Journal of Futures Studies

New Futures and the Eternal Struggle between Good and Evil

Wendell Bell*

Although we live in a modern world dominated in many ways by the rationality of science and technology, age-old millennial beliefs in the supernatural, good and evil, a coming apocalyptic upheaval, and a day of judgment are still widely held throughout the world. Even among non-religious people, similar beliefs exist, especially in political ideologies. Focusing on evil, I contend that most evil is not the result of malevolent monsters or demented individuals. Rather, most evildoers are ordinary people, like you and me. Some people, usually reluctantly, use evil means to achieve their ends. Other people, righteously convinced that they are good, demonize their enemies and feel justified in doing horrendous things to them in the name of destroying the evil that they personify. Doing so, they start a tragic circle of escalating retaliation, cruelty and violence. But people can learn to restrain their evil acts and some principles of futures studies can help them. The principles are foresight that encourages people to consider the future consequences of their actions, an inclusive ethic that invites an objective appraisal of those consequences without demonizing one's opponents, and critical realism that leads people to question their own beliefs.

* **Wendell Bell**, Department of Sociology, Yale University, P.O. Box 208265, New Haven, CT 06520-8265, U.S.A.; email: wendell.bell@yale.edu.

Introduction

In 1970, when he published Future Shock, Toffler told his readers that they were in danger of being buried by ever-accelerating social changes. Changes, he said, had become electrifyingly fast, outstripping people's images of the future and their abilities to adapt to them, much less to control them. People were being shocked and surprised by change, by unwanted and unanticipated consequences of their actions, and by untamed forces beyond their understanding and control. Toffler argued, as had H. G. Wells decades earlier, that people must start thinking about and anticipating the future.

Despite the rise of a field of futures studies, despite the spread of futures thinking in both government and corporations, despite the increased consciousness of threats to the environment and many local and international efforts aimed at conservation, despite the growing consensus about the need for sustainable development, and despite the hundreds of articles and books about a variety of technological revolutions—despite all these things—Toffler's warning not only remains true more than thirty years later, but is, perhaps, more urgent than ever.

Recent technological and social changes have many people reeling. Current developments in biotechnology and genetic engineering, information technology, communications, e-commerce, internet dot-coms, robotics, nanotechnologies or moletronics (molecular electronics), globalization, medical diagnosis and treatment, human potential, energy technologies, and knowledge of the universe would have been, and often were, the stuff of fantasy not many decades ago. These - and a thousand other developments, both large and small - are changing our lives. They threaten many people, not least of all because they bring uncertainties and unknowns, making people feel that the world is becoming chaotic and that they are losing control of their lives.

Yet there are other changes that are not occurring fast enough for some of us. I refer to such things as achieving environmental sustainability; lowering birthrates in some places and reducing the increase in per capita consumption in others; spreading democratic participation and public liberties; generally accepting the principles of human rights and responsibilities for both men and women, including freeing women more fully so that they may have lives of their own choosing; providing basic sanitation and fresh water to people everywhere; reducing illiteracy and extreme socio-economic inequalities; adopting a global ethic and creating a world community of concern for other people; preventing aggression

and violence and constructing a world at peace; building a win-win world in which there is respect for the freedom, well-being, and dignity of every individual; and encouraging a self-identity among peoples everywhere that, without replacing local identities, includes a sense of being a member of the human species (Bell, 1999).

Of course, for many people these changes - or potential changes - are just as threatening, sometimes more threatening, than rapid technological changes. For they not only disturb comfortable routines, they also challenge traditional beliefs and values and bring into question the very purposes and meanings of people's lives.

Purposes

In this paper, I discuss some of those traditional beliefs that still remain with us after centuries, indeed after millennia, of human existence and that still are influencing the future of the human community. I discuss a set of beliefs known as millennialism, focusing specifically on a major component of it, the problem of evil. Although the idea of evil may be of doubtful utility as an analytic concept for the social sciences, it is of great - perhaps major - importance in understanding how, even today with all our science and technology, most people nearly everywhere interpret their world and how they act in it.

Stimulated by some recent writings of the social psychologist, Roy F. Baumeister (1997), I explore four related topics:

1. millennial myths and how they relate to beliefs about evil;
2. the nature of evil;
3. how evildoing can be reduced, if not entirely prevented; and
4. how futures thinking can help to restrain evildoing.

Millennial Beliefs

Millennialism, in its most limited meaning, refers to a belief that the Millennium, as described in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, is coming. "This text, otherwise known as the Book of the Apocalypse . . . consists of a series of fantastic visions of the End of Time in which the forces of Christ and Satan do battle." "The Millennium" refers to the thousand-year period during which the battle ceases, Satan is caged, while Christ and his saints reign on Earth. "Millenarians" in the strict sense, thus, are people who expect "this thousand-year para-

dise to dawn at any moment" and who also believe that "only they will witness, and survive, the End" (Thompson, 1998: xi-xiii).

