

## **CHET MIRMAN**

### **Reflections on the Nature of Good and Evil: Is it All in Your Head?**

Human beings have always been preoccupied with good (right) and evil (wrong). Considerable efforts have been devoted to the pursuit of timeless, absolute moral truths that exist independent of our subjective experience of them. These are seen as transcendent values that can be said to, in some sense, exist "out there." We are thus charged with the task of discovering just what these moral truths are, and then, of course, submitting to this "other-worldly" order.

This paper addresses the propensity to externalize our subjective judgments, thus experiencing good and evil as absolutes that we need not take any responsibility for. By experiencing our valuation as absolute truths we free ourselves from the burden of ownership of our judgments. But it is also an attempt to empower ourselves by enlisting the trump card of transcendent values as the justification for action (or non-action), rather than relying on the more "flimsy" justification of its simply being our own personal preference or value.

An object relations framework, as well as Jung's notion of archetypes, will be employed to link some of the biological-evolutionary morality-inducing mechanisms posited by the Harvard entomologist, E.O Wilson, with the subjective sense of absolute truth. It is suggested that evolutionary psychology provides a third alternative to the dichotomous characterization of either radical existentialism or transcendentalist thinking about morality. In addition to a brief discussion of the internal mechanics of the experience of good and evil, some growthful ways to respond to evil will also be suggested.

*Dr. Mirman is an Associate Professor at The American School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University in Schaumburg, Illinois. He has published and presented a number of papers on the psychology of religion. A religious naturalist, much of his work has been devoted to understanding (and creating) experiences of the divine without recourse to supernatural devices.*