

# Introduction

*Andrew Chignell*



*Those who inquire concerning where Evil enters into beings, or rather into a certain order of beings, would be making the best beginning if they established, first of all, what precisely Evil is.*

—PLOTINUS

## I. EVIL QUESTIONS

“Evil” and its semantic relatives in the Germanic branch of Indo-European have referred, over time, to suffering and wrongdoing as well as to latrines, bowel movements, spoiled fruit, diseases, prostitution, and (oddly enough) forks. The first two meanings survive in English, but the non-ironic use of the term is rare outside of ceremonial and literary contexts. In fact, speaking of evil often feels like an odd exercise in anachronism—like speaking of wickedness, abomination, or iniquity.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains:

In modern colloquial English “evil” is little used, such currency as it has being due to literary influence. In quite familiar speech the adjective is commonly superseded by *bad*; the noun is somewhat more frequent, but chiefly in the widest senses, the more specific senses

being expressed by other words, such as *harm*, *injury*, *misfortune*, *disease*, etc.<sup>1</sup>

This trend is visible in other modern languages too, though not in all. In her illuminating “kakology” in this volume, Antonia Ruppel notes that “*das Übel*” declined in German-speaking lands, just like “evil” did in Anglophone regions, but was soon replaced by “*das Böse*,” which is still alive and well.<sup>2</sup>

The slow erasure of “evil” and its cognates from many European languages, which began (according to Ruppel) in the seventeenth century, was due in part to the rejection of the *concept* by elites. Medical doctors, moral philosophers, natural scientists, psychologists, and even theologians shied away from using the concept—preferring more anodyne notions like *badness*, *harm*, and *misfortune*, or quasi-quantifiable ones like *pain*, *suffering*, *trauma*, and *disutility*. Traditional views of evil as ontologically substantive or even supernatural—something able to possess a body or terrorize a soul—came to seem quaint, unscientific, embarrassing.

Philosophers of religion are a half-exception to the rule. They did and do continue to speak of evil, at least when discussing the “problem” of it. If pressed, though, they will admit that this is because the great framers of the problem—Aquinas, Leibniz, Bayle, et al.—used the Latin or French versions of the term; they will then go on to gloss it generically as, in Michael Tooley’s words, “any undesirable states of affairs.”<sup>3</sup>

1 “evil, adj. and n.1,” *OED* online, June 2017 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

2 I follow Ruppel in resisting any speculation (or jokes) about why “*das Böse*” is still alive and well in Germany and Austria. It is worth noting, however, that “*das Übel*” is etymologically closer to the English “evil.” For more, see Ruppel, present volume.

3 See Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 ed.), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Continental philosophers of religion are less likely to assimilate *evil* to the more anodyne concepts in this way. Some of the more creative (albeit turgid) recent work on the concept of evil itself, as opposed to the problem of evil, has come out of that tradition. See in particular, Richard Kearney, “Evil, Monstrosity and the Sublime,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, T. 57, Fasc. 3, Desafios do Mal: Do Mistério à Sabedoria (Jul.–Sep. 2001), 485–502 and Martin Beck Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

However, in spite of this queasiness about “evil” in both scientific culture and common speech, there are moments when we still feel the pull of the ancient lexicon—expressively, at least, in the mode of both condemnation and lament. Premeditated mass shootings aren’t just bad or traumatic, they are something else—here we reach for “evil.” The years-long imprisonment and rape of children by their parents is a misfortune that produces disutility, to be sure, but our transfixed horror in the face of it can only be captured by the invocation of “evil.” The same is true of most instances of genocide, sex-trafficking, torture-slavery, chemical bombardment, terrorism, serial killing, and slavery: these are one and all bad, harmful, and traumatic activities, but they are also something else—something excessive, mesmerizing, and revolting all at once. In the face of such acts, we—along with our spiritual leaders, newscasters, and politicians—are still willing to speak, preach, and tweet about “pure evil.”<sup>4</sup>

But when we do this—when we speak of evil, *das Böse, il male* nowadays—what is it that we *mean*?

