

## Non-Moral Evil

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There is, I shall assume, such a thing as moral evil (more on which below). My question is whether there is also such a thing as non-moral evil, and in particular whether there are such things as aesthetic evil and epistemic evil. More exactly, my question is whether there is such a thing as moral evil but *not* such a thing as non-moral evil, in some sense that reveals something special about the moral, as opposed to such would-be non-moral domains as the aesthetic and the epistemic. The philosophical issue at stake here is that of the nature of these (supposedly) distinct normative domains, and the nature and extent of their distinctness.

Philosophers commonly distinguish between a plurality of normative domains, including the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic. R.M. Hare (1963, p. 168), for example, contrasts aesthetic “oughts” with moral “oughts” by arguing that the latter override the former: even though I aesthetically ought not place a magenta cushion (a gift from my wife) on my scarlet sofa, I morally ought to place the cushion there, because to do otherwise would hurt my wife’s feelings, and since moral “oughts” override aesthetic “oughts,” I ought – full stop, or all-things-considered – to disregard the aesthetic “ought,” in this case, and place the cushion on the sofa. And Richard Feldman (1988, p. 236) argues that epistemic obligation can conflict with moral obligation, as well as with “practical or prudential” obligation, as when an evidentially unsupported belief would benefit the believer, or fulfill a duty she owes to a friend.

Our question, then, is whether there are such things as distinctively aesthetic evil and epistemic evil, or whether the aesthetic and the epistemic do not admit of evil, in some sense that morality does, which then reveals something special about morality. We shall first characterize evil (§1) and moral evil (§2), before considering possible cases of aesthetic and epistemic evil (§3). We will then consider the nature of the moral, aesthetic, and epistemic domains (§4), before characterizing distinctively aesthetic and epistemic species of evil (§5). This will show us that the existence of moral evil reveals nothing special about morality.

### 1 Characterizing evil

There are several senses of “evil” that we shall set aside. “Evil” is sometimes synonymous with (extreme or gratuitous) suffering, as in (certain versions of) the theological “problem of evil.” In this sense, evil is something like a substance, or a property of states of affairs. There is also a religious or supernatural sense of “evil,” where evil is understood in terms of some entity (e.g. Satan) or force that is radically and essentially opposed to God (cf. Garrard 1998, p. 44, 2002, pp. 322-3, Morton 2004, p. 22). Here we shall focus on a secular sense of “evil” that attaches to actions or to people (and perhaps also to policies or societies). Our initial concern will be with “moral evil,” rather than with “natural evil” (Garrard 2002, p. 320, although cf. Midgley 1984, p. 12).

Evil is a species of badness or wrongness: evil actions must be wrong actions; evil people must be bad people. But we shall set aside the question of whether evil is merely a high

degree of badness or wrongness, and thus merely quantitatively different from mere badness or wrongness, or whether it is aggravated badness or wrongness, and thus qualitatively different from badness or wrongness (Garrard 1998, p. 44, 2002, p. 321, Steiner 2002, p. 184). We shall also set aside the question of whether evil comes in degrees (Steiner 2002, p. 184) or not (Haybron 2002, p. 261-3).

What, then, is evil? What characterizes evil actions and evil people?

We might characterize evil in terms of its effects. Adam Morton (2004) identifies our focus when considering the notion of evil as “acts that impose death, pain, and humiliation on others.” (p. 1, cf. p. 13) So perhaps evil is that which causes death, pain, or humiliation. But things that aren’t evil (in our sense) can cause death, pain, and humiliation: tsunamis, earthquakes, simple twists of fate. Perhaps then: evil actions are those that (intentionally) impose death, pain, or humiliation on other people. But this controversially rules out the possibility of situations in which the intentional imposition of death, pain, or humiliation is morally permissible, for example, in the waging of just war (Garrard 1998, p. 47, 2002, p. 327). It also rules out (although this is less obviously a liability) the possibility of causally impotent evil, as in the case of the “thoroughly hateful and mean-spirited coward” (Haybron 1999, p. 132), the “essentially voyeuristic ... misanthrope” (Haybron 2002, p. 265), or the “sadistic voyeur” (Garrard 2002, p. 327, see also McGinn 1997, p. 66).

