Face-to-Face: Social Work and Evil

Caroline Humphrey, University of Hull

Abstract

The concept of evil continues to feature in public discourses and has been reinvigorated in some academic disciplines and caring professions. This article navigates social workers through the controversy surrounding evil so that they are better equipped to acknowledge, reframe or repudiate attributions of evil in respect of themselves, their service users or the societal contexts impinging upon both. A tour of the landscape of evil brings us face-to-face with moral, administrative, societal and metaphysical evils, although it terminates in an exhortation to cultivate a more metaphorical language. The implications for social work ethics, practice and education are also discussed.

Key Words: evil, social work, controversy, philosophy, metaphors

Introduction

Although the notion of evil germinated from ancient cultures (Parkin 1985) and was systematised within major world religions (Vardy & Arliss 2003), it continues to be invoked in modern secularising countries in the aftermath of atrocities. The hallmark of an atrocity is that it oversteps the boundary of ordinary moral wrongs to such an extent that we recoil with repugnance, and defies the parameters of our everyday sense-making schema, leaving only the malignant mystery of 'evil' intact (Card 2002). The murder of the toddler James Bulger by two ten year old boys in the UK in 1993 and the suicide bombing of the World Trade Centre in the US in 2001 were pivotal events which unleashed the concept from its Pandora's box, and these secular evils were enshrouded in theological imagery (Cole 2006).

There has been a revival of the concept of evil across academic disciplines such as philosophy (Lara 2001), social psychology (Miller 2004) and sociology (Wieviorka 2012). Here it is explored as a secular phenomenon denoting the grave harms which are inflicted by and upon individuals and groups, having been stirred in a cauldron of socio-emotional deficits, socio-economic deprivation or socio-political duress. A renaissance of evil can also be discerned in discourses about public sector management (Adams & Balfour 1998) and the work of caring professionals in health (Austin 2011), psychotherapy (Goldberg 1996; Means & Nelson 2000) and social work (Blackstock 2009; Hugaas 2010; Preston-Shoot 2011). Although psychotherapists address the concept of evil with reference to clients who may be construed as perpetrators or victims of evil, elsewhere the focus is on evils

committed by caring professionals in the public sector. The idea that caring professionals can do evil resonates with many service users and carers in statutory safeguarding work. A Google search of 'social work and evil' conducted in June 2014 revealed that a plethora of blogs had been set up by parents who felt sufficiently aggrieved about social workers' interventions to castigate them as 'evil'.

It is therefore timely to stage a face-to-face encounter between social work and evil. The first section sketches out the philosophical controversy over the concept of evil. A cartography of evil is then unveiled – at the core is individual moral evil which unfolds in interpersonal relationships; then there are collective forms of evil which stem from states, institutions and cultures; and at the periphery lurks a metaphysical evil which is regarded as the cosmic force underlying human evil in many religions. Here, it is argued that a metaphorical language is often more appropriate and anti-oppressive than a literal one. The final section interrogates the value of the concept of evil in social work ethics, practice and education. It is anticipated that this account will demonstrate the salience of evil to the sceptics whilst offering evil-literacy for the perplexed and cautioning against liberal and literal evil-invocations among converts.

A Controversial Concept: Philosophical Observations

The language of evil must be reserved for phenomena which involve a quantum leap beyond ordinary moral wrongs so that moral terms such as 'corrupt' or 'vicious' do not

suffice. Stephen de Wijze (2002, p.218) argues that evil acts, projects or regimes will manifest this excess in one or more of the following ways i.e. perpetrators engage in deliberate violations of the humanity of others; great harms which render life insufferable are visited gratuitously upon sentient beings; and in collective projects there is an overarching quest to annihilate the moral landscape of our world.

