

To Be Good, You First Need to Be Bad: Here's Why

The Power Moves | 30 March, 2018 | by Lucio Buffalmano

A big tenet of this website is that to be a force for good in the world, you have to learn how to be bad.

The concept of facing evil as a necessity for good is not simply a matter of philosophy, but there's enough empirical evidence to prove it.

The first part of this post will address the quantitative, more empirical side.

The second part will address the question more from the individual point of view.

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An Empirical Case For Mastering Evil

[The Evolution of Cooperation](#) is a famous paper in Evolutionary Psychology circles.

It has been a great milestone used to explain, with empirical evidence, why humans present altruistic behavior in the face of otherwise [selfish genes](#) (also read: [The Moral Animal](#)).

The experiment is a computer program running a simplified version of negotiations also known as [iterated Prisoner's dilemma](#).

Many different negotiation strategies were pitted against each other.

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In brief, these were the main types of strategies:

- Some negotiation strategies tried to defect as much as possible to get maximum selfish pay off (cheating, in human terms);
- Some strategies were very highly cooperative (too nice, in human terms);
- Some were middle of the roads (shall we say, assertively win-win, in human terms).

This study is highly relevant to both social skills and cooperation because:

1. Much of social relations are based on [value exchanges](#)

2. We often find ourselves negotiating conflicting interests

The results are also highly interesting in terms of “nice” VS “abusive” strategies as they allow, up to a certain point, to draw some parallels with human behavior.

And the results are very telling:

1. Abusive & Too Nice Strategies Die Out

After millions of iterations the strategies skewed towards maximum pay off -let's call them “abusive”- die out.

And the same fate awaits to highly cooperative strategies -let's call them “too nice”-.

Who wins, then?

2. Conditional Cooperation Wins

The strategy that won out, TIT FOR THAT, could be interpreted as a middle of the road, sort of an “assertive win-win”.

[Read more on TIT FOR TAT strategies](#), but in a nutshell it works like this:

1. First it cooperates
2. It keeps cooperating with those who cooperate
3. It retaliates with those who cheat
4. It starts from scratch after the retaliation

3. Retaliation is Required

“Tit for tat” embodies, empirically, the central thesis of this post (and a central tenet of this website).

And that is that to allow cooperation and win-win you need to be able to punish and cast aside the abusers of this world.

There have been more elaborate techniques that eventually beat “Tit for tat”, but they all included the capacity of cooperating as a default while defending and isolating abusers (for a good overview see [Ridley, 1996](#)).

For cooperation to even exist, evil must be met with evil

Too Nice Is The Root of Evil

Helplessness to evil invites evil (and gives evil the world)

As the empirical experiments show, highly cooperative strategies (“very nice”, in human terms) are the best for everyone IF everyone else around were to be equally very nice.

But it's important to notice that, unless forever ring-fenced, **naively cooperating environment are at high danger of being invaded and taken over by opportunistic cheats.**

Indeed, as long as an abusive alien force can penetrate a highly agreeable system, the agreeable players

will be relegated to ever increasing indigence, enslavement and, eventually, extinction.

Indeed a dishonest strategy seeping into a cooperative-only strategy (too nice strategy) would make easy picking of everyone who can't retaliate.

Unable to defend themselves, the too nice people of this world succumb to the self-centered, evil player.

The World Needs Good Men With Capacity for Evil

When we extrapolate the results of game theory, we get a bleak outlook for virtues without capacity for evil.

Because if people with good intentions don't arm themselves with the tools and knowledge to mustering evil when it's necessary, than this world is mathematically doomed to be run by evil people.

No wonder that so many people around the world lost all faith in the political class: it seems like getting to the top automatically filters out the good players.

Which is indeed something that happens when systems become rotten to the core.

Mathematically indeed, it's impossible to infiltrate a cheat-only system with a collaborative strategy (unless many collaborative players enter it at once).

More Evil In Real World

There's one more twist.

The simulation probably makes it harder for abuse to pay off.

