

## Bad People?

### Badness, and Bad People

Recently, I learnt a new word: *kakocracy*, rule by the bad (or the worst) people in our society. The remnants of my college New Testament Greek (I know that *kakos* means “bad”) should have enabled me to work it out, without reaching for a dictionary. Now, one doesn’t have to be totally disillusioned and cynical to believe that our rulers (in reality, we’re ruled by people in Brussels and Strasbourg, remember, not Westminster) are not strong - either in terms of discernment, or moral qualities - by the way they behave, and the causes they promote. But are they *bad people*, as such? I often find myself wondering what the exact relationship is between badness and the people who do bad things.

The Christian tradition tells us that people who commit evil, or any kind of sin, are responding to temptation – the power of Satan – but are also morally responsible themselves (it’s no good saying that temptation/Satan is (wholly) to blame). Even if one “rationalises” away temptation/Satan into being the “corrupting influence of our culture” or something (which I for one don’t), there is still the firm understanding that there is also *personal assent* present, that people in the end *choose* to respond to the influences around them. Of course, the latest materialist “bioethics”, (or however it’s accurately termed) disposes of this also, by talking away free will as simply an illusion, that we perforce respond, like automata, to the electrical impulses in the brain. Materialism, of course, will always tend to the a-moral (Darwinism/evolutionism, it has long been recognised, ineluctably has amorality built into it).

But for those of us who still believe in free choice, we may observe, among those who choose badness, that such choices have a cumulative effect, such that those who may begin as a person like any other (composed of an original moral flaw, but also the ability to respond to goodness) may proceed (without inner-realisation, or outward sign) towards being so consumed that we must call them bad *in themselves*. Saints, perhaps, are those who proceed in the opposite direction – but they have to do battle against their natures; this may occupy their whole life, but to respond to temptation – to choose badness – takes only a moment.

October 2012