

Good Intentions

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Among the many perverse ironies of modern civilization — and perhaps of all civilizations, whether modern or ancient — is the notion that so much of what humankind has created was motivated initially by good intentions, and quite frequently, by the very best of intentions. Also, the early days after creation, invention, or new development are typically marked by widespread and well-publicized optimism about the goodness — both personal and collective — that will ensue as whatever spiffy new thing plays out and is integrated into society. The belief offered is that humans will benefit and life will improve.

The “coming attractions” that our society loves are usually very optimistic. That may be leavened somewhat, especially these days, by the dystopian or apocalyptic visions that have seized our imaginations (with good reason), but the fact remains that we love to herald positive developments that will make the future brighter, and that effort still commands a lot of our energy.

So, in almost every arena — medicine, technology, finance, travel, education, sports, entertainment, etc. — new developments occur that are lauded as having great potential benefits for us all in making life easier, happier, and better. But then something happens to change that. Various corrupting influences enter the picture. Sometimes this transpires early on, before our shiny new toy even has a chance to develop or be brought to market. Other times it takes awhile after the initial roll-out before the con men, thieves, and grifters show up to infect and sully the supposedly wonderful creation. In fairness, this corruption might not be so terrible if the kidnapping, ransom, and murder occurred with only some of what we create. Sadly, though, the downfall from collective benefit and social goodness into corrupt rackets, ponzi or pyramid schemes, and outright fraud occur for damn near every great thing that humans come up with.

I'd really like to know the proportion within humanity of upstanding, well-intentioned people versus those among us in our species who are con artists and thieves, habitual liars and cheats. Is it one-to-one, a ratio of 50/50? Are half of us Monsters? I seriously doubt it. I think the ratio is probably considerably higher in favor of those with good intentions and at least relatively open hearts who are not power-hungry, money-grubbing, selfish assholes, but I can't be sure about that.

In psychology, the percentages of those who would be clinically diagnosed as sociopaths or psychopaths are claimed to be very low — around 1% of the population — but I'm as sure as I can be that the ranks of Monsters are much greater than that. But then, most actual Monsters do not resemble the sneering cartoon villains of movies and TV. They appear "normal," although they're probably better dressed than most of us and occupy board rooms and corporate or institutional offices.

Whatever the percentage of Monsters is, it's obvious that there are enough Monsters to get the corruption ball rolling. Beyond that, however, I sense more subtle conditions that dramatically increase the devastation.

One of these conditions is propaganda. Needless to say, while a few Monsters revel in their awfulness, most of them don't come right out and admit what they are. No, Monsters typically work hard to create smokescreens, the false pretense of goodness, and they often do so with seemingly rational arguments and very seductive justifications. Stated in the simplest terms, Monsters lie. And they are often extremely skilled liars. Lying is an art with a thousand faces, all of which — from the outrageous to the sublime — Monsters enthusiastically use. The entire industry of public relations is based on the presumption that we can do whatever we want — which sometimes includes getting away with murder — as long as we convince people of our goodness. And this works. The public is easily fooled.

Beyond simple deception, the public can even be enlisted to support the lies. Many people who are not inherently sociopathic Monsters are nonetheless vulnerable to being led astray. They are not solidly grounded in what real goodness is and can be seduced quite easily by the compelling but false arguments of the Monsters' narratives. They may be enlisted as the Monsters' Minions, participating in the ongoing corruption, or they might actually become Monsters themselves. In either case, though, they continue to imagine that they are righteous and good. That paradox is an inherent and essential feature of what is Monstrous in modern civilization. Mass delusion is necessary to keep the game going.

Then too, we must never overlook the deep motivation humans feel to belong socially by conforming to apparent norms. Once sufficiently powerful, real Monsters are incredibly successful in getting away with their crimes. Punishing the rich, famous, and powerful is supremely difficult — their tentacles reach into every nook and cranny of influence. So, when meting out punishment for transgressions, society and culture focus blame instead on the weak and disenfranchised — focusing their wrath on those who are without connections or clout. And since so many Monsters are not mere influencers but actually occupy lofty positions of institutional authority, the culture not only doesn't punish them for their crimes, but actually celebrates them for their illicit successes. Yes, that's horribly perverse, but it's a fact of the world we live in.

So, rather than excoriation and social shunning, far too many Monsters achieve the lofty status of role models. Fame and infamy become indistinguishable, and otherwise good people end up emulating the Monsters. At the very least, this approval means that many trusting souls end up working for the Monsters.

For instance, of all the Americans who work for the most egregious corporations — such as Monsanto, Raytheon, Pfizer, or even General Mills, to name a few — and who actively design, manufacture, market, and distribute the Death Culture products of such corporations, my guess is that almost none of those individuals self-identifies as a Monster. No, whether as executives or lower-level employees, these people believe overwhelmingly that they're engaged in morally principled, honorable work — making the economy more productive, defending their country, supporting their communities, feeding their families, and justifiably feathering their own nests.

How can we fight the Monsters if no one will admit to being a Monster? How do we mount a campaign to restrain the Monsters and keep them from harming us if everyone believes that they are upstanding, righteous, and good? Given the extreme tribal partisanship that now characterizes America, people often define Monsters as anyone who disagrees with "our" beliefs, such as those on the political right hating anyone on the political left (and vice versa). Even more commonly, Monsters become in our minds anyone who is not like "Us" — foreigners, immigrants, people from different cultures, those with different skin color, etc.

The famous and ironic dictum that first appeared in the Sunday comic strip "Pogo" way back in 1970 during the final tragic years of the War in Vietnam still echoes today: *"We have met the enemy, and he is Us."*

Sure, truly despicable people exist in America, just like they do in every country and culture. As they say in Texas, *"Some people just need killin'."* But those obviously bad people are only a symptom of our predicament rather than the real problem. And yes, there are wonderful people in America — literally tens of millions of them — just like there are wonderful people in every country and culture.

Humans cannot be divided accurately into simple, black-and-white categories of good or bad people. OK, maybe there are at least some people in the world who are either overwhelmingly good or overwhelmingly bad, but they are few and far between. For the vast majority of us, life isn't that simple. Good and bad are intertwined. They morph and shift, each becoming its opposite, changing places as they dance. They move from absolute to relative and back again. Some goodness and badness are timeless and near-universal, but much goodness and badness are transitory, even ephemeral. The end result, though, is that it's damn

near impossible to ever say with certainty that a given person is inherently good or primarily bad. We try, of course, but it's easy to get wrong.

This is not to suggest that good and bad don't matter. They do. And we have a serious problem around those assessments and judgments in modern civilization and, in particular, in America. While good and bad are difficult to nail down as absolutes, Death Culture carries no such difficulties. Once one gets a little distance, it's easy enough to see, and then it cannot be "unseen." Death Culture has reached a very advanced stage in this country and the world. Too many of us either serve the Monsters or have become Monstrous ourselves.

In my opinion, there's no possibility of changing that situation for the better until we turn our gaze inward, toward self-examination, to pull back the cloak of invisibility that shrouds our own self-delusions. But even in the unlikely event that we could achieve this collectively, doing so won't save us from what's coming. It's too late to stop civilizational collapse, and the American Empire is dying. That said, however, it's never too late to do the right thing.

As a final kicker in this brief commentary, I'll close by adding one more pithy old saying:

"The road to Hell is paved with good intentions."