"Tit for tat" for example plays multiple rounds with fixed payouts.

But what if one could win big once without retribution? Or cheat without anyone else knowing it?

Indeed, abusive behavior is more likely to pay off socially when:

- Nobody knows you have cheated
- The other player cannot retaliate
- You will never meet the other player again
- You can win huge and give back little when retaliated against

You will notice that any of the above are common instances in life.

An abuser who is able to legally -but not ethically- take advantage of someone else, for example, will often face no retribution.

What's left to do, then?

Why You Must Master Evil

By mastering evil I am referring to:

1. The ability to recognize evil when you see it
2. The strength, and skills, to withstand it (avoid it or destroy it)
3. The ability to act evil, when needed

Once you can do that, it will do a myriad of great things for you, the people around you, and the world at large:

1. Mastering Evil Prevents Abuse

When you know how to recognize dishonest players, you are also more likely to defuse them or even beat them at their own game.

It's a little bit like martial arts training.

You will be able to spot the signs of aggression and are more likely to respond calmly and confidently.

Which, overall, lowers the chances a fight will ever be needed.

2. You Remove Yourself From The Easy Target List

Who do abusers prey on?

Mostly on people who are easy to prey on, of course. When you can read the signs of dishonesty and cruelty and are able to send back equally powerful signals, you are less likely to become a prey.

And if everyone were able to withstand evil, evil will cease to pay off. And cease to exist.

If you're unable to muster evil, you're enabling evil to exist

3. You Respect Yourself More

As Jordan Peterson, author of [12 Rules For Life](#), explains: if you are too nice, too agreeable and too passive in the face of abuse, you will pay the price emotionally.

All that action that you're not taking, all that anger you're bottling up makes you become bitter and resentful.

Peterson says that if you're harmless you're not virtuous. There's no virtue in being harmless.

But if you're a monster without acting monstrously, *then* you're virtuous. And, I would add, if you can be a monster and act virtuously, then you're a hero.

Why don't you be a hero instead.

4. The Only Way to Do Good

Ultimately, I believe, you can't do good in any meaningful way without being able to be bad when the time calls for it.

I'm afraid it's again simple logic that supports this statement: the higher you aim, the more you will have to contend with evil.

Your success will attract lots of great people and great opportunities. But also the swindlers, the resentful haters, and the vultures looking for easy spoil.

And of course, it might be the case that unfair competitors won't stop at anything trying to squash you.

It derives that you cannot spread love at scale if you cannot destroy the evil that stands in the way.

The better angels of our nature are useless if they can't confront evil

The Hero Journey

If you're being too agreeable, or have dreams to improve the world for good... Chances are that you need

a dark side to enable your goals to come to fruition.

It's not necessarily easy. Becoming a hero for good also requires incredible mental power and mental control.

You must become impermeable and control your state of mind so that dealing with the scum of this world will not infect your mood and your mission for good.

As Nietzsche says: when you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you. Meaning you risk to internalize evil in a way that you lose your enlightened way.

But don't let that stop you: internalizing the power of destruction and aggression, and yet pushing ahead for good is the ultimate conquest of the hero.

You can do it.

Please do it. We need people like that.

Get your sword. Then keep it sheathed (most of the times).

Summary

We talked about why you need to be bad.

But don't get this article wrong. This is no place for empty cynicism. There are countless people who will NOT take advantage of you. Or might even help you asking nothing in return.

These are the great people out there and the kind of person you should strive to become.

But what I'm saying is that you can't count on that. And that there will be people who DO will take advantage of you. And you're better off being prepared for them.

On the same note: don't forget that giving is the best way forward. TIT FOR THAT gave first. And as Peter Diamandis, author of [Bold](#) said: to become a billionaire, help a billion people.

What I do am saying though, is that on your way to help a billion you'll meet a few hundred that will try to take advantage of you and possibly try to take you down.

With those, you need to be able to play the dirty game.

And that's one of the very reasons I started this website: spreading the tools to beat and transcend (social) evil and dishonesty.

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