Although specific details differ, millennial beliefs wherever they occur contain a core of similar ideas. They exist in almost all religions, both in those that are well established such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as in the eschatological expectations of sects and extremist cults. Moreover, this core of similar ideas may go back to the dawn of human existence. We have evidence that they existed at least 7000 years ago among the ancient Egyptians. They existed, also before Christ, among the Mesopotamians, Vedic Indians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Indo-Iranians, Canaanites, and Zoroastrians, as well as many other groups

One of the common themes of millennialism is the conviction that a supernatural world exists alongside the natural world of everyday human life. From the earliest times, the stories of how the world is and how it came to be are filled with supernatural beings. There are gods - or in later times at least a God - and a variety of spirits (sometimes of ancestors), angels, demons, devils, and monsters that are viewed as influencing human behavior and events in this Earthly world. Another view that is central to millennial beliefs is the conception that both the supernatural and natural worlds are dominated by a mighty, continuous struggle between the forces of good and evil, a struggle sometimes described with "scenes of stomach-churning violence and cruelty" (Thompson, 1998: xi). Evil spirits and their human allies are viewed as a constant threat to order and security.

Also, among otherwise diverse religious beliefs there is a striking agreement about how good and evil are defined. The good usually includes, among other values, order, justice, fertility, abundance, bodily nourishment, industriousness, generosity, knowledge, wisdom, truth, incorruptibility, fulfilling one's obligations to others, courage, cooperation, and the importance of human life itself. Their opposites-from chaos to death - are evil. Many such values, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Bell, 1997, vol. 2), can be objectively justified as being the right values by which humans ought to live, now and in the future.

Millennial beliefs also include a belief in prophecy itself, a belief that foreknowledge of what will happen in the future and when it will happen is possible, often through some omen or a message either from a supernatural being or its human spokesperson.

Additionally, these millennial prophecies include a belief in some coming End of Time, Final Judgment Day, or the Return of the Messiah. Moreover, it is coming soon. People are told to prepare for an apocalyp-

tic upheaval, some sudden - often violent - change, a final confrontation between good and evil in which, at long last and forevermore, the good will be victorious.

Included in these prophecies, additionally, is the belief that, when this End of Time comes, people will be judged on how they have lived their lives; they will be sorted and divided into evildoers who have sinned and the righteous who have lived morally upright lives. The evildoers will be condemned and punished, horribly tormented, and destroyed. The righteous, to the contrary, will be rewarded by eternal life in some terrestrial or celestial afterlife utopia (Boyer, 1995; Thompson, 1998). For the people who live their lives rightly, there is the promise of salvation and often of immortality.

These stories are familiar to us all. In one form or another and with one cast of characters or another, most of us grew up with them. Even in homes where they were not taught to us directly as received truth, we learned about them from the popular culture around us. But what do these beliefs, except as artifacts for our objective research, have to do with us modern people today?

Indeed, modernity means scientific thinking and, more generally, rationality. We have been told that it leads to the dissolution of traditional mythic worldviews and the weakening of the authority of the world's religions (Habermas, 1987). Educated, modern people are expected to be enlightened, to be devoted to discovering or formulating the facts of the natural and social worlds through empirical observation and to be free of such supernatural nonsense. The occasional odd physicist who embraces a new cosmotheology after deciding that he has discovered God in some physical theory of the universe is certainly the exception (Harrison and Dick, 2000). Surely, these chiliastic worldviews have relatively little influence on human actions today and will have less in the future.

Although I wish that this were the case, the truth is that, despite the rationalization of many spheres of modern life, many, if not most, people in the world believe in these chiliastic expectations. Most of all, they believe in a world of good and evil.

With the exception of the belief in a supernatural world, many thoroughly secularized people, including many members of the academy, believe in comparable propositions. Millennial themes, for example, have their counterparts in many ideologies of political and social movements, including Marxism, modern nationalism, environmentalism, and the peace movement - to mention only a few examples. The ideologies of

such movements identify an existing world in which certain things are wrong, unjust, harmful, or evil (such as the exploitation of the working class, the political oppression of a colonial people, air and water pollution, or organized aggression and violence against others). Although beliefs in the supernatural are not part of them (even though a New Age spiritualism may be), these ideological convictions may be held with all the fervor and emotion - even fanaticism-that devout people express for their religious faith. Although the evils that such secular ideologies identify are presumed to exist in this one everyday real world, they are nonetheless evils.

