

When Good People Do Bad Things

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I'd like to thank Professor Matthew Packer for inviting me to talk about the hit Broadway musical *Wicked* and the questions it raises about what it means to be good. This talk is based on my book about the musical, *The Wicked Truth: When Good People Do Bad Things* and is part of my work at the Raven Foundation where we believe that the stories we tell about ourselves and our own goodness are often veiled justifications for violence. In fact, it may be that the biggest threat to peace in our time does not come from a select group of wicked people who must be rooted out so that peace can finally be achieved, but from all human beings when we become so convinced of our own goodness and the justice of our cause that we do very bad things without any moral misgivings. In other words, the path to peace does not involve defeating an external enemy but finding a new narrative to tell about what it means to be good.

At Raven we are guided by the work of Stanford professor emeritus and cultural critic René Girard who cautions that those nations which claim to want peace and to have only a defensive military position are the very ones which pose the greatest threat to peace. We witness this paradox playing out today, as our nation is engaged in two protracted conflicts in order to avoid war. As Girard says, we have become "warmongers out of pacifism."*

Girard has accumulated many honors and distinctions during his long career, but perhaps the most notable is his induction into the French Academy in March 2005. As you may know, the Academy is a prestigious institution consisting of 40 members known as "immortals". Distinguished members of the Academy have been Victor Hugo, Louis Pasteur, Voltaire, Descartes, Molière, Jules Verne and Émile Zola, to name a few. Girard has earned a place among these immortals for his mimetic theory, which includes three interrelated ideas which I will focus on tonight: the origin of conflict in mimetic desire, scapegoating violence and the narratives born out of that violence, which he calls myth. I very much enjoyed my time with two of Professor Packer's classes this morning where we focused on desire – tonight the focus will be on scapegoating violence, and my hope is that you will see how they bear on one another. *Wicked*, oddly enough and without intending it at all, could be subtitled "mimetic theory, the musical"! So I'm going to use the plot, characters and song lyrics of this show to illuminate mimetic theory and the way it challenges us to rethink the narratives we tell about our own goodness and in the process redefines our understanding of where obstacles to peace are to be found.

Wicked is a blockbuster mega-hit of a musical written by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman that has broken box office records and been playing to sold out houses around the US and the world since 2003. It gives us the back story to the events of the 1939 movie starring Judy Garland, *The Wizard of Oz*. Both the movie and the musical tell us what happened in Oz during the last days of the reign of the Wonderful Wizard. The movie tells it from the point of view of the good people, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, the Wizard and Glinda the good witch. These characters want the kind of things we want: to be home again, to be a little smarter than we are, to have courage in the face of danger and to love and be loved. But the musical rather wickedly switches the perspective and tells us a narrative of the same events, but from the point of view of the Wicked Witch of the West, the one whose evil and violent desires are nothing like ours, or so we think. It's a clever reversal that challenges our faith in Dorothy's goodness and arouses our sympathies for the witch so that by the musical's closing scene, which is the confrontation between Dorothy and her friends in the witch's castle, our faith in our own goodness has been deeply shaken.

This story has been an American favorite for 110 years and a favorite of mine as well since I first saw the movie as a little girl. When I heard about the musical and its switch of perspective, I resisted going to see it. I was such a big fan of the movie that I didn't want anything to spoil it for me. The ad for the show said, "So much happened before Dorothy dropped in." Maybe things did happen in Oz before Dorothy got there, but what more did I need to know? I had been reassured by the movie's happy ending that good little girls like me could conquer evil. And the movie had certainly satisfied my need to spend time with Dorothy and her friends. Whatever happened in Oz in this supposed imaginary "before" time was of no interest to the little girl who still lived inside me.

There's a lyric in the opening song of the musical that summarizes the movie's message very nicely. It's from the song, "No One Mourns the Wicked" and it's sung by Glinda the Good Witch of the North: "Isn't it nice to know that good will conquer evil?" It's very nice! I didn't want anything to ruin my celebration with Dorothy and her friends and all of Oz when the Wizard was defeated and everyone's dreams came true. What else did I need to know about Oz anyway?

Apparently, a lot! What I had thought was a sweet and harmless movie version of a fairy tale is actually a dramatization of the way our narratives about good and evil perpetuate violence and create conditions in which authentic peace is impossible. My refusal to have my love of that narrative questioned was itself an obstacle to peace.