The most systematic onslaught on the concept of evil was launched by Philip Cole (2006). First, he points out that it is a descriptive-evaluative term, but one that is often erroneously treated as if it is an explanatory term, in which case it calls a halt to thinking. Second, it functions to bifurcate humanity into 'good' and 'evil', and since we invariably locate ourselves in the camp of the innocent, this will only fuel our delusion. Third, it cannot be shorn of its theological moorings, so that 'evil ones' become monsters in accordance with archaic demonology, at which point they must be eliminated to restore the moral order. Fourth, in the process of dehumanising those deemed evil, we succumb to our own prejudices and persecutory proclivities and indulge in evil ourselves. Cole (2006) categorises evil as a mythical notion, the counterpart of Satan as a mythological archetype (p. 23). Although he acknowledges the human capacity for doing evil, his verdict is that the moral, psychological and political ramifications of utilising this term are so obnoxious that we should erase it from our vocabulary (p. 21). In essence, 'evil' (word) entrains 'evil' (deed).

Each of these criticisms can be deflected. First, Eve Garrard (2002) questions why evil should operate as an explanatory concept when such a demand is not levelled at other moral

notions such as courage or cowardice, before suggesting that the psychological silencing of moral imperatives may furnish a partial explanation for evil. Second, a dichotomy between good and evil does not feature in accounts by evil-revivalists; on the contrary, the potential for both good and evil is regarded as coterminous with the human species itself (Russell 2010). Third, it follows that there is no need to postulate the existence of monsters, for the face of those who perpetrate evil is one of the many human faces, and potentially if not actually our own face (Garrard 2002). Fourth, the concept of evil has no more theological baggage than the concept of goodness, and no one is proposing to eliminate goodness from our vocabulary on the grounds of its historical and theological roots in God (Formosa 2008).

Nevertheless, there remain pitfalls to be circumnavigated by evil-revivalists. There is an asymmetry between good and evil in the moral spectrum so that whilst 'good' can be applied to the entire positive side, 'evil' has to be reserved for extreme case scenarios. Failure to respect this asymmetry enables evil-*qua*-atrocity to slide into evil-*qua*-immorality (Hugaas 2010) or to encompass the omissions of bystanders paralysed by the evil of others (Vetlesen 2005). Evil remains a valid and valuable notion for atrocities – we cannot extirpate the reality of evil by jettisoning the word which describes it (Formosa 2008), and it is ironical that efforts to 'unname' evil have coincided with an era which has unleashed the greatest evils (Adams & Balfour 1998 p. xi). Evil occupies a special niche in the moral phenomenology of revulsion experienced by victims and witnesses, so that if we no longer experienced this revulsion or had access to a word to express it, our moral sensibilities would be stunted (Garrard & McNaughton 2012).

The territory of evil is also muddied by the fact that evil is both a noun and an adjective. The noun lends itself to reification whereby evil can be treated as a literal entity in the world or metaphysical force in the cosmos, inviting the monstrous conception, whilst the adjective can be understood as a quality of a particular deed, person, regime or ideology which has been subject to the secular processes of social construction (Horne 2008). Evil-revivalists may distance themselves from the 'monstrous' conception by explaining that theoretical and theological terms can be approached metaphorically, so that if I greet a close friend as 'an angel' when she arrives in my hour of need, I do not literally mean that she has winged her way to me from a heavenly abode (Russell 2010).

The interpolation of metaphors may not suffice to expunge theological traces from the concept of evil. For one thing, large segments of the public in multi-cultural societies adhere to a religious worldview (Baker 2008). For another, secular and religious meanings often interpenetrate precisely at those times when we conjure up this appellation, as the encounter with evil transports us into a different zone where ordinary sense-making schema are suspended (Richmond et al. 1999). Here, de Wijze's (2002) injunction to foster a dynamic reflective equilibrium between intuition and reason allows us to countenance the potential relevance of religious insights and imagery. Whilst he proposes a secular conception of evil, he also draws upon religious metaphors to depict its impact, concurring with others that it pollutes the soul and destroys our sense of moral innocence and our trust in a beneficent universe, all of which propel us towards rituals for purification (p. 213, 235). Contemporary scholarship around spirituality could dismantle the dualism between the

religious and the secular insofar as it incorporates this existential-spiritual dimension into the moral landscape (Holloway & Moss 2010).