These secular ideologies also contain a vision of some kind of a coming upheaval or significant change in the old order, although not necessarily violent, and an impending future renewal, largely occurring through the actions of true believers of the ideological movement and with the participation of their enlightened followers. They contain, additionally, an image of a new world of social justice and order, individual freedom and equality of citizenship, a sustainable life-supporting Earth free of pollution, peace and harmony - a terrestrial, this worldly, even scientific, utopia where all that was evil in the old order will be gone. Thus, in the broadest sense, millennialism can refer to any belief that the end of some aspect of the present, evil world is - and ought to be - coming and that the changes will produce a better, if not perfect, world that will exist in some other place or in this place at some future time.

The Nature of Evil

As we have seen, a core element of millennial beliefs and a major force in motivating and shaping human action is the pervasive view of the world as a struggle between good and evil. Among intellectuals and academics, such as ourselves, this idea may appear to be much too simple, too utterly devoid of sophistication, too lacking in intricate theorizing, and too bare of polysyllabic conceptualizing to carry any significant explanatory power for our understanding of human behavior. Although it, indeed, may be simple, it is also one of the most powerful of all underlying folk beliefs shaping human behavior. In every society on every continent on Earth, political, religious, educational, and other leaders urge people to seek the good and to oppose the evil. Everywhere, judgments of what is good and what is bad are the most important judgments that people make and the most central to their lives (Osgood et al., 1975). Moreover, this overall view of the world as a mighty struggle between

good and evil encourages people to believe in the evil of others.

But what is evil? In seeking an answer, I rely heavily on Baumeister (1997), although I will indicate a few minor disagreements with his view. His book on evil rests upon his integrative study of the relevant literature, including the findings of empirical social research. Although it is less complex and comprehensive than his masterpiece, *Meanings of Life* (1991), it is a reliable, scholarly work.

For the sake of this discussion, I will define evil as human actions or inactions that harm other people. Although such harm often prominently includes violence and physical harm, it can also include other forms of cruelty that cause suffering in others, such things as stealing, treating others unfairly, humiliating others, betraying or threatening others, oppressing others psychologically, lying, and so forth. It does not include all forms of pain inflicted on people, however. For example, a dentist or a doctor may have to hurt his patient in the course of providing treatment, but his purpose - and, if he is competent, the result - is beneficial for the patient's health.

Contrary to what Baumeister (1997: 8) says at one point, I don't define evil as necessarily the result of an intentional act to harm others. Of course, people often impute evil intentions when people harm them, even when no harm is intended. I include unintentional harm in the definition of evil, however, not for that reason, but rather because people ought to be held accountable when their irresponsible or incompetent acts harm other people, even if they do not intend to do harm, as in the case of a person who causes the death of another person in an automobile accident because he was talking on his cell phone while driving. I add "inaction" to the definition because there are times when the choice not to act - as in the case of a bystander who witnesses an evil act and does not come to the aid of the victim - may also cause harm to others.

Think of evil as a continuum, ranging from those acts that are horribly grotesque and monstrous in the harm and suffering that they cause to those that are relatively minor. Think of evil, too, as a choice that people make, even though the choice is frequently situated within a context of group pressures and social conventions.

Thus, evil involves the infliction of harm, sometimes intentional, on people. But its causes have been obscured by the myth of pure evil. Evil is not generally driven by some force or person relentlessly seeking "to inflict harm, with no positive or comprehensible motive, deriving enjoyment from the suffering of others." It is not the seeking out of "unsuspecting, innocent victims from among the good people of the

world." Nor is the victim always completely innocent. Nor is evil some eternal other seeking to throw the world into chaos (Baumeister, 1997: 75). Rather, evil is often the result of understandable acts of well-meaning, decent people, such as you and me.

This is the most important point: the production of evil is for the most part the result of the behavior of ordinary people. Only "a tiny proportion of this century's massive killings are attributable to the actions of those people we call criminals, or crazy people, or socially alienated, or even, people we identify as evil people. The vast majority of killings were actually carried out by plain folk in the population" (Katz, 1993: 10). The most terrible deeds are often done while people are engaged in the mundane tasks of every day life. For example, this was Hannah Arendt's judgment in her famous study of Adolf Eichmann. During his trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann was depicted as a monster, the very embodiment of evil, for his role in the Nazi extermination program. Yet Arendt (1964) concluded that even the horrendous evil that he did was banal. Looking at the details of his life and his unspeakable crimes, she reached a crucial insight: Eichmann was not some perverted crackpot or demonic monster. He was, rather, the most ordinary of human beings.

Thus, the idea of evil as fun and of hurting other people as a source of joy for the evildoer, contrary to popular conceptions, does not account for many evil acts. Baumeister (1997: 205) concludes, for example, that although sadistic pleasure exists it is relatively rare, acquired gradually, "and responsible for only a minority of evil."