The musical begins where the movie ends, with the celebration of the death of the Wicked Witch of the West. While that celebration in the movie is unambiguous, the opening scene of the musical casts the whole celebration into doubt. But after seeing the musical, I realized that the movie itself casts doubt on the necessity of the witch's death and therefore the morality of the celebration in ways I had been blind to.

One thing the movie does which warns us that we should not, as I did, be taking things at face value is to have the main characters profess one thing and do another. Let's look at how that happens, beginning with the Scarecrow who claims to lack brains. Yet how does the Scarecrow help the friends escape when they are cornered by the Witch's guards in her castle? He uses the Tinman's ax to cut the rope holding up the candelabra. It lands on the witch's guards and everyone gets away, for the moment. Did you ever wonder about that? Doesn't the Scarecrow already seem to possess the very thing he is going to the Wizard to obtain? How did you explain that to yourself?

And what about the Tinman who claims to lack a heart? The Tinman continually needs to be oiled by Dorothy because he keeps crying, a sure sign of a heart that is breaking. Again we meet a character who already possesses the thing he is pursuing. Even the so-called Cowardly Lion marches bravely into the Witch's lair to save his friend, Dorothy. Are we to believe that he is a coward? Remember that even Dorothy possesses the power to go home from the moment the ruby slippers are on her feet.

What is going on here? When the Wizard tells the four friends that he will not grant their wishes unless they return with the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West, the Tinman says, "B-B-B-But if we do that, we'll have to kill her to get it!" It's not that he's so concerned with the fact of killing, but that it will be a difficult and risky task. The underlying assumption is that it is okay for good people to kill bad people to make their dreams come true – as dangerous as it may sometimes be.

If you take these contradictions seriously, you arrive at an unsettling view of what this movie is all about. Rather than the black and white plot line of good conquering evil, and the sweet moral of "There's no place like home," we have something more sinister: four good people who already possess what they claim they lack are willing to kill to obtain it. Now that's a lot of moral ambiguity around the necessity of killing the witch! But because Dorothy and her friends survived the epic battle, they get the story-telling rights, and the story they tell makes heroic efforts to gloss over any ambiguities and justify the killing of the witch, a quite natural thing to do. All of us want to believe that we are good people behaving well and so when we do employ nasty methods to achieve our ends, like liquidating someone, we make excuses like, "But I

didn't know water would melt her" or "I had no choice, I was the one under attack." If Dorothy and her friends had thought that they had killed someone unnecessarily, their sense of their own goodness would have been deeply shaken.

This is representative of the prevailing narrative we tell about the difference between good people and bad people: Good people only kill bad people when there is no other choice. And bad people kill good people for no good reason. So if the witch had employed the same methods as Dorothy and her friends to achieve her goals, that is, if the witch had killed Dorothy to obtain the ruby slippers, the movie would have viewed that as a bad thing and there would have been no celebration in the Emerald City. The movie insists, as do we on this side of the rainbow, that the very same action – the use of violence to achieve your goal – is good in one case and bad in another. All the good people in the movie, from noble Glinda to the lowly Munchkins, insist on the difference between what they want to do to achieve their ends and what the witch wants to do to achieve hers. Without that distinction, their sense of themselves as good would waver, maybe even falter completely and rather than good people doing something quite noble they would realize they had been involved in an act of scapegoating violence.

Of course this compartmentalization of violence into two categories of good and bad violence is hardly unique to *The Wizard of Oz*. It permeates our culture and dominates the entertainment industry. I'll offer just one example that I think neatly captures the flawed ethical code we are talking about here. It's from the 1994 movie *True Lies* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis. Jamie Lee plays Arnold's wife, and she has just discovered that her husband is not a mild mannered salesman but a highly trained, top-tier American spy. She asks him, "Have you ever killed anyone?" and he answers, "Yeah, but they were all bad." We may laugh, but our laughter reveals the painful truth, that when it comes to the justification of violence, we employ a double standard that gives good people license to use violence to achieve their goals while restricting its use by those we deem to be bad.

The moral dilemma in this formulation is who gets to decide who the good guy is? I've never heard of a real life conflict in which one side self-identifies as wicked and admits that they have no right to employ violence in the pursuit of their cause. In the movies which adhere to the double standard for violence, the bad guy often gets to have his say just before he is defeated by the forces of good. In that speech, he admits his guilt and demonstrates the depth of his wickedness so that when he is finally destroyed, our faith in the hero's goodness and therefore our own is reinforced. But those bad guy speeches are good guy propaganda and no more to be taken at face value than Dorothy's claim that she had to kill the witch in order to go home.

Mimetic theory has a word for the propaganda – it’s called myth and its presence is evidence that this is a case of scapegoating violence.