There are two main camps on this issue. When pressed, many people (philosophers included) will revert to the more tractable terms. *Of course* what we are really talking about (whispering about, tweeting about, shaking our heads about) in those moments of condemnation and lament is an extreme instance of suffering or disutility. *Of course* “evil” is to “bad” what “wicked” is to “immoral”: a conceptual vestige of a prescientific, credulous past that we occasionally invoke for the sake of solemnity, empathy, or emphasis. A concept that—outside of

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4 Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump) tweeted on February 2, 2017, that “we must keep ‘evil’ out of our country.” Despite the quotation marks, it was clear that he meant evil the entity and not “evil” the word. After the Las Vegas mass shooting in October 2017, Trump and many others in leadership referred to the event as “an act of pure evil.” Ali Vitali, “Trump Calls Las Vegas Shooting ‘Act of Pure Evil,’” *NBC News*, October 2, 2017. Likewise, Barack Obama referred to the Paris shooting of journalists in January 2015 a “cowardly, evil attack” (<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/president-obama-calls-paris-terror-crisis-a-cowardly-evil-attack/>). More famously, George W. Bush referred to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the “axis of evil” in a State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, and Ronald Reagan repeatedly characterized the Soviet Union as “the evil empire,” most famously at the Berlin Wall March 18, 1983.

horror films and fiction—is best analyzed in terms of nature’s frustration of the basic needs of sentient beings or as the effects of illness or ill-parenting. Yes, evil acts and events have an excessive, egregious quality that makes them notable, even transfixing. But they are not, in the end, *sui generis* or ontologically mysterious. Neuroscience, medicine, and psychology have domesticated evil.

People in the second camp focus less on conditioning, damage, and disease—preferring instead to speak of evil in terms of *choices* and *will*. For them, evil consists in malevolent intentions, malice with forethought, self-conscious cruelty; it also typically leads to suffering and tribulation. They will allow that there are contributing factors and preconditions, of course, but they ultimately hold the *agents themselves* responsible for evil.<sup>5</sup> This appeal to agency may seem mysterious to people in the first camp, but it is no more mysterious than human free will generally. It suggests that people in the second camp, too, are in the business of domesticating evil—of making evil explicable in terms of familiar concepts, of setting it on a continuum with other, familiar acts and events.

I said these were *the* two opposing camps. But in truth there is another one—one that used to be the most populous of all but now has fewer partisans. People in this third camp eschew all efforts to explain away or domesticate evil; for them, what we mean by “evil” is not equivalent to what we mean by “bad” or “wrong” or even “very, very, very bad” or “very, very, very wrong.” In other words, evil is not just illness, misfortune, or poor choices by another name, but rather a positive, substantial rottenness in the universe. Some *thing*—substantive, oomphy, robust, out there (“in them woods”). But what, exactly? Is evil just the shadow side of good—an impersonal supply of the bad yang to every good yin? Or is it a positive force that is mortally opposed to

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5 In the lamentable moments on a global scale, the debate between these two camps plays out on cable news stations and op-ed pages. The people in the second camp (who tend to the political right) make a show of using “evil” because they think that people in the first camp (who tend to the political left) are uncomfortable with the ideas of individual free choice and personal responsibility.

the good in a Manichean/Star Wars kind of way? Or, most unnerving of all: Is evil grounded in something *personal* and *agential* but also nonhuman—a malevolent, striving will that makes the universe tend not just to entropic winding down but also to outbreaks of genuine, targeted hellishness?

These are some of the main *ontological* questions that philosophers, past and present, raise about evil. They are questions about its substance and essence, its being or nonbeing, its intrinsic features and its ways of manifesting in nature.

There are related *epistemological* questions: How and what can we *know* about evil? As we will see, one of the leading accounts of the ontology of evil says that it is an *absence* of being or a *privation* of the way things ought to be.<sup>6</sup> But what does that imply about our ability to understand its nature, when to expect it, and how to prevent it? Can we know something that is *no-thing*?

It's clear in any case that we can know *about* evil—for instance, when we hear reports of a sadistic torture-murder or a genocidal massacre. But does a victim know evil in a way that is *entirely* different from the way that we know it, or that a witness knows it? Can the perpetrator know evil *as* evil at all—or does he, at least in the moment, inevitably view his action *as* good in some way (good for him, good for his cause, good for his people, good fun)? Does an eyewitness or someone watching on television acquire “what it is like” knowledge of evil, or is such access reserved solely for victims and perpetrators? More farfetched: can a nonhuman animal know evil? Can a Martian? Can a god?