Evil: A Cartography

Moral Evil

Moral evil unfolds in a relational context where one or more persons intentionally inflicts great harm upon one or more other sentient beings with a disregard for their suffering, in situations where the infliction of harm is gratuitous and undeserved (Zimbardo 2004). The attribution of moral evil is contingent upon the maturity of the perpetrator as an autonomous and responsible human being who exercises choices as to their conduct, so that children and cognitively impaired adults are exempt.

In social work, evil rears its head in cases involving the abuse and murder of children and vulnerable adults. Evil as an adjective has been applied to perpetrators who cause harm (their character, conduct or state of mind); the consequences of harm for victims (trauma suffered or experiential encounter with evil); and the actions or omissions of caring professionals with safeguarding duties. When baby Peter Connelly died as a result of massive injuries inflicted by male carers and camouflaged by his mother, which included a broken spine and rib cage, the British tabloid press designated the perpetrators' deeds, the

infant's suffering and social work failures as evil, and called for the dismissal of those who had 'blood on their hands' (Garboden 2008, n.p.). Liberal evil-invocations are problematic, since no distinction is made between the adults who wilfully maimed and murdered the infant, and practitioners who committed errors of judgement rather than evils. Likewise, press characterisations of the child-killers of James Bulger failed to distinguish between evil acts and evil personhood – whilst the murder was evil, the perpetrators were children whose personhood was still developing, and in a context of maltreatment (Cole 2006).

Some American psychotherapists who work with perpetrators and survivors of domestic abuse have adopted the language of evil, but those with a Christian heritage cleave to a continuum of moral-metaphysical evil. For example, Jeffrey Means and Mary Nelson (2000) work with survivors of abuse in pastoral care settings. In their schema, moral evil consists of a rupturing of the victim's body, psyche and social network (p. 39); metaphysical evil pertains to the destruction of the interconnected web of creation (p. 92); and the internalisation of the destructive-demonic force of perpetrators which engenders the self-hatred and self-harm so prevalent among survivors is construed as 'Satan outside' becoming 'Satan inside' (p. 197). Whilst abstaining from theological premises, Jon Allen (2007) asseverates that there can be a spiritual dimension to trauma, particularly among those abused by clergy whose faith in God, church and cosmos is torn asunder. He highlights the relevance of attachment theory in making sense of the evil of child abuse and its intergenerational transmission, according a pivotal role to mindblindedness (cf. Garrard 2002). An abusive parent is 'blind' to the mind of the suffering child as a result of deficiencies in the cognitive-imaginative-affective capacity known as 'mentalising'; the child

has to 'blind' herself to the mind of the parent in order to eschew the psychologically

intolerable realisation that she is at the mercy of someone who is indifferent to her fate; the

child then grows up 'blind' to significant chunks of her own mind and that of others, and in

the absence of insight-promoting education or therapy, mindblindedness can be recycled

across the generations.

A parent who does unto her children that which has been done unto her, in the absence of

opportunities to learn anything else, is not a paradigmatic case of an evil perpetrator. There

can be a disjuncture between perpetrators and victims whereby the perpetrators are not

evil people even though they cause others to suffer evil through their actions and omissions.

The paradigmatic cases of evil people are those who actively pursue a career in harming

others in spite of opportunities to pursue alternative pathways, such as many serial killers,

recidivist sex offenders, terrorists and dictators. Here, indifference to the suffering of others

often yields to a gratuitous pleasure/power in the suffering of others. This may be

consciously denied after the event (particularly if the perpetrator is on trial in a criminal

court), or camouflaged by recourse to self-justificatory strategies (such as blaming the victim

or appealing to a higher end). But in the act itself of murder, rape or torture there is a

symmetry between the experiences of perpetrator and victim – the victim is aware that the

perpetrator has actively sought to induce suffering in another sentient being in order to

enhance his or her own power and pleasure, and this gratuitous excess is the hallmark of

paradigmatic moral evil (Steiner 2002). Whilst evil careers are still moulded within deprived

or depraved societal incubators (Goldberg 1996; Ivey 2005), the adults are exercising

choices and seem to gravitate towards evil 'as if' it is a magnetic *sui generis* force (Alexander

2001). This betrays a moral inversion of the psyche, an *a priori* allegiance to 'evil' or 'Evil' which has become germane to their self-concept and *raison d'être*.