Instrumental Evil

Two other types of evil are more prevalent. One is instrumental evil. It is the use of harmful acts as a means of achieving some goal. The goal itself might be perfectly acceptable - such as getting money, property, political advantage, a passing grade on a test, and so forth. Thus, if acceptable means were used to achieve such goals, the behavior would not be considered evil. But, under normal circumstances, when people engage in lying, stealing, political tyranny and torture, assassination, warfare, murder, and other harmful acts to achieve their goals - even socially approved goals - then they are committing immoral, evil acts.

Why do people use harmful acts to achieve their goals? Because people often view such acts as being easier, more readily accessible, or quicker than using legitimate means. They view deception, bribes, threats, or

the use of violence as requiring little skill, patience, institutional credentials, or long-term planning compared to acceptable ways of doing things. Generally, people would prefer to use legitimate rather than illegitimate or illegal means. But when they view acceptable means as being too difficult, too slow, or impossible for themselves, they reluctantly turn to harmful means.

In general, evil is not very effective as a means of fulfilling long-range objectives (Baumeister, 1997: 109). The exception is that evil is effective at making people suffer and sometimes in establishing dominance over them, i.e., to gain and maintain power. Thus, although many aggressor nations, armed rebels, and revolutionaries have been defeated, others have succeeded in acquiring land or establishing states and governments, some of which remain in existence today. An example is the Revolutionary War that helped establish the United States of America. But the "successes," as we all know, have often been as costly in death and destruction for the victors as they have been for the vanquished. Surely, the human community would have been better off without the suffering and death, the tortures, the savage brutalities, the genocides, the rapes, the starvations, the dislocations, and the other miseries that occurred during the 20th century alone.

Idealistic Evil

Also accounting for a sizeable proportion of evil acts is idealism. Idealistic evil allows people not only to do violence against others, but also to believe that they are, in fact, doing the right thing. True believers define themselves and their causes as just and good. They define individuals and groups who oppose them as their enemies. They tend to marginalize, dehumanize, and demonize them. As a result, they deprive their enemies of having any truth, decency, or legitimacy (Doob, 1978). Looking through the lens of the myth of pure evil, they see them as having no valid, comprehensible reason for their evil acts. In such a perspective, the "ordinary restraints that apply even to severe conflicts may be waived" (Baumeister, 1997: 186) and it may become one's sacred or patriotic duty to destroy the evil other.

This process of thinking can lead morally conscious and ethical people to commit hideous deeds against others, while believing that they are doing God's or Allah's or some secular ideology's righteous work. In idealistic evil, thus, the very traits that ordinarily contribute to making a person a good and decent member of the community, such as having a

conscience and strength of character, "operate to spur the perpetrator on to more severe and intense deeds" (Baumeister, 1997: 170).

The Christian Crusades of the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries are examples. In their efforts to regain the Holy Lands from the Muslims, the Christians killed, maimed, tortured, and committed unspeakable acts of cruelty, all in the belief that their brutal violence was divinely sanctioned. They were, according to their view at the time, behaving in an exemplary fashion, fulfilling their sacred obligation.

The same can be said of most of the ethnic and political conflicts throughout the world. From Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, and the Basques of Spain to Cambodia, West Timor, Chechenya, and the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq to the Palestinians and Israelis, Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and the ultra-right paramilitaries and the Marxist guerrillas in Colombia, to mention only a few of the violent confrontations that have occurred in recent years, each side believes itself to be in the right and the other side in the wrong. Each side sees itself as good and the other side as evil. Extremists on each side feel justified in doing the most horrendous harm to their enemies, including rape, hacking off hands and feet, bombing of public places, and wanton killing of combatants and noncombatants alike. Righteousness leads to menace, malice, and mutual carnage.

In many parts of the world, Hitler and other leaders of Nazi Germany remain in people's memories as prime candidates for recent history's worst devils. Many people believe that there was no punishment too dreadful for them because of their crimes against humanity. The ghost of Hitler appeared again during the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. For example, I received an e-mail message from Slobodan Vukovic, President of the Serbian Sociological Association, in which he compared the NATO attack to 1941 when "Hitler's Germany bombed Serbian towns and spread death" and to World War II, more generally, when 1,100,000 Serbs were killed. He protested the bombing, calling it, among other things, an act of "barbarism" and a "genocidal campaign against the Serbian people." He accused NATO of using prohibited weapons, killing close to 10,000 civilian victims, and bombing schools and hospitals. He attacked U.S. President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and other Western politicians.