A third kind of question is broadly *psychological*: What could motivate some agent—human or otherwise—to *intend*, *perpetrate*, or *permit* evil? It is hard to imagine how great evils such as Satan's rebellion, Iago's machinations, Stalin's genocides, or Dick Cheney's

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6 See the pieces by O'Meara, Davies, King, and Newlands in the present volume.

vice presidency could be psychologically *understood* in the ways we understand ordinary actions—i.e., in terms of intelligible reasons, intentions, beliefs, and desires. But what about more banal evils: Can we make sense of how a one-time vacuum oil salesman named Adolf Eichmann might have regarded himself as an able bureaucrat, meticulously doing his job however unpleasant the consequences, and hoping for a promotion? And what about corporate, structural, or systemic evils—can they be explained in terms of actions on the part of individuals?

More broadly, does talk of “evil” make sense without referring to some psychology or other—someone who acts with intention? Can nature—a law of nature, or a karmic principle—be evil? What about a hurricane or an all-destroying asteroid? We are reluctant to ascribe full-fledged moral agency to nonhuman creatures, so why are we so often willing to depict them as arch evil in literature and art (goats, whales, serpents, crows, dark angels) and film (*The Blob*, *The Birds*, *Jaws*, *Alien*, *Aliens*, *Alien 3*, *Alien Resurrection*, etc.)?<sup>7</sup>

In the lamentable moments, we still speak and think in terms of evil, and so these metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological questions inevitably arise.

Some people choose to sit quietly with these questions. Others make the effort—intrepidly, quixotically—to offer answers. Many of those try, explicitly or implicitly, to push back to the anodyne, domesticating, tractable concepts. Others quote texts or proverbs from religious traditions. Still others write novels or poetry, give sermons, create memorials, compose music, or produce documentaries.

This volume focuses on how *philosophers* in the broadly western tradition—the tradition that includes Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought—have responded to these questions. From Hebrew wisdom writers to Greek sages, scholastic theologians to enlightenment

<sup>7</sup> See Christy Mag Uidhir, “Cinematic Evil,” present volume.

rationalists, nineteenth-century pessimists to twentieth-century Holocaust theorists, philosophers of different stripes and eras have joined religious, artistic, and political leaders in trying to cope with evil. In most cases they have done so, characteristically enough, by making *arguments*: arguments about how we ought to formulate these questions, or arguments that some questions can't properly be asked and mustn't be answered. Arguments that analyze or reduce; arguments that historicize or debunk. Arguments that focus on the compatibility of evil with God's existence; arguments according to which such projects in theodicy must be abandoned. And so on.

In addition to the thirteen chapters, the volume intersperses thirteen interdisciplinary Reflections on how evil has been conceived or depicted by poets, artists, essayists, composers, theologians, technologists, and political regimes. The selection is obviously incomplete; entire shelves could be filled with Reflections on the ways human beings have tried to cope with evil. But these at least provide some sense of how non-philosophers view our baleful topic.

## 2. THE CHAPTERS AND REFLECTIONS

In the first chapter I continue in this broad introductory mode by considering some prominent ethical concerns raised by the very act of collecting a volume called *Evil*. These concerns are echoed in the current debate between so-called evil revivalists and evil skeptics, but the *locus classicus* is a 1940s correspondence between Karl Jaspers and his former student Hannah Arendt.

As we will see, the first "Jaspersian concern" is that calling something evil will lead us to *exoticize* the act or perpetrator in such a way that moral condemnation becomes difficult. The second Jaspersian concern is that talk of evil encourages a kind of pre-moral, magical thinking whereby we treat perpetrators, victims, and maybe even eye-witness and relatives as tainted by the act, as contaminated or contagious. I examine various ways in which *moral evil*, in particular, has

been characterized as unintelligible or “radical,” and show when and how these characterizations raise Jaspersian concerns.

The other chapters and Reflections are presented chronologically by subject matter. Antonia Ruppel’s chapter on “Kakology” goes as far back as one can—she provides a path through the murky etymologies of the various words for “evil” in German, English, Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. Although it is hard to discern the term’s origin (in this way the term is very much like its referent!), one of Ruppel’s conjectures is that “evil” is lexically linked to concepts like *up* and *over* and *beyond normal boundaries*, thereby evoking a kind of *excess* or *extremeness*. She also surmises that, in some ancient contexts, using the word itself was ill-advised or tabooed, and that this may explain the etymological murkiness.

