

Thomas Jefferson's Religious Beliefs

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Since we are not explicitly talking about this in terms of Epicurean philosophy, it still might be helpful for us to conceive of where ideas of evil began in history. In theological terms evil is usually associated with some supernatural presence that represents “negative” qualities, darkness or chaos. Either a god or a spirit. Evil deities were prevalent in the myths of the near east and responsible for many human problems. The Persians had Ahriman the dualistic hostile spirit that was the opposite of the Lord of Wisdom Ahura Mazda. The Egyptians had Set, who was the god of chaos, who murdered Osiris. The Hebrews had various hostile spirits and fallen angels such as Azazel and Semjaza, which eventually evolved into the Christian devil and Satan. Sometimes these spirits were “gods” of neighboring hostile nations like Baal or Dagon, that were identified as evil. What’s interesting is that the Greeks didn’t have a specific diabolical deity that they identify as “evil.” The Greeks seem to have seen all the gods being capable of benevolence and evil, just like people. Whereas the other groups seem to have identified one or a group of gods as “good” and others as evil.

Perhaps this might be useful for a linguistic purposes of how various populations define “evil” in this sort of theological and mythological context. Supernatural entities that represent the occult, black magic, darkness, witchcraft, diseases, disasters, war, famine, drought, madness etc.