Administrative Evil

Guy Adams and Danny Balfour (1998) coined the term 'administrative evil' to depict the ways in which public servants can be co-opted into doing evil whilst discharging their duties. It is an insidious form of evil insofar as it is masked by an ostensibly positive language (e.g. eradicating problems with cost-effective solutions) and by the ostensibly neutral routines of working life (i.e. abiding by policy and procedure). It flourishes in modern bureaucracies with hierarchical chains of command-and-control, technical forms of rationality for processing cases and the separation of public and personal lives, all of which hollow out the psychic infrastructure of reflexivity, morality and affectivity. Philosophically, it is quite distinct from moral evil i.e. perpetrators of moral evil choose to do evil of their own free will (autonomous evil) and can become 'addicted' to the power/pleasure this affords them, whereas perpetrators of administrative evil are constrained to do evil at the behest of their employers or the state (heteronomous evil) and gain no gratification from the suffering of others, which may not be directly witnessed in any event (Formosa 2006).

There are at least three types of situations in which social workers *qua* public servants or state employees can be co-opted into doing evil. First, there are totalitarian regimes where the ruling élite is yoked to an evil project and assumes total control over public services. In

National Socialist Germany, caring professionals such as doctors, social workers and teachers were tasked with deciding who was 'unfit to live' and reporting them to Nazi officials, resulting in one million disabled adults and children being referred to euthanasia programmes under the guise of facilitating 'mercy deaths' (Johnson & Moorhead 2011). It is unclear how far caring professionals were committed to the evil ideology of 'purifying' the Aryan 'race' of its 'vermin' (Jews and gypsies) and 'defectives' (disabled and gay people). Medical schools espoused social eugenics and citizens who voted Hitler into power probably subscribed to this (although not 'the Final Solution'); many teachers and social workers may have complied with official dictates in spite of the qualms of their conscience in order to salvage their livelihood ('the survival imperative'); the few midwives and social workers who rescued Jewish infants and adults laid their lives and livelihood on the line, whilst also testifying to the substratum of human autonomy even in totalitarian regimes.

Second, cultural rather than biological genocide has been associated with social work practice in colonial countries. Cindy Blackstock (2009) reports that Canadian law and policy during the 19th and 20th centuries was to remove Indian children from birth families to state-sponsored church schools in order to 'civilise' and 'educate' the Indians, so that the next generation would be 'integrated' into the mainstream culture of the white colonisers (p. 34). Social workers arrived at Indian reserves to take busloads of children to residential schools – where 50% subsequently died of disease or maltreatment. Official documents indicate that social work leaders were aware of the fateful consequences of this policy, but only recommended improvements to residential schools on the assumption that the policy was sound – it has now been condemned as cultural genocide by a Canadian judge (p. 30).

This scenario was replicated elsewhere, in the removal of aboriginal children in Australia (Hugman 2013) and Romany children in Europe (Hugaas 2010). The degree of culpability accruing to social workers in liberal democracies is greater than that of social workers in totalitarian regimes since in the former there is leeway to challenge and change state policies without sacrificing life or livelihood. The dearth of critique underscores the cultural oblivion to racism among white social workers and their enmeshment in state colonialism. Even though many would have witnessed indigenous peoples' suffering, their conscience may have been appeased by cognitive dissonance reduction strategies i.e. when indigenous children are living in poverty and deprived of schooling, social workers who place them in affluent families or educational institutions can convince themselves of the 'good' they are doing and conceal their 'dirty hands' from themselves (cf. de Wijze 2002).