Ruppel’s survey of five main Indo-European languages is followed by Carol A. Newsom’s chapter focused on the Hebrew tradition—in particular, the conception of evil in the wisdom literatures of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Although the first two texts are neutral or optimistic—offering at least some rhyme or reason for misfortune—the vision we confront in Ecclesiastes is different. The speaker, Qohelet, is depicted as confronting evils of various sorts and ultimately losing his trust in the goodness and rationality of the world—and thus in the goodness and rationality of its creator. This kind of unpredictability or unintelligibility, according to Newsom, is one of the key ways in which evil manifests itself in the Hebrew tradition.

Esther Hamori’s Reflection on Satan’s role in the Hebrew Bible adds a further twist. Later cultures (including contemporary pop cultures) depict Satan as Milton’s thoroughly malevolent, majestic angel of darkness. In fact, as Hamori shows, the earliest Hebrew texts depict *ha-Satan* much more ambivalently—in *Job*, he occasionally seems to be a source of help around the heavenly court! Intriguingly enough, these texts also depict *other* divine beings, including Yahweh himself, as occasionally a tad malevolent.

Matthew C. Halteman's *Reflection* focuses not on what the Genesis narrative has to say about angels but rather on what it says about non-human animals and their relationship to human beings. Halteman contrasts the Edenic picture of "shalom" with the postlapsarian rupture in which animals are suddenly treated as threats, property, or food. The "disruption of shalom" that this represents in the Hebrew tradition has developed, thanks to increased demand and new industrial techniques, into a manifest modern abomination. Indeed, Halteman raises the question (without taking a stand) whether the current industrial harvesting of more than 80 billion land animals and untold billions of sea creatures *per year*, might someday be regarded as one of the greatest evils of all time.

Rachana Kamtekar's chapter approaches Greek and Roman antiquity (a vast territory, obviously) by contrasting two forms of moral explanation. The first is fully intellectualist or "rationalistic": we understand an evil act by entering into the reasons and deliberation of the agent, considering her ends and her choice of means. This is how Medea's decision to kill her own children is presented by Euripides, for instance. Sometimes, however, such rationalization seems radically inadequate to the explanandum. In such cases, authors like Plato and Seneca are forced to revert to mere dispositional analysis: *she did that because she has an evil disposition—that's just the kind of person she is*. Kamtekar points out that this kind of quasi-explanation leaves the heart of darkness in Medea unexplained—and her evil act partly unintelligible.

Dominic O'Meara's chapter focuses on the ways of thinking about evil developed by the late antique thinker Plotinus (ca. 204–270) and then appropriated in different ways by his followers—the Christian philosopher Augustine (354–430) and the pagan philosopher Proclus (412–485). Plotinus rejects the idea that we humans are the ultimate source of evil—even moral evil—and blames *undifferentiated prime matter* instead. Such matter exists necessarily as the ultimate terminus in the great chain of being, but it has no form, no rationale, no order.

It is the Hellenic counterpart to the Hebrew *tohuwobohu*—the “chaos” over which the spirit of God dwells and out of which order is fashioned in Genesis 1. Although Plotinus offers no real explanation of why the soul, in a self-caused motion, ultimately “turns toward the worse,” he insists that the origin of that act is not in the will but *in matter itself*. Proclus and Augustine object that this is in tension with the view that the One is both absolute Goodness and produces all things, *including* matter. Proclus adopts *absence theory* according to which “evil” is a name for a non-thing that is not there; Augustine adopts *privation theory* according to which evil is an *absence where there ought to be a presence* (in this case, a good will).

Peter King’s chapter provides a full-dress discussion of St. Augustine’s immensely influential account of evil: privation theory, the account of free will as the origin of moral evil, and the way Augustine packs both into the Judeo-Christian doctrine of original sin. King goes on to examine Augustine’s somewhat flailing efforts to defend the claim that *all* the suffering of sentient creatures throughout the ages is somehow *morally* justified in the divine economy.

Moving forward a few centuries, Clark West offers a Reflection on medieval traditions of thinking about hell—in William of Auvergne but especially in the writings of women mystics like Hadewijch of Brabant and Marguerite Porete. Whereas for moderns and contemporaries, hell itself is part of the problem of evil—something whose existence must be either denied or made compatible with God’s existence—for most of the medievals it was a manifestation of God’s appropriate justice. For some, however, it was also a place that one might decide to go out of *love* of God or another.