As I have already noted, the musical begins where most good guy/ bad guy narratives end, with the defeat of the bad guy and the proclamation of the mythological version of all that happened. But it undermines myth from its premise. To legitimate the villain’s perspective by allowing her to star in her own musical and to have her say unfiltered by the good guy’s needs for self-justification, is a direct challenge to the myth. It is the story the myth is trying to cover-up. Let’s see how the myth is both proclaimed and challenged in the opening song. As the curtain rises on all of Oz gathering to celebrate the death of the Wicked Witch of the West, they sing:

Citizens of Oz

Good News!

She’s dead!

The Witch of the West is dead!

The Wickedest Witch their ever was

The enemy of all of us here in Oz

Is dead!

Good News!

Good News!**

While the words proclaim unambiguous joy, the composer Stephen Schwartz uses a discordant minor key alerting us not to take the classification of the witch’s death as “Good News” at face value. How unlike the silly ditty from the movie, “Ding dong the witch is dead,” which celebrates the death of the other wicked witch, killed by Dorothy’s falling house. Just as an aside for any Biblical scholars among us, the word gospel means of course glad tidings or good news. But the good news of the evangelists is not that “he’s dead” which would be a myth-making chorus but “he lives”, which is the one thing myth makers do not want to hear. A living victim is the one voice that can effectively challenge the myth and undermine all its benefits, shaking our sense of ourselves as good.

In the midst of the celebration, the Good Witch Glinda arrives floating in by magic bubble offering the reassurance the Ozians seem to need that they have behaved as good people should. She sings:

Glinda

Fellow Ozians...

Let us be glad
Let us be grateful
Let us rejoice that goodness could subdue
The wicked workings of you-know-who
Isn't it nice to know
That good will conquer evil?
The truth we all believe'll by and by
Outlive a lie
For you and –

Glinda gives voice to the myth, affirming their belief that good can and should conquer evil. But she says something quite interesting from our perspective: she raises the issue of truth and lies. Within myth, the lie is anything said by the villain that might threaten the hero's version of events. The truth is the myth itself. But what the audience does not yet know is that the rest of the show will be told in flashback to explore how all of Oz has arrived at this moment of celebration and it will allow the villain to speak for herself. Glinda launches the flashback with this question about the witch: "Are people born Wicked? Or do they have Wickedness thrust upon them? After all, she had a father. She had a mother, as so many do..."

In short order, we find out that the Wicked Witch was not born wicked at all. We meet her on the first day of college and find out that she has a name, Elphaba, that her sister is in a wheelchair and that Elphaba is at college not as a student but as her sister's caretaker. We also learn that her mother died giving birth to Elphaba's sister, something her father blames her for, and all the students hate her on sight because of an unfortunate birth defect – she has green skin. Though she is a social pariah, the headmistress of the school chooses her to be in a special sorcery class. It seems that Elphaba has unique magical powers that may make her a favorite of the Wizard some day. She's bewildered by this recognition and she sings of what it would mean to her to meet the Wizard:

Once I'm with the Wizard
My whole life will change
'Cuz once you're with the Wizard
No one things you're strange
No father is not proud of you
No sister acts ashamed
And all of Oz has to love you
When by the Wizard, you're acclaimed

And one day, he'll say to me: "Elphaba,
A girl who is so superior
Shouldn't a girl who's so good inside
Have a matching exterior?
And since folks here to an absurd degree
Seem fixated on your verdigris
Would it be all right by you
If I de-greenify you?"

How odd to find out that the Wicked Witch has dreams and desires, too, just like Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman and the Lion. All she wants is to be de-greenified so she can be loved and accepted. How easily she could have joined them on their journey to meet the Wizard as companion and friend. She is more like Dorothy and her friends than the movie had let on, but the goodness of Dorothy and her friends is dependent on denying that similarity. In other words, they *need* their enemy to be evil in order to convince themselves that they are good so differences become juicily scandalous and all similarities are suppressed, especially how alike they are at the level of desire.

The musical illustrates this relationship between shared desire and conflict in the marvelous duet, "What is this Feeling?" sung by the epitomes of goodness and evil. Glinda the Good stands on one side of the stage and Elphaba stands opposite her on the other side. One girl is all glitter and light, the other dark and green. They glower with hatred at one other because Elphaba has been accepted into the sorcery class that Glinda coveted, and Glinda has been refused. Glinda stands at the pinnacle of popularity, a position Elphaba can only envy with no hope of attaining. Each has what the other wants, and to make matter worse, these rivals have just been assigned to be roommates against their wishes.