Alternatively, we might characterize evil in terms of our emotional response to it. Morton (2004) writes that “we tend to be appalled, horrified, or outraged by evil,” whereas we are merely “upset, disillusioned, or saddened by other kinds of wrong.” (p. 18, cf. p. 13) Suppose that evil warrants a distinctive suite of reactive attitudes. We might then say that evil is that which warrants such attitudes. But this is an unsatisfying “account” of evil. The aforementioned reactions are responses *to* something that warrants them, and what we want to know, when we want to know what *evil* is, is what that *something* is, that warrants such responses. As Morton says, there is something “to which our reactions of horror and disgust are *attuned*,” (p. 54, my emphasis) and as Eve Garrard (2002) argues, “an adequate account of what evil is would show why ... we respond to [evil acts] as we do.” (p. 322) (The same point would apply to any attempt to characterize evil in terms of the sorts of coercion that one would be justified in using to prevent it, or in terms of the sorts of sanction that one would be justified in imposing to punish it.)

In light of these problems, a promising strategy is to characterize evil in terms of its motivational or affective profile. There are a variety of more specific ways of spelling this idea out, but all such accounts of evil are instances of the same general strategy: evil concerns something about the motivation or emotional state of the evildoer or evil person. Augustine writes, on stealing pears with a group of friends, that “[o]ur only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden,” and that he “loved the evil in me – not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil: My soul was depraved ... seeking no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked.”<sup>1</sup> Milton’s Satan declares “Evil, by thou my good.”<sup>2</sup> And G.E. Moore (1903) describes lasciviousness – “an enjoyment or admiring contemplation of things which are themselves either evil or ugly” – as a “great intrinsic evil.” (pp. 208-9) Colin McGinn (1997) takes evil to essentially involve “an inversion of the usual laws of interpersonal feeling.” (p. 64) On McGinn’s view (p. 61-9),

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<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, selection anthologized in Rorty 2001, pp. 43-7, at p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Lost*, line 110.

the evil person derives pleasure from other people's pain and pain from other people's pleasure.

This kind of strategy has been adopted by a number of philosophers. Hillel Steiner (2002) characterizes evil actions as "wrong acts that are pleasurable for their doers." (p. 189) (We should add, following McGinn, that the pleasure must be *because* of the wrongness of the act.) Garrard (1998, 2002) characterizes evil as essentially requiring a "silencing" of moral reasons. For the evil person, "[t]he sufferings of his victims ... play no part in his practical deliberations." (1998, p. 54) On her view, "the evil action is one in which the agent is entirely impervious – blind and deaf – to the presence of significant reasons against his acting." (2002, p. 330) These reasons, moreover, are "reasons of the first importance" and "overwhelmingly strong." (Ibid. p. 331) Daniel Haybron (1999) describes evil people as exhibiting (some combination of) McGinn's inverted sympathy, lack of conscience (1999, p. 134), lack of sympathy (p. 135), malice or hostility towards others (p. 136), or malevolence. "[T]he concept of evil," Haybron writes, "centrally concerns matters of motive and affect," (2002, p. 264) and (on his view) "[t]o be evil is ... to be consistently vicious in the following sense: *one is not aligned with the good to a morally significant extent.*" (2002, p. 269) Finally, Morton (2004) argues that evil has different causes than other sorts of wrongdoing (p. 2): the motives of the mere wrongdoer "are less evil than" those of the evildoer; the mere wrongdoer has not necessarily "aimed at anyone's harm." (p. 10, see also p. 12, p. 24) Following McGinn, Morton writes, of sociopaths, that their natural inhibitions against violence have been suppressed or otherwise gotten around (p. 49). Evil actions are then defined as requiring a failure of inhibition "by barriers against considering harming or humiliating others that ought to have been in place." (p. 57)

I will assume that evil essentially requires a distinctive motivational or affective profile: evil actions must be the result of such a profile; evil persons must suffer from such a profile. Evil, in other words, requires **wickedness**. Wickedness comes in two varieties: the **wicked inversion** of a normal or proper profile, such that the evildoer or evil person is positively attracted to badness or wrongness, or to death, pain, and humiliation (McGinn, Steiner), and **wicked indifference** to badness or wrongness, or to death, pain, and humiliation (Garrard, Heybron, Morton; cf. Midgley 1984, pp. 12-16, on a "negative" conception of evil).