Nadja Germann’s chapter describes the debate in early Islamic philosophy between the *natural law* theory of right and wrong defended by the Mu‘tazilī school and the *divine command* theory of right and wrong put forward by their twelfth-century critic, the theologian al-Ghazālī. It is *only* through special revelation, al-Ghazālī says, that we come to know what is prohibited and what is commanded. We must

simply *intend* to follow God's commands as we are given them. For al-Ghazālī and his Ash'ariyya philosophers, then, the unintelligibility of evil is inherited from the unintelligibility of *wrongness*: we can know *that* God has proscribed something, but we cannot know *why*. Despite this disagreement about what wrongness consists in, these early Islamic scholastics—like Augustine, Plato, and Euripides—locate the source of moral evil in the finite will.

Thomas Aquinas's discussion of *malum culpae* goes a step further insofar as he clearly admits, according to Brian Davies, that "even free human choices are creatively caused by God." The Thomistic God is the ultimate source of all being: the being that is the finite will, and thus the being that the finite will produces. Rather than conclude that God is also the author of evil, Aquinas exonerates God by insisting that God is not the source of the *orientation* of the will, and that the (erroneous) orientation of the will is what evil consists in. So God's goodness *qua* creator is not called into question by moral evil. Likewise, God is the source of the being and goodness in things that suffer as a result of the characteristic activities of other beings, but God is not the source *of the evil* of suffering (*malum poenae*).

Eleonore Stump is another leading scholar of Aquinas, but her Reflection is focused on a very different way of exhibiting the medieval view of evil—in the narrative poetry of Dante Alighieri. According to Stump, Dante explains in *narrational rather than philosophic* terms how the treachery of a host against an unsuspecting guest can be one of the very worst evils of all. Such an explanation, and the images it provokes in readers' minds and in the works of painters like William Blake and Gustav Doré, are memorable and persuasive in ways that a philosophical *disputatio*, even one by Stump's angelic doctor, is not.

Derk Pereboom's Reflection on early Calvinism revisits questions about whether the traditional God *qua* creator can avoid being the author of moral evil. Can theological hard determinism avoid the ghastly conclusion that there is something evil or diabolical in the divine nature itself?

Sarah K. Pinnock focuses less on theology in her Reflection and more on how the human tendency to think in terms of taint and contagion (the source of one of the Jaspersian concerns that I discuss in chapter 1) can lead to virulent forms of misogyny. In the medieval and early modern periods across Europe and the New World, *thousands* of women were condemned as witting or unwitting sources of physical and metaphysical evil. Many of these women were put to death in horrible ways, thereby adding rather than subtracting from the evils in the world.

Samuel Newlands's chapter traces the fate of the privation theory of evil in the early modern period. Newlands shows how René Descartes ingeniously preserved a limited form of privation theory about *moral* evil, even while promoting an otherwise mechanistic, anti-teleological physics. Subsequent philosophers took the attack on teleology further, however, and jettisoned privationism altogether in favor of a theory of evil as mere absence (Spinoza) or a theory according to which it is a positive reality (Malebranche). Newlands ends his piece by provocatively suggesting that contemporary theodiscists might do well to revive some form of privation theory.

Elaine Sisman's Reflection on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* addresses the enlightenment period in a very different key. Sisman notes that although Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte explicitly invoked Dante's *Inferno* as a source of his inspiration, the text by Da Ponte together with Mozart's musical accompaniment tell a much more ambivalent story. The Don is hardly diabolical; rather, he is an ambivalent source of both good and evil (much like Hamori's *ha-Satan*).

George Huxford's Reflection focuses entirely on the work of Immanuel Kant, whose treatise on *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793) is the most influential work in the philosophy of evil in the west since Augustine's *Confessions*. Kant rejects privation theory across the board and also disparages the very idea of "natural evil." His views about cancer, tsunamis, and death are close to those of contemporary "skeptical theists"—namely, that beings with our limited

cognitive abilities not only *cannot* see why God would allow such things, they also *cannot reasonably expect* to see why. For Kant, then, the only kind of genuine evil is *moral*. Our will has a radical disposition to evil—a disposition at its very root (*radix*)—to prefer natural inclination and self-love over the moral law, and this can only be fought but never extirpated. Thus “radical evil” in Kant is very different from what it is in later authors (e.g., Richard Bernstein, Martin Beck Matušík, Slavoj Žižek, and Gabriel Motzkin in the present volume). It is not something diabolical or inhuman or even excessive; rather, it is found in a common disposition that we all share—one at the very root of human psychology.