Such demonization was a mirror image of how NATO countries were depicting the Serbs at the same time. The media in Europe and the United States demonized the Yugoslavian President, Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs, labeling Milosevic as another Hitler for his dictatorial

and oppressive actions and calling him "the butcher of Belgrade," while referring to the Serbs as monsters for their ethnic cleansings, rapes, and mass murders of Muslims in Bosnia and of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The NATO countries and the Serbs demonized each other, each side tragically playing out yet again the ancient drama of the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Victims, Perpetrators, and the Escalation of Evil

Although Baumeister (1997: 128-168) may be correct in classifying revenge as a distinct form of evil, I see it more as idealistic evil. Revenge, after all, is a response. Victims retaliate in order to right a wrong. They want to even the score, to restore justice by punishing the perpetrator for the harm he or she has done to them. Moreover, the principle of revenge may enter into the relationship between perpetrator and victim, no matter what the motivation for the initial harmful act. Acts of instrumental evil, for example, can inspire its victims to retaliate against the evildoer.

Let's consider some of the factors at work. First, perpetrators tend to minimize the harm that they do to others, while victims tend to exaggerate the harm that is done to them. Baumeister (1997: 294) calls this the "magnitude gap" between perpetrators and victims. As a result of this magnitude gap, when victims retaliate, they often do so with a harmful act that is more severe than the perpetrator's was in the first place.

When revenge is taken, roles are reversed. The victimizer now sees himself as the victim. He, in turn, tends to exaggerate the harm done to him by the original victim, to be affronted by its unwarranted excess, and to strike back raising the level of harm still more. "Just when one side thinks things are even, the other side thinks it has been the victim of an outrage that cries out for retaliation" (Baumeister, 1997: 294).

Second, as we have seen, victims tend to see harmful acts against them as arbitrary, unwarranted, and deliberately malicious. Perpetrators, to the contrary, often see their acts not only as minor but also as quite reasonable and perfectly understandable.

Third, perpetrators use a short time span, while victims tend to use a long time span to justify their sense of victimization and to justify their response. Perpetrators say, "Let bygones be bygones." Victims say, "Never forget." For example, Serbs who committed atrocities in Bosnia in the late 20th century justified their actions by portraying themselves

as victims going back to Turkish atrocities against the Serbs in 1389. Their present-day Muslim victims were mystified, wondering what that distant past had to do with them.

Fourth, a time perspective also enters into harmful acts against others in another way. The use of cruelty and violence to solve a problem or to resolve a dispute is often a victory of the present over the future. People who cannot think ahead beyond the immediate present are most likely to view an evil action as rational. Yet other people who stop and evaluate the consequences of their actions for their own future, even for tomorrow or next week as well as for the rest of their lives, are more likely to refrain from harmful acts against others (Baumeister, 1997: 123). Of course, people who think too far into the future - say hundreds of years - may not be restrained by the future, because, by then, they imagine themselves dead and beyond caring.

Fifth, whatever the perceived underlying cause or the justification of harmful acts against others may be, the proximate cause frequently is a loss of self-control (Baumeister, 1997). Emotional distress breaks down self-control and tends to wipe out any thought of future consequences. It is a flashpoint of instant action. A person's entire body chemistry may change. No doubt, during the long period of human development, such momentary disregard for the future must have been of survival value for human groups. Rage, for example, blinds people to their own vulnerability and to a normal concern for their own safety, allowing them to ferociously enter combat against opponents. In today's world of large-scale, complex society, however, rage is almost always dysfunctional. Alcohol consumption sometimes leads to aggressive acts precisely because alcohol reduces self-restraint and the ability to think through the future implications of one's actions.

Sixth, aggressive acts often escalate if the aggressor is allowed to get away with his harmful acts. A perpetrator - whether an individual or a repressive government - can grow more violent unless some intervention is made to stop his aggression. For example, after reviewing the work of experimental social psychologists on bargaining games, Hornstein et al. (1971: 538) conclude that " . . . subjects who are exposed to a non-violent other will consistently exploit the other's non-violence." This creates a dilemma in that on the one hand the victim must respond in order to stop being harmed but on the other hand must not respond so vigorously as to set in motion the escalating and potentially endless cycle of retribution. Clearly, there is a judicious balance between the two, letting the perpetrator know that he has done a wrong, harmful act but

keeping a counter harmful act to a minimum.

Seventh, and finally, the structuring of society into collectivities-corporations, states, government agencies, military units, schools, churches, hospitals, art centers, universities, and thousands of other complex organizations (which, as a sociologist, I regard as the *sine qua non* of many achievements of human civilizations) - nonetheless also contributes to the production of evil. It does so through the diffusion of responsibility and the isolation of top decision-makers from face-to-face contact with the harmful actions they may foster. The division of labor in large organizations, for example, divides and obscures responsibilities, making it sometimes difficult to know who exactly is responsible for what. Also, the separation of the decision-makers from the persons carrying out harmful acts in many organizations allows the blame for wrongful acts to be diluted and shifted to others.