Here is a bit of the lyric of the song which opens much as a long song might.

GALINDA

What is this feeling so sudden and new?

ELPHABA

I felt the moment I laid eyes on you...

GALINDA

My pulse is rushing...

ELPHABA

My head is reeling...

GALINDA

My face is flushing...

BOTH

What is this feeling?/ Fervid as a flame

Does it have a name?/ Yes!

Loathing/ Unadulterated loathing

GALINDA

For your face...

ELPHABA

Your voice...

GALINDA

Your clothing...

BOTH

Let just say – I loathe it all!

Ev'ry little trait, however small

Makes my very flesh begin to crawl

With simple utter loathing

There's a strange exhilaration

In such total detestation

It's so pure! So strong!

Though I do admit it came on fast

Still I do believe that it can last

And I will be loathing

Loathing you

My whole life long!

You get the distinct impression that though each girl is infuriated by the other, they seem to be enjoying their pique of rage a bit too much. Their loathing feels delicious to them, why? Why do they seem to be so pleased that it will last a whole lifetime? Because their hatred lets them

know who they are. Each believes the other is wicked and their hatred of such wickedness cements their sense of their own goodness. But what I want to point out here is that these girls are not at war with one another because of the differences they insist on stressing as so important, differences of look, of voice, of style. No, that's a smokescreen to hide the truth from themselves, that they are at war because at the level of the desire, they are the same.

All such rivalries, of course, arise not because we want different things than our rival. In that case, there would be nothing to fight about. Rivalries erupt because of shared desires, but not only because of that. Shared desire is what brings people together as friends or lovers. What causes shared desire to flip into rivalry and hatred is when the object of desire cannot be shared or at least that is the conviction of at least one of the rivals. The example that I like to give is that of a student and teacher who over time develop a deep friendship until one fateful day the student graduates and becomes a rival with his or her teacher for the same coveted academic post. Not only do they want the same thing, but they learned to want it from one another. The more one wants it, the more enflamed will be the desire of the rival until the conflict escalates to desperate proportions. Mentor has become rival, model has become obstacle. Perhaps insults fly, character is assassinated and what was friendship flips into enmity. I'm sure such a thing has never happened here at Buena Vista, but perhaps you have heard about it. In their hatred, the rivals are functioning as scapegoats for one another, that is they are using their hatred of the other to prop up their flagging self-esteem. The strange exhilaration is exactly what the doctor ordered.

If too many rivalries like this move through a community, it creates instability and undermines the functioning of the community, in which case what will restore equilibrium will be if all the little rivalries can converge on one target in a purging act of scapegoating violence. The musical once again provides us with a wonderful demonstration of how this works – at some points doing so so explicitly as to be comical. There is a history professor at Shiz University named Dr. Dillamond. Dr. Dillamond is a Goat. A Goat with a capital G who can talk, think and philosophize like Aristotle. In the musical's version of the Land of Oz, there is a whole category of animals that can talk and think like humans. They are called Animals, with a capital A to distinguish them from the normal, Kansas-variety animals we are familiar with in our world. The writers of the musical treat us to this dialogue:

Dillamond:

Doubtless you've noticed I am the sole Animal on the faculty – the "token Goat," as it were. But it wasn't always this way. Oh, dear students ... how do I put this? How I wish you could have known this place as it once was. When one would walk down these halls and hear an Antelope explicating a sonnet, a Snow Leopard solving an equation, a

Wildebeest waxing philosophic. Can you see, students, what's being lost? How our dear Oz is becoming less and less, well ... (looks right at Elphaba) ... colorful. (Taking in the rest of the class.) Now. What sent this into motion?

Elphaba:

(Raises hand.) From what I've heard, it began with the Great Drought.

Dillamond:

Exactly. Precisely. Food grew scarce and people grew hungrier and angrier. And the question became – whom can we blame? Can anyone tell me what is meant by the term: "Scapegoat"?

Marvelously obvious isn't it? In case we are so spellbound by the myth that we are missing the more subtle clues we've been given so far, we are presented with a talking Goat talking about scapegoating. Before Dr. Dillamond can lead the class in a discussion about scapegoats, he is interrupted by the discovery of a message on the blackboard. It reads: "ANIMALS SHOULD BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD." In dismay and frustration, he dismisses the class.