Third, there will be contemporary situations where social workers are colluding with evil. Adams & Balfour (1998) note that administrative evil is most effectively masked when it occurs in our own lifetime and cultural context since '*we wear the mask*' (p. xxii) and that it is typically only unmasked by alterity or posterity. Following their suggestion that it flourishes whenever there are 'surplus populations' to be diminished or disposed of (pp. 144-51), the most likely victims of administrative evil are illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. British social workers are already required to report illegal immigrants to the Home Office; after deportation to their country of origin, some may face poverty or persecution (Humphries 2004). The situation facing asylum seekers is just as precarious, and one unaccompanied minor committed suicide after being unlawfully denied services by social workers who claimed that he was an adult and proposed a plan for his repatriation

(Manchester SCB 2011). Such perfidy, or infidelity to professional ethics, may be spawned by compassion fatigue as much as by compliance with citizenship laws (Austin 2011). The more overstretched services become, the more perfidy beckons; for the burning-out social worker, the option of re-routing some 'cases' to the Home Office may even be welcomed.

Societal Evil

Societal evil is the crucible in which administrative evil foments. There are two forms of societal evil – i.e. cultural-ideological and structural-systemic – which interpenetrate since cultures can sediment into structures or systems which in turn are sustained by ideologies.

Genocide is the archetypal outpouring of cultural evil insofar as the machinery of murder is legitimated by reference to evil ideologies seeking to deracinate specific ethnic groups (Wieviorka 2012). This fits the atrocity paradigm, and the ingenious methods of torturing civilians and prisoners of war expose the gratuitous excess characteristic of evil (de Wijze 2002). It is instructive to recall experiments where college students selected for their robust moral constitution rapidly metamorphosed into sadists when occupying the role of prison guards (Zimbardo 2004). This suggests that whilst evil regimes materialise episodically 'out there', they mirror and trigger impulses already universally 'in here'.

Global capitalism is the prevailing structural form of societal evil. The Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda (2013) examines how the majority of people in affluent societies help to produce structural evil, naming them (along with herself) as 'killers' (p. 4). The causes of this evil are located in the production and profiteering profiles of corporations and the addictive consumption patterns of citizens; the consequences are economic violence for billions of human beings, particularly those in impoverished countries, along with ecological destruction of other species and planet earth. In a series of case studies unveiling our planetary interconnectedness, she illustrates that we participate in a maiming and murdering machine to the extent that we eat meat and fish, purchase and discard more clothes and computers than we need, travel regularly by car or aeroplane and sell our labour to industries which garnish and glamorise such lifestyles.

To interpolate this as structural evil jolts us out of our moral oblivion i.e. our capitulation to the hegemony of a neo-liberal ideology which has naturalised and idealised capitalism. But in my view it would be more accurate to posit an asymmetry between causes and consequences for systemic evil. Privileged Westerners produce grave harms for others as a result of living and labouring in accordance with the ethos of capitalism, but they are ordinary people born into an evil-producing system rather than 'killers'. Their disprivileged counterparts suffer diseases, destitution and even death as a result of this system, and this is indeed evil. The system can only be changed by collective human action, notably by privileged people drastically altering their production and consumption patterns, and a refusal to do so after consciousness-raising publicity renders them complicit in systemic evil.

The appellation of evil should probably be confined to those who organise people-trafficking and those who buy and sell human beings as slaves. Here, a minority of entrepreneurs exert coercive control over millions of adults and children for the sake of maximising profits, whilst remaining indifferent to the humanity of their 'commodities' or 'chattels' (Bales 2005).

Metaphysical Evil

The provenance of metaphysical evil is in religious worldviews which hold that earthly struggles between good and evil reflect a cosmic struggle between the transcendent forces of Good and Evil, personified as God and Satan in Western religions (Vardy & Arliss 2003).