At the other extreme, the people who personally do the harm in organizations are only following orders, and following orders, it must be remembered, is ordinarily a positive value embodying both trust and loyalty (Baumeister, 1997). Also, taking part in an evil act as a member of an organization, such as American soldiers at My Lai in Vietnam or ordinary Germans during the Holocaust, tends to suppress individual and private doubts. Even transient groups such as street crowds contribute to the diffusion of responsibility. Although a bystander who is alone may come to the aid of a victim, the exact same person as part of a large crowd of bystanders may not act.

Some Implications for the Restraint of Evil

Must we simply accept evil as an inevitable product of human nature and an unavoidable cost of organized social life or can we hope to take some positive actions to reduce the number of evil acts in the world? Can we, both as individuals and members of groups, do anything to effectively suppress the escalating cycle of vengeance and counter vengeance?

The answers, of course, are yes, although collective solutions at the international level may be implemented only slowly and too late to prevent hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of needless deaths and much suffering in the coming century (Singer and Wildavsky, 1993). We are dealing, after all, with human predispositions and maxims of behavior that come from eons of biological evolution of the human species and

from millennia of the social evolution of human groups. Obviously, many human adaptations were successful or we humans would not be here now. But they are retentions of what worked in a past world different from today and even more different from the coming future. Some old solutions, the insights and learning of human experience, may be as useful as ever. Others may be dysfunctional in today's world, such as the continued value placed on high reproductive rates in some parts of the world and the reliance on aggression and the use of force to resolve conflicts. In order to reduce evil, people may have to invent new social mechanisms and ethical systems.

We can hope that we humans can do so. The foundation for such hope is found in the knowledge that evil is, as we have seen, largely the result of the behavior of ordinary people. Thus, we can try to reduce evil acts by focusing our efforts on the average person and the mundane. People can learn to turn away from evil just as they can learn other things. They can learn self-restraint. Remember that no "alien powers are at work in evil, merely human beings responding to the context in which they find themselves and making decisions on their own. This knowledge can empower us to take charge of our lives in realms of evil, just as we do in other realms" (Katz, 1993: 126).

On the level of supraregional and global cooperation, hundreds, if not thousands, of treaties and agreements have been written and ratified, dealing with everything from peace and disarmament to protecting the environment. Also, although they are by no means fully adequate, the many agencies of the United Nations and other international institutions, including nongovernmental organizations, are a promising beginning. They provide a variety of forums for planning action concerning common problems and the resolution of conflicts. One important achievement that these developments share is the fact that people are talking to each other—people of different countries, languages, religions, and cultures—and issues of disagreement are being clarified just as many mutual understandings are being reached.

Three Futurist Principles for Restraining Evil

There are at least three major concerns of futures studies that may be of use in reducing evil. They are the principles of foresight, the principles of a universal and inclusive ethic, and a theory of knowledge that emphasizes the uncertainty of knowledge.

First, people can be taught to forecast the future consequences of

their actions and, if they do, evil acts may be reduced. But a proviso must be added. People have to be reasonably accurate in foreseeing such consequences. If they have totally unrealistic images of the future consequences of their contemplated actions, then they may harm others simply because of their erroneous forecasts, the way doctors sometimes used to damage their patients by bleeding them under the false belief that such treatment would cure them. Also, if people can foresee no outcomes to their actions that will affect them and people they care about, then they have nothing to evaluate and make judgments about. To make intelligent decisions about how to act, people first need to foresee with some accuracy what will happen as a result of their actions.

Second, to make the right choices and decisions to act, people need not only foresight but also an objective basis for moral judgment that includes a concern for the well-being of other people. They need to be able to assess the consequences of their actions toward others as good or bad within an ethical system that defines every member of the human race as worthy of equal consideration. No matter what they have done, other people ought to be regarded as human beings like yourself.

Although some of our judgmental responses to the world around us may be biologically based - as a baby knows that it is better to be fed and warm than hungry and cold - in most cases the "distinction between good and evil has to be learned and continually reinforced" (Doob, 1978: 120). Existing institutions of socialization-the family, the neighborhood, the school, the church or temple or mosque, etc. - will continue to be important in such learning and reinforcement, although their teachings may have to be enlarged so that the scale of application of morality expands to include everyone, not simply members of their own groups. International organizations and the growing global discourse on ethics that some of them have initiated may have an important role to play in promoting this enlargement of caring.