Allen Wood iterates this point about Kant in his chapter, while also insisting that the natural disposition to evil is a function of our invidious tendency not merely to prefer self over the moral law, but to prefer self *over others*. Wood sees this as an openly Rousseauian aspect of Kant’s theory. Kant’s successor J. G. Fichte changes the moral-psychological landscape by saying that evil ultimately arises *either* out of preferring natural inclination over the moral law *or* from our “pure” drive for self-sufficiency and domination of all that is external. The first kind of evil doesn’t require others at all—it can involve mere “inertia” or laziness, and so Fichte (unlike Kant, according to Wood) allows for evil that isn’t based in “unsocial sociability.” The second kind of evil does involve others in the sense that it ignores their moral claims on us altogether. Both are reflective of a kind of failure that Fichte calls “despair over oneself”: an idea that, according to Wood, Søren Kierkegaard appropriates in his much less rationalistic discussion of the origins of moral evil.

Silvia De Toffoli’s Reflection moves us back to Southern Europe in order to focus on Italian poet-philosopher Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). Leopardi was a reflective pessimist who was an inspiration to Schopenhauer and deserves a wider readership among philosophers. His pessimism was expressed poetically for the most part, but, as De Toffoli shows, it was also a considered philosophical outlook.

His explicit refrain in his *magnum opus*—*Zibaldone* (1817–1832)—is that “everything is evil,” but this is partly belied by his own narrative, in which it becomes clear that humanity is ultimately a victim, and Nature is to blame: “My philosophy makes nature guilty of everything, and by exonerating humanity altogether, it redirects the hatred, or at least the complaint.”

Susan Neiman takes up where she left off in *Evil and Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002). Her main argument in that seminal book was that the effort to cope with evil is one of the main impulses—perhaps *the* main impulse—behind the development of enlightenment philosophy. In the chapter titled “What Happened to Evil?,” Neiman deftly extends the storyline into the nineteenth century by surveying key developments in Hegel, Schopenhauer, Marx, and Nietzsche, each of whom she regards as far more focused on the existential and philosophical threats posed by evil than other commentators recognize.

Eric Martin and Eric Watkins approach the fate of our baleful topic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a scientific angle in their chapter “Evil, Natural Science, and Animal Suffering.” With the advent of new conceptions of the laws of nature came new conceptions of natural evil, and with the advent of new evolutionary understandings of biological development came new conceptions of just how much sentient suffering characterizes the natural order (both now and long before humans came on the scene). Darwin offered his own ambivalent response to the problem posed by the suffering of nonhuman animals without ever abandoning theism. Martin and Watkins show how later “broadly Darwinian” pictures—both theistic and non-theistic—developed to cope with this new conception of the suffering involved in evolutionary development.

Christy Mag Uidhir takes the volume into the twentieth century with his Reflection on the ways in which evil was depicted in early film. Despite the fact that pre-code Hollywood (the industry prior to the enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code in 1934) was

“infamous for featuring violence, sexuality, profanity, drug use, and all manner of moral turpitude,” Mag Uidhir shows that it wasn’t until the middle of the century that “pure” or “intrinsic” evil becomes a prominent theme. This may have had to do, he speculates, with “the sorts of evil taking place in the actual world” at that time.

Gabriel Motzkin’s chapter articulates and defends an account of “radical evil” that is also radically unKantian. For Motzkin, radical evil does not consist in a disposition of the will or a violation of the moral law but rather in the repudiation of morality and its authority altogether. As a result, it is evil in a transcendent, permanent, and incommensurable way, rather than evil that is “defined in comparison to the good.” What is particularly intriguing is that, for Motzkin, the fact that radical evil involves an effort to transcend the moral law altogether also makes it *inexpiable*. Some contemporary “evil-revivalists” think it’s important to revive the concept of evil so that we can refer to *agents* for whom there is “no hope of rehabilitation.”<sup>8</sup> Motzkin, by contrast, wants to use “radical evil” to pick out the *deeds* for which there is no hope of atonement. He lists various kinds of slavery, genocide, and paradigmatically the Holocaust as examples of radical evil.

