

AGGRESSION, MORALITY AND WAR

(Written 28th. Sept. 2002)

1. Many of us think in terms of 'goodies' and 'baddies'. When we ask ourselves what makes a 'goody' or a 'baddy' we would say that they get their label not according to what they believe, but mainly because of how they BEHAVE.

2. Behaviour comes in two main sorts – good and bad, or we can use the terms 'moral' and 'immoral'.

3. Let's see it in simple terms: A little old lady is walking along a street with no intention (or record of) doing anyone any ill. A young person attacks her with the deliberate plan to harm her, steal her handbag, and take her money.

4. The old lady is obviously a 'goodie' and her attacker is the 'baddy'. They get those labels because of their behaviour. The lad behaved badly; he acted without morals, or moral constraints. He was, in other words, 'immoral'.

5. This simple illustration demonstrates something of extreme importance.

Aggressors (whether nations or individuals) do not feel themselves constrained by morals.

Germany in 1940 felt free to act immorally. It repeatedly broke promises and ignored treaties in its attempts to conquer Europe. Germany at that time was, by its behaviour, a 'baddy'.

6. 'Baddies' always have the advantage because they feel free to act immorally. This always creates a problem for the 'goodies'!

The crunch question comes when the 'goodies' are faced by 'baddies' whom they want to hold in check.

7. Let's return to our old lady. Suppose, ever since an earlier mugging, she carried a brick in her handbag! She is approached by a lad who is like the one who mugged her before, but she is not exactly sure it is him, nor is she sure of his intentions.

The moment he approaches her, she swings her handbag and belts him one on the head and he ends up in hospital!

8. If, as we've seen, 'goodies' and 'baddies' are judged by their behaviour, how, now, would we label the old lady? 'Goody' or 'Baddy'? I think 'Baddy'!

There is a great moral danger in such a situation. If aggression is 'bad' behaviour, my story shows that the old lady ends up acting as the aggressor. She behaves immorally.

9. Civilisation depends for its health and survival on an overwhelming majority of its members willingly allowing themselves to be live under moral constraints – i.e. behaving well, for the good of all.

10. Those who regard themselves as 'goodies' have to find ways of containing and constraining evil, without themselves changing sides and thereby increasing aggression and immorality.

11. Once those who were 'goodies' allow their fear of the 'baddies' to lead them to change sides, then not only is evil, aggression and immorality doubled, but any moral authority that the 'goodies' might have had to uphold the good is undermined.

12. I believe there are three positions that it is helpful to distinguish.

a) Pacifist: those who would never check aggression by violence.

b) Non-pacifist: those who would check aggression by violence.

c) Non-aggressive: those could not use aggression as a means of checking possible aggressors.

13. All readers of this will pray for God's guidance on the leaders of nations at this time, and for Christians to discern how to "overcome evil with good". [Romans 12:21]