The silencing of the Animals is a clever metaphor for the silencing of all scapegoating victims. The drought in Dr. Dillamond's example illustrates the conditions in which scapegoating occurs. They are familiar to us: when communities are in crisis, like an academic department or a political institution beset by rivalry, there is often a search for someone to blame. Even in a natural disaster like a drought that no human being could have caused, the search for someone to blame begins to consume the community. Why? Because hardships can cause rivalry, too, as members of the community fight with each other over scarce resources. Imagine what it would be like if there was not enough water for your family. What if you had to compete with your friends and neighbors for water for your child, your spouse or sick parent? Terrible tensions and anxiety would begin to build and we can imagine the accusations that would fly through the community – Jim is taking more than his share; Betty is hoarding water in her basement and pretending she has none; Larry deliberately tripped Louise, causing her to spill her ration because she wouldn't go to the prom with him.

Eventually these suspicions and resentments would threaten to destroy the community from within. It is possible that it would not be the drought itself that destroys the community, but the resulting fears and resentments turned violent. A central thesis of mimetic theory is that the greatest threat to the existence and well being of human communities large and small is not an external threat at all, but the risk of its own violence turned inward. The scapegoat's function is to keep the violence outside the community. So you see that scapegoating

accomplishes something very real for the community, which makes it difficult to give up.

Now please understand, neither I nor mimetic theory nor René Girard is advocating for scapegoating violence. In fact, the opposite is true. Mimetic theory, by exposing the price paid by the community in scapegoating, throws a monkey wrench into the scapegoating machinery, disrupting its functioning. Just as Dr. Dillamond is doing when he teaches his class that the Ozians have bought their peace and their sense of themselves as good at the expense of the Animals who are being silenced and “disappeared” like dissidents in repressive regimes. The Animals are not responsible for the community’s lack of cohesion or for the people’s insecurities and doubts, yet they are being made to take the blame. One last theological aside: they are being made to suffer for the sins of the community.

Reminiscent of real world politics, the musical reveals that it is the Wizard himself who is responsible for the Animals’ disappearance and when Elphaba takes their cause as her own, she becomes an enemy of the Wizard as well. Wickedness is thrust upon her by the Wizard’s political machine as it ramps up to defend him by turning all of Oz against Elphaba. While Oz has been living in fear of Elphaba, the real threat to their citizens has been coming from the Wizard himself. They have been pursuing the wrong villain and even though her death functions well from a scapegoating perspective, the peace it delivers is partial and temporary. Partial because the peace is not universal, some members of the community have had to pay the price for the peace of the others. If the lion and the lamb don’t agree that it’s peace, then it isn’t. And it is temporary because the underlying problems have not been solved or even identified.

But all this raises an important and timely question that I’d like to address: you would be justified to wonder at this point, surely not all accusations are false and not all villains are misunderstood victims. Don’t evil people really exist? We’ve witnessed more than enough proof in the reality of evil throughout the twentieth century: the cruel destruction of life on September 11, the genocide of the Jews by Hitler, the murders and imprisonment of the millions by Stalin, Saddam’s ruthless extermination of his perceived enemies. These examples suffice to point out that people do exist who commit remorseless acts of evil, regardless of *Wicked’s* clever retelling of the story of the wicked witch.

Yes, evil exists. That point is indisputable. But our discussion about scapegoating violence begs the question: are Stalin’s murders evil because they are an example of bad violence – violence by the wrong person for the wrong reason – or are they evil because murder is just wrong no matter the reason? It’s the same question the musical is asking about Dorothy and her friends: was the murder of the Wicked Witch wrong and if so, why? Is it because all murder is wrong or

because now we suspect the Ozians were mistaken in their accusations against her, that their reasons were flawed? Depending on how you answer that question, you arrive at very different ethical codes and very different definitions of good and evil.

If you say that good violence exists, that violence can be justified, you find yourself in the position of evaluating the justice of the justifications, which can lead you down a bit of a rabbit hole, to mix my fairy tale metaphors. I came across a startling example of this in an account of the trial of a wartime leader of the Bosnian Serbs named Momcilo Krajsnik. The newspaper reported, “Prosecutors said that one of [Krajsnik’s] main functions was to coordinate and oversee the brutal ethnic separation campaign carried out in 37 Bosnian townships. Judges found him guilty of deportations, forced transfers and persecutions as well as murder and extermination of Croats and Bosnian Muslims.” One might image that he was a monstrous human being, someone who could be easily recognized by us and even by himself as evil. Yet a few paragraphs later the reporter made this observation: “Mr. Krajsnik testified for weeks in his own defense, claiming he was unaware of any crimes and instead was a peacemaker.”