Metaphysical evil has reared a Janus-faced head in cases of child abuse in Britain. On one side there have been allegations of Satanic rituals in which children are sexually assaulted – these emerged in the early 1980s and spread across the country until the mid-1990s. Although there were offenders who identified as Satanists, in most cases social workers superimposed their own beliefs about the reality of Satanic abuse upon young children who were unable to articulate what had actually happened to them in the face of adult inquisitors (La Fontaine 1994). On the other side can be found allegations of children being possessed by evil spirits – these surfaced in the late 1990s among black and minority ethnic communities and continue to this day. This phenomenon involves a syncretism of indigenous beliefs around witchcraft or black magic with Christian or Islamic beliefs about

Satanic evil and demonic possession. Families experiencing misfortune may locate its causes in a supra-natural realm; if they believe that an evil spirit has invaded one of their children, they consult a religious leader; and if prayers of deliverance fail to cure the problem, they may resort to tribal remedies to release or destroy the evil spirit by cutting, starving or strangulating the child (Stobart 2006).

These cases lend substance to Cole's (2006) thesis since believing in (metaphysical) evil can itself bring (secular) evils into being. I have argued elsewhere that social workers should maintain an agnostic stance on the reality of metaphysical evil (Humphrey 2014). In principle, any metaphysical realm is beyond ordinary human ways of knowing derived from our senses and sciences and therefore also beyond the purview of social workers *qua* social workers. In practice, social workers can only adjudicate upon the harms inflicted or endured by human beings with reference to empirical evidence, and excursions into metaphysical evil divert us from client-centred and evidence-based practice.

Metaphors for Evil

A metaphorical language is often more appropriate than a literal one since metaphors illuminate experiential realities which cannot easily be captured by conceptual schema whilst eschewing the dangers of literal evil-invocations which transport us into the realm of monsters and metaphysics. It can also help to resolve the anomaly whereby there may only be a minority of genuinely evil people and projects in the world, but there are evils built into

systems and cultures which are created and sustained by human beings, and ordinary folk with a moral conscience can collude with societal evils whilst parading their innocence.

In Jungian psychology, 'the shadow' is the metaphor for that which has been disavowed by human beings on the grounds that it conflicts with their idealised image of themselves, their group or their nation-state. There is a subterranean shadow-side to every individual and collectivity and the human species itself; whilst glimpses of our individual shadow may be fleeting unless we attune our consciousness to the logic and language of the unconscious, collective shadows are emblazoned on our blood-stained history (Daniels 2005, pp. 72-74). This sensitises us to the universal human potential for evil, since harbouring a shadow flows from the multi-layering of the psyche which is the cornerstone of our humanity; we are all capable of thinking, feeling and acting in ways which are objectionable to our conscience, often whilst refuting this publicly or even privately. It can also demarcate boundaries around genuinely evil people and projects and carve out a sanctuary for evil or Evil as a noun. Evil people are epitomised by a role-reversal between their conscious self and their subterranean shadow i.e. serial killers, dictators and Satanists indulge and glorify their shadow which becomes their conscious persona, leaving residues of moral conscience as their despised shadow (Ivey 2005). In the process they substitute evil for good and their worldly pursuits embody this inversion, so an evil regime parades Evil as the Highest Good. The omnipresence of the shadow means that evil regimes can seduce the shadow-side of individuals who do not warrant the 'evil' nomenclature (and who in other circumstances would be 'good') and social groups with positive ideals (such as caring professionals).

