that their genocides were actually moral?

To address this question, we have to explore what exactly makes people think an action is moral or immoral. The answer lies in their worldview beliefs.

Animistic groups evaluate morality based on the particular pantheon of gods they worship. They generally see their gods to be the right ones, but also recognize

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that other tribes and groups worship different ones. If they do battle with another group and are able to defeat them, they consider their gods to be the strongest and are feel justified in their conquests. In these cases, morality is determined by the gods who are strongest. Historically, Genghis Kahn, the ancient Romans and Greeks, and the Japanese based their understanding of morality on this type of belief.

There are also certain groups of Theists who believe they are justified in wiping out other groups of people. In particular, from the very time of its founding, particular factions of radical Muslims have held this belief. Some Muslim groups, though not all, interpret portions of the Qur'an to mean that all who are "infidels" should be wiped out – with infidels being defined as people who are not Muslim or who convert out of Islam. The motivation of these people is based on their belief that the Qur'an is a revelation of God's will, and by carrying out genocide, they are obeying God – which makes their actions moral.

In more modern times, it has been primarily believers in naturalistic philosophy who have had the more genocidal tendencies. Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. Belief systems in this category are all atheistic. Hitler's basic beliefs fell into this category.

But the most prominent naturalistic belief system that has fostered genocide in the modern era has been the various versions of Marxism. This has included people like Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot.

In the case of naturalistic beliefs, there is no outside authority source that is able to define morality. There are no gods that duke it out in the spirit world, and no God who is able

to reveal morality. Here, morality is defined by the people who are able to impose their will on the rest of society. It is based on "the law of the jungle."

When it comes to the authority source that defines morality for Christianity, we are looking at the same worldview category as Islam. It is a theistic belief system which holds that God has revealed to mankind what is moral and immoral. There is a huge difference between the two, however, and the difference lies in the content of the two authority sources. While both faiths claim to be a revelation from God, one instructs its followers to kill infidels, while the other looks to the Bible with its elevated view of the value of human life and emphasis on grace and mercy.

So, how can we know for sure how to determine what is moral? Is there a way?

Let's start with the common understanding of what things people deem to be moral. In spite of the fact that the above mentioned dictators and dictatorial regimes committed genocide and felt they were justified in doing so, that is actually an extreme minority position. Most individuals in the world, regardless of their worldview beliefs, believe that killing other people is wrong. They may qualify that to some degree based on various circumstances, but in general they believe it is wrong. The varying qualifications are typically determined by whether or not they know or like the other person. It is interesting that all of those promoting genocide begin by dehumanizing those they want to kill. If they are able to do that, it provides a justification for the slaughter.

It is important to note that murder and genocide are not the only topics that are affected by a person's moral views. The same principle applies to honesty, sexual morality, and any other topic where morality comes into play. Most people have an internal sense that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and

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they justify their moral beliefs based on their worldview.

So, if a person's worldview beliefs are based on their personal view of superiority (as in when their gods are stronger than other people's gods), or they believe they get to make up morality for themselves (as in Atheism), then virtually anything can be deemed moral under the right circumstances. Basically, people are able to override their internal sense of right and wrong if their underlying worldview beliefs allow it.

It is different when it comes to theistic beliefs. All theistic belief systems claim that their moral beliefs come from God. That being the case, since different ones have contradictory beliefs about morality, it is necessary to discern which theistic belief system is actually true.

This is not really as difficult as it may seem. Every non-Christian theistic belief system, without exception, is going to have problems. Some of the problems will be evident in its history, and some based on internal contradictions found in its writings. Additionally, virtually all of these propose a God who is not personal. With that as a starting place, being moral is a matter of legalistically following a set of moral rules.

The Christian faith is different. It certainly does prescribe a particular approach to morality, but being moral is not the bottom line when it

comes to a connection with God. The God of the Bible is personal in a way that puts a priority on a personal relationship with Him. People act morally because they love Him, not because they must do so in order to achieve His approval. The focus is on relationship, not on works. In non-biblical theistic faiths, the works come first and are necessary to please God. In Christian Theism, the relationship comes first, and the good works result from the changed life people experience because of it.

So what is the bottom line?

- People don't get to make up their own morality.
- Morality is not determined by the power of a person's gods.
- Morality is not based on legalistic works.
- Right morality is an outward expression of a person's personal relationship with the true and living God.

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