I will assume that wickedness combined with a sufficiently bad or wrong action is sufficient for evil action. I'll leave open the question of whether wickedness alone, without bad or wrong action, or without a disposition for bad or wrong action, suffices for evil. And I will leave unaddressed the question of banal evil, and of whether to count the actions of "desk-murderers" (Garrard 2002, p. 328) and cases of "white-collar evil" (Morton 2004, p. 12) as instances of evil. I'll also remain neutral on whether evil requires an evil *character*, i.e. the situational and temporal stability of wickedness (Haybron 1999, p. 137, 2002, p. 269, and as suggested by McGinn 1997, pp. 61-9, and Morton 2004, p. 57), or whether there can be "one off" evil (Garrard 2002, p. 321).

## 2 Moral and non-moral evil

What would distinguish moral evil from other, non-moral species of evil? Evil is a species of badness or wrongness (§1), so we can note that moral evil is a species of moral badness or moral wrongness: it is either a high degree of moral badness or moral wrongness, or aggravated moral badness or moral wrongness. Moral evil is evil that is evil at least partly in virtue of its moral badness or moral wrongness. Non-moral evil

would thus be evil that is evil at least partly in virtue of its non-moral badness or non-moral wrongness: e.g. its aesthetic badness, or its epistemic wrongness.

What characterizes *moral* badness or *moral* wrongness? We'll return to this question below (§4). But we should note that the characterization of wickedness canvassed above (§1) suggests that wickedness is a matter of a person's attitudes towards, or motivations with respect of, the death, suffering, or humiliation of other people. This characterization suggested that evil comes down to how we relate to *others*. This interpersonal aspect is essential to some of the accounts of evil that we canvassed (see, e.g., McGinn 1997, pp. 65-9, Morton 2004, pp. 59-62). This goes some way, it seems to me, towards explaining what is distinctive of *moral* evil (§4).

You might think that the notion of evil is essentially a moral notion. Haybron's (1999, 2002) characterizations of evil employ the notion of morality: a paradigm evil character is "indifferent to morality," (1999, p. 135) and evil people are "not aligned with the good to a morally significant extent." (2002, p. 269) Our question here is whether the notion of evil also has application in (would-be) non-moral domains, e.g. the aesthetic and the epistemic.

### 3 Cases of non-moral evil

Paradigms of (moral) evil are **moral atrocities** – acts that impose death, pain, and humiliation on other people. We might then make a case for aesthetic and epistemic evil by considering **aesthetic** and **epistemic atrocities** – acts that are destructive or harmful from the aesthetic and epistemic points of view. Consider the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in March of 2001. The two monumental (and, so I shall assume, aesthetically valuable) 6<sup>th</sup> century statues, carved into a cliff-face in central Afghanistan, were destroyed using dynamite on the orders of the Taliban leader Mohammad Omar. Was this a case of non-moral, aesthetic evil? Or consider the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in June of 1981. During a three-day rampage, an anti-Tamil mob destroyed the library, which contained a number of unique (and, so I shall assume, epistemically valuable) historical manuscripts. Was this a case of non-moral, epistemic evil?

Someone skeptical of the existence of non-moral evil should not be convinced by these examples. For both are plausible cases of moral atrocity: pain and humiliation were visited upon Buddhists and Tamils, respectively, when powerful symbols of their religious, cultural, and ethnic heritage were intentionally and needlessly destroyed. So we have, at least, not found intuitive cases of evil that are not cases of moral evil.

We might then seek examples of acts that are destructive or harmful from the aesthetic and epistemic points of view, but which do not impose death, pain, or humiliation on anyone. We can remove the morally relevant details of our cases, by imagining the destruction of objects of great aesthetic or epistemic value, but where said objects have no religious, cultural, or ethnic significance. We can imagine that the objects in question are naturally occurring, rather than artifacts, thus removing the possibility of harm to their creators. And we can imagine that the aesthetic and epistemic value of these objects is, and will remain, unappreciated, thus removing the possibility of harm to their appreciators. Imagine an incredibly beautiful, though unappreciated, geological formation – e.g. an unappreciated version of the cave crystals at the Naica Mine in Chihuahua, Mexico. Or imagine an unrecognized trove of significant truths – e.g. an uninterpretable (and non-sentient) oracle. Suppose someone were to intentionally

destroy such a cave, or such an oracle. Would these be cases of aesthetic and epistemic evil, respectively?