A metaphorical language of evil is also more congruent with anti-oppressive practice. It paves the way towards a positive engagement with clients who appear to act 'as if' possessed by a demonic-destructive force – the 'as if' clause provides a reflective space for them to ponder on their own deeds and a safety-net preventing them from plunging into the abyss of the literally demonic. It has been mobilised to therapeutic ends by Carl Goldberg (1996) who specialises in treating violent offenders. He discovered that some clients were convinced that they harboured a 'demon' so he engineered encounters with this alter ego. For example, one client who saw a demon when he looked in the mirror was invited to identify this face from portraits of demons in medieval art. Therapist and client then embarked upon a dialogue with this demonic alter ego which had to be persuaded to relinquish control over the client in order to make room for a more benevolent personality (pp. 89-109). In Jungian terms, when there is a creeping colonisation of the self by the shadow, the shadow has to be permitted to disclose itself and declare its own truth before being silenced by an alliance of the therapist and the client's conscious persona, all in the service of enhancing self-consciousness and liberating the voice of conscience.

The foregoing does not entail that evil itself is only a metaphor. Evil is just as 'real' as good, but both exist in our minds as Platonic Ideas (in noun form) or normative evaluations at polar ends of the moral spectrum (in adjectival form). 'Good' and 'evil' do not inhere in anyone or anything, but they furnish the ultimate parameters for all morality, and by pledging ourselves to good or evil we disclose our idealised conceptions of self and world and take steps towards their actualisation. When Good and Evil are ideas or ideals

transcending our subjectivity and empirical reality, it can be appropriate to capitalise their noun-forms, without necessarily hypostatising or theologising them.

Social Work: Practical Implications

International codes of ethics revolve around our intentions to safeguard human rights, promote social justice and sustain integrity under conditions where these are often undermined (IFSW & IASSW 2004), as encapsulated in the mantra of anti-oppressive practice (Clifford & Burke 2009). But good and evil are notable for their absence. As superordinate concepts they are implicit in these codes insofar as they envelop all other moral phenomena, but they also transcend other phenomena, and we should make room for both types of excess in principle if we aspire to rise to their challenges in practice.

The spectre of evil highlights three lacunae in social work ethics. First, there is no recognition of the omnipresent possibility of colluding with evil. Indeed, professional socialisation into anti-oppressive practice may encourage us to turn away from our collective shadow, clothing us in a naïve moral piety which may remain intact long after the cloth has been tattered and torn (Blackstock 2009). Second, our ethical codes do not attest to the irreducible moral responsibility of mature human beings or the probability that some human beings will choose evil rather than good. The moral clauses in them pertain to social workers who are enjoined to display the virtues of integrity and compassion, but elsewhere ethics is trumped by politics, and by emphasising the oppressive societal contexts within

which service users and carers can perpetrate harm, we appear to excuse harm-doing and to deprive adults of moral responsibility (Garbarino & Hershberger 1980). Third, there is no scope to countenance the extreme evil of atrocities or the supreme good of supererogation. Genocide goes beyond individual human rights violations, and in totalitarian regimes there is an attempt to destroy the spontaneity, creativity and morality of humanity itself. Goodness under these conditions goes beyond ordinary moral duty as it requires heroic acts of sabotaging the *status quo* which court the prospect of self-sacrifice (Steiner 2002).

Paradoxically, the relevance of evil to social work ethics does not require us to have recourse to the name in everyday practice settings. This can be explained by a critique of Jon Hugaas' (2010) argument that if evil occupies a central place in the social work lexicon, victims will benefit from an explicit recognition of the moral evil they have suffered, and managers will have access to a clear criterion for prioritising cases. Psychotherapists who enlist the concept of evil in their theoretical work advocate caution about its deployment in practice. Survivors can be eager to cast their victimhood as evil, but this often exacerbates the psychic defence of splitting and militates against deeper realisations about the universal human potential for good and evil (Means & Nelson 2000), and a metaphorical language is the only recipe for working therapeutically with offenders (Goldberg 1996). In statutory safeguarding work, the notion of evil may do us a disservice insofar as the existing panoply of terms such as harm, risk, vulnerability, duties under civil law and breaches of criminal law proffer a more multifaceted and multi-professional approach to prioritising workloads.

