

## **Random Thoughts on Morals, Values; Good, Evil and Human Nature**

**By Lawrence G. Downing, DMin**

### **Abstract**

What behaviors can we expect from those who colonize space? Will humans have advanced to the point where conflict and violence have been diminished from Earth? The stories and myths that have since ancient times described the behavior of the beings who inhabit the heavens tell of violence, duplicity, sexuality, and death. Ethics and morality take a minority position. Contemporary science-fiction writers populate their stories with behaviors not unlike those found among the gods who inhabited what we call Space. It is a hope that those who colonize Space will live by a high moral and ethical standard. The evidence to substantiate this hope is slim to non-existent. It is not realistic to expect a change in geography to modify behavior. Human behavior is a complex combination of genetics, environment, and experience. We cannot, through testing or interview, ensure that specific behavior traits will be continued from one time period or one situation to another. People change, and not always for the better.

**Keywords:** behavior, ethics, morality, myths, genetics, environment, experience, change.

Humans, since the beginning of recorded history, have demonstrated a fascination with the possibility that life and the physical accretions associated with life exist in places removed from Earth. For example the writer of the Book of Hebrews, a book in the Newer Testament, said of the patriarch Abraham that he looked for a city that had foundations whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). This city was a heavenly city, not one of Earth.

The various books associated with the prophet Ezra take the reader to “heavenly” places where Ezra encounters all manner of un-earthly beings and views sights not found on planet Earth.

In the ancient accounts of life and events that occur in un-earthly places, conflict, war, expulsion, and death are frequent. In the Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh Epic*, the conflict among the various gods is graphic and violent. The Greek pantheon is populated by numerous vicious gods who vent their spleen upon unsuspecting humans. St. John, in his Apocalypse, gives an account and result of a war in heaven that resulted in Jehovah casting out Satan along with a third of the angels who supported him. A peaceable kingdom is also described in this book, but conflict is in the majority.

Contemporary writers are no gentler than the ancients when it comes to their accounts of how the inhabitants of space behave one to the other. Movies that depict a quiescent society populated by people who demonstrate care and concern for each other are not big draws to the big screen. *Flash Gordon*, *Star Trek*, the *Star Wars* franchise, and countless other sci-fi productions are not built around characters who practice peace.

The heroes do not usually carry an olive branch. Boogymen and monsters are the norm for space citizens.

Who, then, is the more correct in the description the societies that may one day populate space? Will those who propose communities built on principles of mutual respect and care achieve their ends or will the sci-fi scenarios prove more predictive? What will be the determinants that set the course one way or the other?

The biblical writers examined the human family and, as a general trend, came to negative conclusions. The prophet Isaiah looked at his fellow Israelites and said, "Your righteousness is as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). The Apostle Paul, centuries after Isaiah, made a similar inventory and concluded that there is no one righteous, not even one, (Romans 3:10).

It is no surprise that "feel good" individuals take little comfort in the biblical writers' evaluations of humanity. Were they able to witness present events, the holocaust, ethnic cleansing, and genocide around the world, their verdicts would lend further credibility to the ancients' pessimistic views of humanity. Are we, then, never to free ourselves from the evils that have so often proven descriptive of human nature? Does the past cast the mold for the future? No! However, and it is a huge HOWEVER, we cannot assume that good intentions and careful selection will assure a bright and peaceful future for those who inhabit Space.

Human nature is far too complex to allow us the luxury of devising a test or norm that will assure that Space communities will not be infected with maladies similar to those that now impact society. Genetics, environment, and human will are powerful forces that we cannot predict with accuracy or control.

We may educate the young to understand and practice morality. We may embed our moral values in every thinking person's brain and may uphold the highest ethical practices. Suddenly, like a gale from some far place, without warning or reason, one of the carefully chosen ones with an enviable track record, for no apparent reason, goes off track and once more evil reigns.

Are we then to eschew our best efforts and let nature take its course? Never! Ideals and goals are vital to a proposed Space community. Integrity will always have a place as will honesty and peaceful relationships. Be not fooled, nor be surprised, when evil once more lifts its despicable head. Such event will generate response and the circle begins again. The geography may change, the processes, not. We can still dream and, despite set-back, allow hope to arise again from the ashes of our human frailties. We acknowledge there is no magic formula to assure tranquility. We can still hope!

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**About the Author:** Lawrence G. Downing, DMin, has been a pastor for the Seventh-day Adventist churches in the United States for more than forty years. He was an Adjunct Professor for both the School of Business and the School of Religion at La Sierra University, Riverside, California, 1990 to 2006. His DMin is from Lancaster Theological Seminary. He is a co-author of *Beyond Earth: The Future of Humans in Space* (Toronto, ON: Apogee Press, 2006). Access [www.bobkrone.com/vcat\\_details/24](http://www.bobkrone.com/vcat_details/24) to see the video interviews of Dr. Downing and Dr. Krone at the 2006 International Space Development Conference in Los Angeles. He is Kepler Space Institute's Professor of Space Faith. His article, "Space and the Art of Staying Human" is in the Fall 2012 issue of the *Journal of Space Philosophy*.



**Editors' Notes:** Dr. Lawrence Downing is a pioneer for the complex field of Space Faith. He has stated that "Faith is the base upon which the world's religions build; and faith can only exist when the doctrines/teachings are sustained by the values of those who support and promote the group or movement." In this short essay he writes about one of the major Space questions – "Can humans settling in Space leave their pathologies and evils on Earth?" **Bob Krone and Gordon Arthur.**