Would the World Be a Better Place with more evil?

What is Evil?

An evil act is often described as “an intentional act that is cruel, unjust, harmful or selfish.”¹ Many things in this world would fall under the category of “evil,” but is society better off without evil in this world? There are many ways to view the positive and negative effects of an evil action, but the perspective in which it is viewed can drastically change the outcome. An economist sees the world very differently than others and can sometimes be viewed as unethical or lacking correct moral judgment. Throughout this essay, the reader will have to look at many situations outside the box to really see a different way of finding what is truly an evil act or an increase in efficiency for society.

To define an evil act, one needs to look at definitions from many different perspectives. The general definition states that an evil act consists of something that is harmful, cruel, unjust or selfish. However, if we look at things with more of a religious perspective, we see that their definition is viewed as going against what is right in the eyes of God. Therefore, this leaves many contradictions between the two definitions which I will try and show throughout this discussion. This paper will view evil as something that decreases efficiency in society. This more economic view will completely change the way we view an evil act. For example, if a person murders another “evil” person, is society really worse off? This example just begins to open the economic prospective on whether or not society is maximizing their utility.

This idea of looking at things in multiple prospective will soon prove that there is a fine line between what is evil, and what is ethical. Many people view something that is
unethical, evil, but is this really the case? An economist would argue that an evil act that increased the efficiency of society would truly not be an evil act. However, other may be worse off if this evil act was morally wrong or unethical.

The economic view needs to take into account the given rights each human has. For example, everyone has the right to live, the right to free speech, and the right to vote. Rights theory states that “A right is a special advantage that someone gains because of his or her particular status.”

**Does evil make society worse off?**

For this argument, I will discuss things for the prospective of a process consequentialist as well as the more economic outlook, a sole consequentialist. A process consequentialist not only looks at the outcome of ones action’s, but as well as the means necessary to achieve that goal. Usually, these people are seem as “more ethical” in the eyes of society but not in the eyes of an economist. They are more of a consequentialist relying only on the end result, not so much as the means necessary to achieve them. This leads us to the question, is a evil act that makes society better off truly and evil act? If this act increased efficiency, then how could it be evil? We have to disregard the moral or ethical aspect for now.

We are going to examine an example of a good person who committed an immoral or unethical act by killing another human being. Will we use the killers name as “Jeff” and the victims name, “DeadGuy.” DeadGuy was a well known serial killer who had not been caught yet. Jeff knew what was happening and chooses to do something
about it. Jeff then murdered DeadGuy and disposed of the body. DeadGuy has some family that had a suspicion what was going on and choose to ignore it.

By most definitions, no one has the right to do what Jeff did. He took someone else’s life which fits almost every definition of committing an evil act. However, lets examine this with the economic definition. Is anyone worse off? Is society as a whole worse off? Is the society a more efficient place? Is the gain from the gainers greater than the loss from the losers? From an economic prospective, what was really the harm done by Jeff killing DeadGuy?

Society has one less killer in the world meaning most everyone is better off. The only ones affected by this are DeadGuy, his family, and the future people whose lives have now been saved. If DeadGuy’s family members had no problem with the actions taken then this is very close to a pareto improvement. If DeadGuy killed others, does he lose the right to make his own decisions or have his feelings taken into consideration. If society deems this acceptable than even though this action may be seen as immoral, it may also been seen as an efficiency increasing action.

Another example of an evil act involves Roe vs. Wade. This court case legalized abortion in the early 80’s. Many religions view abortion as an immoral action that is unacceptable in the eyes of God. However, the book Freakonomics by Stephen Levitt examines “a direct correlation between legalized abortion and a significant decrease in the crime rate in the United States.” Is abortion really that evil? A significant decrease in the crime rate is an efficiency increasing improvement for society. However, a significant portion of the population is pro-life because of the ideals they have been raised with or how their religion views right and wrong. If everyone knew about this “study proving
that unwanted children have a significantly less chance of committing a crime when they are older⁴, why not do what is best for society even if it is against your morals? Even though abortion may be seen as a bad, this study shows that, from an economic standpoint, that abortion may be a good.

Society’s lack of an understanding of economics allows their “feelings” and “morals” to run their lives when these actions truly decrease society’s efficiency. Religion and morals are playing a role that hinders the happiness of others around them. Who is to say what is right? The answer is an economist. An efficiency increasing action will never be seen as the wrong thing to do if it makes the world a net “better place.” Each person has their own perspective about what it right and what is wrong but should improperly educated people be allowed to make that decision? This argument does not come down to what is right or wrong but what increases efficiency and happiness for the majority of society. And frankly, some people shouldn’t be allowed to make their own decisions.
1. www.dictionary.com
2. http://www2.sfasu.edu/polisci/Abel/ConstitutionalLawII/RightsTheory.htm
3. Freakonomics by Stephen Levitt
4. Freakonomics by Stephen Levitt