The physical and social sciences, during the past fifty years or so, have largely abdicated their responsibility for investigating the nature and function of morality. At least in part this has been because of the dominance of the false belief that moral questions have no objective answer. It is time for this dogma to go. The fact is that we do know how to ground morality in reason - in empirical fact and logical analysis. Moreover, futurists, given their concerns about preferable futures, are playing a role in spurring an interest in examining value judgments objectively. Many universal and near-universal human values, for example, can be shown to have their origins in the biological-psychological na-

ture of human beings, in the pre-conditions of social life, or in the human interaction with the physical environment. Also, there are methods of analysis, such as Keekok Lee's (1985) epistemic implication, that allow objective testing of moral propositions by examining the reasons given to justify them. I discuss this at length elsewhere (Bell, 1997, vol. 2) and suggest some modifications in Lee's method to adapt it to a future-oriented, decision-making perspective, so I won't elaborate on it here.

Before leaving the topic of moral judgment, a final word needs to be said about the obligations of bystanders. In today's globalizing society, where electronic communications link hundreds of millions of people from distant parts of the Earth into information-sharing networks, more and more of us are becoming bystanders, watching as perpetrators harm their victims in this or that distant place. It is, thus, increasingly important that the international community expand its role to try to prevent local violence and cruelty, because inaction of bystanders when faced with scenes of organized violence can imply moral approval.

Third, in addition to foresight and an inclusive morality, people, ought to be skeptical about their own beliefs. As Confucius taught us, people should tell themselves the truth. That is not always an easy thing to do. It requires that they question their own convictions. Of course, science in general rests upon such skepticism, but, as we all know, positivistic science as carried out by imperfect human beings has sometimes been arrogant and itself a purveyor of unwarranted certitude.

Elsewhere (Bell, 1997, vol. 1), I have proposed a post-Kuhnian theory of knowledge, known as critical realism, that emphasizes the uncertainty and corrigibility of knowledge and the importance of discourse in arriving at warranted assertions. Critical realists give reasons for their beliefs and they make serious efforts to refute them. Following Karl Popper's fallibilism, they accept beliefs as warranted only if the evidence supporting them remains unrefuted and they rely on public and open examination of the evidence (Musgrave, 1993). Of course, this means that only serious, naturalistic evidence is admitted. "God told me" cannot be refuted or confirmed. Thus, it cannot be offered as evidence in critical realism.

Critical realists are dedicated to the principle that they really do want to know that they are wrong if what they believe is, indeed, wrong. Moreover, they believe that knowledge is conjectural and they allow for the possibility that it may turn out to be false. Thus, they avoid absolutist claims.

Can we teach people the principles of critical realism and encourage them to apply them to their life's circumstances and decisions? If we can, then we can contribute to the reduction of evil in the world. Critical realism encourages people to hold their own beliefs tentatively and contingently. Most important, it encourages them to question their own beliefs and actions, to ask, for example, "Am I really certain that what I believe is true?" When people are dealing with others, for example, it leads them to question whether they or members of their group themselves are guilty of harmful acts against others. Critical realism reminds you that you may be in the wrong.

Restraining evil in ourselves may require something more than foresight, an inclusive ethic, and critical realism. It may also require understanding and empathy for our opponents, trying to see the situation from their point of view and giving them the benefit of the doubt (Pybus, 1991). We need some feeling for the plight of others, some understanding of the full, human consequences of others' joy or suffering that follows from our acts. For all of us to try to understand others is civil, decent, and fair. It may also redound to our own benefit. At least from the limited evidence of laboratory studies, there is reason to believe that nice strategies win out over mean strategies in producing cooperation in others and that nicer strategies do even better (Axelrod, 1984).

Finally, although you ought to remember the past, be prepared to forgive those who have harmed you. Do not hold grudges and do not seek revenge. For, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) has said, focusing on future goods rather than past wrongs can help break the vicious circle of retribution and counter-retribution. In his account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, he shows how South Africans, by embracing forgiveness and focusing on a desirable future, have given themselves a chance to break the vicious circle of mutual violence. Although it may be too early to tell if it will be successful or not, it is a noble experiment soundly based on our present knowledge of how to create a desirable future. The alternative would have South Africa already lying in ashes.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that I consider myself to be a scientist. I have spent much of my career doing empirical social research on social change in American cities and in the new states of the Caribbean. Although I believe that knowledge is conjectural, I also believe that some

things are true and some things are false and that we can often determine which is which. Although there is a place in science for creativity, imagination, intuition, and insight, in the end we can rely only on those truth propositions that are testable and that have survived efforts to falsify them. Within the limits of the human senses and their application to the realities of the natural and social worlds, I believe that warranted assertability is possible. Moreover, I believe that we each have but one life to live in this one natural world.