The contribution of evil-revivalism to professional practice resides more in the recognition that our institutions can sanction harm-doing whilst camouflaging it from us. If this is an artefact of modern bureaucracies, restructuring social work into small community-based teams would be a necessary if not sufficient antidote. If it targets surplus populations, then practitioners need to ask "Who in this community might be regarded as 'surplus' and how can we protect them?" Certainly our regulators as outsiders have a crucial role in unearthing harm-doing and tracing it to its source (Preston-Shoot 2011).

In terms of remedying historical harms, Adams & Balfour (2008) explain that only restorative justice forums can heal wounds and only the re-education of future generations can prevent a repetition of history. The Reconciliation in Child Welfare programme in Canada is a restorative justice forum modelled on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa where indigenous people tell their truth to social workers who acknowledge their own errors and the resulting evils as the prerequisite for redeeming relationships and reconfiguring a culturally sensitive social work practice (Blackstock 2009). By listening to those who have been harmed by our predecessors, we can appreciate the magnitude gap which separates the vantage-points of victims and perpetrators (Baumeister & Vohs 2004). There is wisdom and compassion in imaginatively trading places here i.e. if we had been involuntary clients, we would have construed social work interventions as evil; if they had been non-indigenous social workers, they could have done as our forebears did without recognising it as evil.

The education of future generations of social workers revolves around deepening critical reflection and extending skills in combating institutional perversions; these are twinned since ongoing critical reflection acts as a deterrent to our own propensity to become institutionalised employees (Kerwin 2012). Critical reflection interrogates the hidden motives of governments and employers – are they driven by human rights and social justice, or by prejudices and budgets? It turns this critical gaze upon ourselves – are we able to entertain our own potential for evil, or willing to jettison our livelihood to salvage our conscience? Michael Preston-Shoot (2011) recommends that educators prepare students to recognise and respond to institutionalised harm-doing, with a focus upon whistle-blowing duties. I would add that we must first come face-to-face with the ancestral shadow of our profession, which may prove to be our best teacher.

Conclusion

Evil-literacy acquires urgency for social workers when grave harms experienced by service users, along with their personal, professional, societal or cosmic sources, are transliterated as evil in everyday vernacular, secular scholarship and religious discourses. It is impossible to extirpate this term from our language; good and evil are antinomies linked by an umbilical cord and our sensitivity to one may be a barometer of our sensitivity to the other. Indeed, Kevin Bales (2005 pp. 27-37) argues that advances in human rights have been dependent upon witnesses assuming the vantage-point of victims who perceive the evils done unto them, rather than accepting protestations to the contrary from perpetrators.

Importantly, evil-producing conduct is more likely to betray a non-reflexive conformity to an evil context generated by capitalism, caste or culture than an evil character *per se*, but in the absence of framing the conduct and context as evil, it is far more likely to be reproduced.

To recommend that social workers come face-to-face with evil is a metaphorically framed multi-levelled injunction. On the one hand, we need to expose our own shadows and those of others to the light of consciousness long before they overturn moral conscience. Acknowledgement of the shadow as one of the interior faces of all members of the human species unites us with service users who may have temporarily surrendered to their shadow, and awareness of the collective shadow of our profession distances us from an illusory moral purity. On the other hand, we need to recognise genuinely evil people and projects where the shadow sits permanently on the throne and dictates the highest ideals. Only then can we bring both the shadow and moral conscience face-to-face with genuine evil, and become cognisant of the ways in which the latter can seduce our shadow-side (by appealing to any latent prejudices or authoritarian tendencies) *and* our moral conscience (by reframing evil as good and couching it in terms of goods we have already signed up to such as law, duty or social progress). This is a duplex dynamic in which we are simultaneously seduced *and* betrayed; it is the springboard for betraying ourselves and our service users. Most of us inhabit the grey zone of good-and-evil most of the time, which is why we are so susceptible to confusion and co-optation. To come face-to-face with evil is to dissipate some of this confusion and reduce the prospects of co-optation; here I depart from Cole (2006) since the more we shun secular evil (as a concept), the more secular evil (as a reality) can have us in its grip.

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