We have eliminated the effects present in moral atrocities. But have we thereby turned genuinely evil actions into actions that aren't evil at all, or that perhaps aren't even wrong? You might have the intuition that, once we have removed the impact of these actions on people (or sentient beings), there is no longer anything *evil* about these actions – perhaps not even anything wrong. Who cares if I destroy a set of beautiful crystals, or a trove of truths, when neither is doing anyone any good?

Alternatively, you might argue that these actions would be evil, but only because they would be *morally* evil. We attempted to create cases of non-moral evil by abstracting away from cases involving the causation of death, pain, and humiliation, to cases in which aesthetically and epistemically valuable objects are destroyed, but without negative impact on anyone. But you might maintain that the destruction of aesthetically and epistemically valuable objects is *morally* wrong, and thus potentially morally evil (as it is, perhaps, in the imagined cases), because aesthetic and epistemic value, per se, matter from the moral point of view. This is not, as we could easily imagine in the case of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and the Jaffna Public Library, in virtue of the fact that aesthetic and epistemic atrocities are harmful to people, but merely in virtue of the fact that aesthetic and epistemic atrocities are destructive (or otherwise harmful) to objects that have aesthetic or epistemic value. The normative domain of the *moral*, on this view, takes into account the per se aesthetic value of beautiful geological formations and the per se epistemic value of a trove of significant truths. If we conceive of the moral in this way, we will struggle to find cases of non-moral evil. But, in that case, the fact that only the moral domain admits of evil reveals nothing special about morality, as opposed to such domains as the aesthetic and the epistemic.

#### 4 Normative domains

Above (§3) we sought to describe cases of non-moral evil; we sought to describe cases of intuitive evil that were not cases of moral evil. This strategy has been unsuccessful: we cannot find cases of intuitive evil that are not cases of moral evil. For the remainder of the paper I'll pursue an alternative strategy. In answer to the question of whether there exists non-moral aesthetic evil or non-moral epistemic evil, an obvious (if sophomoric) answer might be: it all depends on what you mean by “moral,” “aesthetic,” and “epistemic.” What do we mean when we employ these terms?

Our search for cases of non-moral aesthetic evil will succeed only if we can find conceptions of the moral and the aesthetic that reveal what makes these two normative domains distinct. The same when it comes to the moral and the epistemic. Perhaps such conceptions cannot be found (cf. Zagzebski 2004). In that case we will be unable to make sense of non-moral evil; but this will reveal nothing special about the moral, as opposed to the aesthetic and the epistemic.

Some argue that morality is essentially **impartial**. Susan Wolf (1992) proposes “using “moral” to refer to whatever is dictated by an impartial perspective.” (p. 255) But this will not distinguish the moral from the aesthetic and the epistemic. Epistemic requirements are impartial requirements – this explains why it is uncontroversial that wishful thinking is epistemically forbidden. As Feldman (1988) argues, “[t]he peculiarly epistemic judgment [about someone's belief] concerns not [the] practical merits but rather the propriety of a disinterested believer in [that person's] situation having that

belief.” (p. 236) “Epistemic obligations,” he points out, “are obligations that arise from a purely impartial and disinterested perspective.” (Ibid.) Something similar can be said when it comes to the aesthetic point of view. I don’t mean to suggest the Kantian view that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested. What I mean is that, just as impartial morality competes with our partial concerns (as Wolf argues), impartial aesthetic demands compete with our partial concerns. Take a familiar kind of case: impartial morality demands that I commit to three years of foreign service; partial love demands that I remain at home with my sweetheart. In exactly the same way, there can be impartial aesthetic demands that compete with the demands of partial love. Consider a Gauguin who cares deeply for his family, but also feels a kind of aesthetic duty to head to Tahiti.

Another possibility is that morality essentially involves **obligation**. But the language of obligation is natural in epistemology – along with the rest of the deontic vocabulary (“epistemically ought,” “epistemically permitted,” and so on, see Feldman 1988, 2000, 2001, Russell 2001, Audi 2001), and as Marcia Eaton (2008) argues, we can make sense of aesthetic obligation as well:

Suppose you [can only save from destruction one of] two paintings that ... are equal in moral value – will provide equal amounts of pleasure, are equally enlightening, will serve equally to further feelings of respect for one’s fellow human beings, and so on. [Y]ou have an uncontroversial, nonconditional aesthetic obligation to save one rather than the other, namely, the more beautiful painting. (p. 5)

As above (§3), one might reject the possibility that the more beautiful painting and the less beautiful painting are “equal in moral value,” if you thought that their difference in aesthetic value, *per se*, makes a moral difference. But if there could be such a difference, then it seems that there could be aesthetic obligation.