As a futurist, I believed for a long time that except for the passing moment of the present, all human life is composed only of memory and anticipation. Although I still think that there is much truth in that contention, it is not complete. Except for images of the future, it fails to sufficiently emphasize the human ability to create imaginary worlds-sometimes fantastic, irrational, and counter-factual worlds that never did and never will exist. Even the most normal people can imagine these fantasy worlds (whether supernatural, science fiction, political pseudo-realistic, or whatever). Such daydreams and illusions have a kind of reality for some people, are sometimes organized as stories and shared with others, provide frames of reference that people use to make sense of their lives, and sometimes influence the way they behave. Such illusions mix with, and sometimes replace, memories of actual past events just as they insinuate themselves and mingle with real-world anticipations, hopes and fears.

One of the most universal of such beliefs is the myth of pure evil. It includes the beliefs that most of the evil in the world is committed by malevolent monsters or demented individuals who are intent upon doing evil things to their innocent victims largely for the pleasure of having power and creating suffering. This myth itself is part of a larger cluster of millennial beliefs about the existence of a supernatural world, an eternal struggle of good and evil, the threat of social chaos, a coming apocalyptic upheaval in which good will triumph over evil, and, finally, an aftermath in which evildoers will be punished and the righteous will be redeemed. Although these beliefs are millennia-old, they continue to exist, in one form or another and in both sacred and secular versions, in nearly every country of the world.

These millennial beliefs are not benign. Despite the many positive values that they may promote through religious and political teachings-from justice to generosity and from industriousness to honesty - they tend to create true believers whose absolutism in the rightness of their beliefs leads them to clash with people who have different views. On the

one hand, millennial beliefs blind people to the fact that ordinary people, including themselves, commit most of the evil acts of the world. On the other hand, they foster the demonization of other people, encouraging retaliation and an escalation of harm between people. Millennial views allow plain and decent people to feel justified in carrying out the most hideous crimes against others whom they see as evil, subhuman monsters.

Given the long history and present spread of such millennial beliefs, the task confronting anyone who tries to intervene and to break the cycle of evil seems overwhelming. But it may not be impossible. We can take heart from the knowledge that evil is banal. In fact, no alien powers are at work, only ordinary people carrying out largely innocuous tasks. Ordinary people can learn that the idea of pure evil is a myth. They can learn self-restraint and not to harm others. They can learn empathy and fairness. Although the lessons may have to be taught from an early age and continually reinforced, people can learn to exercise foresight, to care for the freedom and well-being of all members of the human species, and to be skeptical about their own beliefs, just as they can learn anything else.

Also, consider that each of us is the world - even if only some small slice of it - for those people with whom we share our lives, from family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers to others with whom we have but fleeting contact. Although we cannot control the actions of nations and multinational corporations or the momentous events of history, we can control ourselves. Sometimes, it takes courage to do so, because we may have to stand against the views of our own groups. But it can be done. Thus, it is within our power to create a new future of self-restraint, empathy, understanding, and generosity for each person with whom we are interacting. Within the narrow band of the lives of others that we constitute, each of us can create the good society that we hope will become the future. Such behavior on our part is not mere selfless altruism, because what goes around comes around. As we act, we create the world, not only for others but also for ourselves.

References

Arendt, H. 1964. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* New York: Penguin Books.
Axelrod, R. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation.* New York: Basic Books.
Baumeister, R.F. 1997. *Evil: Inside Human Cruelty and Violence.* New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.

Baumeister, R.F. 1991. *Meanings of Life*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Bell, W. 1999. "Images of the future for our time." *Transactions 56*. New Haven, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Bell, W. 1997. *Foundations of Futures Studies*. Two volumes. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Boyer, P. 1995 (1992). *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Doob, L.W. 1978. *Panorama of Evil: Insights from the Behavioral Sciences*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Habermas, J. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Harrison, A.A. and S.J. Dick. 2000. "Contact: long-term implications for humanity," in A. Tough, Ed., *When SETI Succeeds: The Impact of High-Information Contact*. Bellevue, WA: Foundation for the Future.

Hornstein, H.A., B.B. Bunker, W.W. Burke, M. Gindes, and R.J. Lewicki, Eds. 1971. *Social Intervention: A Behavioral Science Approach*. New York: Free Press.

Katz, F.E. 1993. *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Lee, K. 1985. *A New Basis for Moral Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Musgrave, A. 1993. *Common Sense, Science and Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osgood, C.E., W.H. May, and M.S. Miron. 1975. *Cross-Cultural Universals of Affective Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Pybus, E. 1991. *Human Goodness: Generosity and Courage*. Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Rummel, R.J. 1995. "Democracy, power, genocide, and mass murder." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39 (1): 3-25.

Singer, M. and A. Wildavsky. 1993. *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham.

Thompson, D. 1998 (1996). *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Toffler, A. 1970. *Future Shock*. New York: Random House.

Tutu, D.M. 1999. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.