Motzkin’s chapter is bookended by two Reflections on related topics. One of them, by Jennifer L. Geddes, provides an illuminating overview of Hannah Arendt’s engagement with Nazism in the form of the banal-seeming salesman slouching in the dock in Jerusalem. Arendt started off, in *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), viewing evil much as Motzkin does: as *sui generis*, category-bursting, wholly other. But as Geddes points out, by the time she wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), Arendt had developed the banality thesis for which she is now more famous.

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8 See Luke Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For an excellent overview of the debate see Todd Calder, “The Concept of Evil,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 ed.), ed. Edward N. Zalta,

The other bookend is an eloquent, half-autobiographical Reflection by prominent Israeli political philosopher Avishai Margalit about the dangers involved in aestheticizing satanic “instigators” of evil and treating the mere “compliers” as banal.

Volumes in the *Oxford Philosophical Concepts* series are supposed to stop around 1960, since it is difficult for historians of philosophy to foresee which of the more recent trends will remain significant. One thing that does seem clear, however, is that discussion of the complex relationship between technological and moral progress is here to stay. So we made an exception for the final Reflection by Wesley Chan—an early product manager and “innovator” at Google, Inc..

In Chan’s telling, the story of Google is that of a young corporation earnestly instructing its employees “don’t be evil” and reaping great benefits as a result—both for its users and for its bottom line. What Chan doesn’t discuss, however, is that in many people’s eyes Google has now become a case study in the way structural evil can arise from systems that are constituted by (mostly) benign or even good intentions. When you google,<sup>9</sup> in a spirit of high irony, the phrase “Is Google evil?” you’ll find numerous stories from every side of the political spectrum, most of which agree that the company did not live up to its one-time corporate motto:

- “Is Google Evil?” (*Mother Jones*, October 2006)
- “Steve Jobs: Google’s ‘Don’t Be Evil’ Mantra is Bullshit” (*Wired*, January 2010)
- “Google’s Broken Promise: The End of ‘Don’t Be Evil’” (*Gizmodo*, January 2012)
- “Google Is Evil” (*Wired Magazine*, June 2012)
- “What Is ‘Evil’ to Google?” (*The Atlantic*, October 2013)
- “Can We All Just Admit that Google Is an Evil Empire?” (*Fast Company*, January 2014)

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<sup>9</sup> If you don’t want to google the phrase, you can always duckduckgo it (see [www.duckduckgo.com](http://www.duckduckgo.com)).

- “Does ‘Don’t Be Evil’ Still Apply to Google?” (*CNBC.com*, August 2014)
- “Which Is More Evil—Google or Apple?” (*Fortune*, June 2014)
- “Google, Evil? You Have No Idea” (*Infoworld*, March 2014)
- “Why Google Is the New Evil Empire” (*Fox Business*, January 2016)
- “Did Google just Surpass Monsanto as the World’s Most Evil Company?” (*Natural News*, April 2017)
- “Google Is Being Evil After All” (*American Conservative*, August 2017)
- “Top 10 Ways Google Does Evil” (*Listverse*, September 2017)
- “Under Eric Schmidt, Google Evolved from ‘Don’t Be Evil’ to ‘Be Kind of Evil’” (*Slate*, December 2017)
- “The Case Against Google” (*New York Times*, February 2018)
- “Google Will Always Do Evil” (*Engadget*, May 2018)

A few of these pieces are exaggerated, to be sure. But many of them contain serious indictments; one of the authors even suggests that by using Google or owning company stock, “you might be supporting EVIL without even knowing it.”<sup>10</sup>

If this is even close to correct, then Chan’s piece provides an excellent illustration—*malgré lui*—of how hard it is for people who profit handsomely from a corporate structure to see how utterly it has been corrupted by the profit motive. In Silicon Valley, just like everywhere else, money is the root of far more than innovation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mike Adams, “Did Google Just Surpass Monsanto as the World’s Most Evil Company?” *Natural News*, April 18, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> In April 2018, just as this volume was going to press, Google removed “Don’t Be Evil” as the motto of its official code of conduct. There is now only one instance of the phrase at the end of the document: “And remember . . . don’t be evil, and if you see something that you think isn’t right—speak up!” The company offered no explanation for the change. See *Google Code of Conduct*, April 5, 2018 update. See also Jessica Conditt, “Google will always be evil,” *Engadget*, May 24, 2018.