Was Krajsnik trying to con the judge, or did he truly believe in himself as a peacemaker? If his defense was more than a con job, then it could stand to reason that the judge had made a terrible mistake. I used to read articles like this and my head would spin – both sides of the story couldn’t be true, I thought. Either he is guilty or the judge made a mistake and found an innocent man guilty of a crime he didn’t commit. But that reasoning is mythological. Standing outside of myth, I can see how both things can be true – someone can be guilty of terrible crimes all the while claiming that he is a peacemaker. You recognize, I hope, the difficulty. The problem with agreeing with myth that violence is wicked only in as far as the reasons for it are wicked, is that my reasons are always the right ones, aren’t they? By definition, of course, I, my desires, and my cause are the epitome of right, of goodness, of justice and anyone or anything that opposes my desires are therefore evil. Everything becomes relative.

Can we ever know the truth about good and evil if everyone is claiming to be justified in their use of violence? I think we can, I think we do already. Even though many of us did not suspect the movie about the witch’s death to be a scapegoating narrative until we saw the musical, we find it easy to spot scapegoating narratives in other places. Let’s look at why that is.

For example, during World War II, all Americans of Japanese decent were locked into concentration camps out of fear that all Japanese were the enemy. In college, I had a professor who was born in such a camp. Although his family was a threat to no one, there he was – an innocent young child charged, tried and convicted of treasonous intentions by virtue of his genetics alone. No matter the reasons given at the time, today we look at that and have no

trouble seeing it as scapegoating.

The lynching of black men in the South in the decades after the Civil War is another sad example. Lynching statistics were kept between 1882 and 1968. During those 86 years 4,743 victims were murdered, 3,500 of them African Americans. Most sociologists today agree that these 3,500 murders were racially motivated. As if such callous cruelty to the victim and his family were not enough, many of those who gathered to witness the lynching took photographs of the hanging victim as if they were at a circus. So confident were these people in their own goodness that they made many of those photographs into postcards to send to family and friends like mementos of a summer vacation. Those postcards give silent witness to the murderers' inability to see the evil in their own deeds and the innocence of their victims.

Here is the thing I'd like you to understand or to paraphrase the narrator of *A Christmas Carol*, nothing good can come from the stories we have just heard. The difference between the lynchers and us is that black men are not our scapegoats, they were theirs. The difference between Americans today and Americans in the 1940s is that Japanese Americans are not our scapegoats, they were theirs. The reason I did not recognize the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, as a scapegoating narrative was that Elphaba was my scapegoat, too. The essential symptom of scapegoating and the hardest aspect to cure is that if you have a scapegoat you are completely, totally, absolutely without a doubt convinced that you have the devil dead to rights. It is that unshakable belief that you are right and your scapegoat is wrong that blinds you to what you are doing. The sad truth is that we can always see someone else's scapegoat but never our own for as soon as we do, we no longer have a scapegoat. Our enemy is revealed as an innocent victim and all our anger and self-righteousness crumbles into guilt and remorse.

The way out of scapegoating violence as a way to achieve peace and know ourselves to be good is not a simple or easy one. It involves learning to recognize our own scapegoats, something that requires a great deal of discipline and self-awareness that is achieved painfully, over the course of a lifetime. And what we may not realize is that the way out of scapegoating violence presents dangers as well. The mechanism of scapegoating violence can be described as the use of a small or targeted dose of violence in order to prevent a larger outbreak of violence. But if we deprive ourselves of this mechanism, however flawed that mechanism may be, we risk the larger outbreaks of violence. Finding new ways to know we are good and more authentic ways to achieve peace will be essential as the myths become more and more transparent.

Within the mythological world, the end justifies the means. We've seen that any means is permitted if the end is the fulfillment of my desires or securing peace for me and my community. This is what allows good people to do bad things without moral misgivings. And

we've seen that everyone puts themselves in the good guy category – no one self-identifies as evil. The label of evil is employed as a justification for violence – whether accurately applied or not, that is its primary function. I would encourage you to wrestle with these issues and develop a new narrative of what it means to be a truly good person. For me, I've come to believe that if we use violence to achieve our ends, we must give up our claim to being good. We just can't have it both ways. Violence can never be justified as good or be celebrated by good people. I would suggest that we begin the search for a new narrative by rewriting the title of the opening song of *Wicked*. Instead of "No one mourns the wicked", we would do well to "always mourn the wicked" for the celebration of any death as a necessary ingredient for peace is a failure of a goodness.

*René Girard, *Battling to the End* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010) 183.

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