We could say, following Bernard Williams (1985, Chapter 10), that morality essentially involves “categorical” obligation, meaning both that “[m]oral obligation is inescapable,” in the sense that “once I am under a given obligation, there is no escaping it, and the fact that a given agent would prefer not to be in this system or bound by its rules will not excuse him,” (p. 196-7) and that “[b]lame is the characteristic reaction” (p. 197) to moral violations (i.e. violations of moral obligations). We should consider these two aspects of the categorical in turn.

First, the **inescapability** of moral obligations. This does not yet distinguish the moral from the epistemic and the aesthetic. Epistemic obligations are also inescapable (Kelly 2003, Owens 2006, Grimm 2008): my indifference to epistemic norms will not excuse me when I violate them – when I believe something on insufficient evidence, for example, or when I engage in wishful thinking. Similarly, in Eaton’s case, your aesthetic obligation to save the beautiful painting is not removed if you are indifferent to aesthetic value.

Second, that moral violations characteristically warrant **blame**. Stephen Darwall (2006, Chapter 5) further develops the idea that there is an essential connection between morality and the reactive attitudes, arguing that our moral obligations are what “members of a moral community can appropriately demand that we do, including by responding with blame or other reactive attitudes if we fail to comply without adequate cause.” (p. 92, see also p. 101) In this sense, “second-personal accountability is part of the concept of moral obligation.” (p. 115) But second-personal accountability is also part of the

concepts of epistemic obligation and aesthetic obligation. In whatever sense you can appropriately demand that I comply with moral requirements, and respond with blame when I violate such requirements without excuse, you can appropriately demand that I comply with epistemic and aesthetic requirements, and respond with blame when I violate such requirements. Darwall's conception of accountability makes room for such cases, since "what we are accountable for can extend, for example, to the treatment of ... aspects of the environment," (p. 95) e.g. the geological formation imagined above (§3). There is no reason, in principle, why it might not also extend to our treatment of statues and libraries, to troves of truths, to paintings; nor any reason why it might not extend to our cognitive conduct.

Consider how we react to someone who persistently reasons poorly and whose thinking is utterly muddled, but who has no good excuse for her epistemic irrationality: she isn't incapable of epistemic virtue, she's not devoting her mental energy to other things, but rather prefers to wallow in ignorance and confusion – perhaps out of laziness, or perhaps because she profits from it (think here of the kind of muddled confusion that sometimes tempts government funding bodies). There is something awful about such a person, something loathsome and disgusting. Nothing to get too worked up about, of course, but there are reactive attitudes here. On the aesthetic side of things, consider again someone who knowingly destroys a more beautiful painting to save a less beautiful painting, with no good excuse, or someone capable of creating great works of art but who instead creates aesthetic failures, intentionally and without good excuse, perhaps out of lasciviousness, or perhaps for profit (a Thomas Kinkade, perhaps).

You might wonder whether someone who is *indifferent* to aesthetic value really deserves *blame* for not saving the more beautiful painting. You might think that there is something hypothetical about aesthetic obligations, at least when it comes to our reactive attitudes towards those who violate them. But there is similarly something problematic when it comes to moral obligations, something likewise problematic about blaming someone who is indifferent to moral value for a moral violation. The apathetic and remorseless sociopath is more an object of our horror or pity than of our blame. To the extent that we can appropriately blame such an "amoralist," our blame functions as forward-looking "proleptic mechanism," designed to bring the amoralist to appreciate moral values in the way that we do (Williams 1995). Likewise when it comes to the person indifferent to aesthetic value.

Is our reaction to such cases truly a reaction to the epistemic and aesthetic violations that have occurred? You might argue that we are reacting to moral violations in these cases. Again, one possibility is that aesthetic value, *per se*, matters from the moral point of view, generating *moral* obligations to save beautiful paintings and to not create bad works of art, and thus our reactions to the cases just described. Another kind of worry can be raised here in connection with epistemic obligation. W.K. Clifford's defense of evidentialism (the view that it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence), in "The Ethics of Belief" (1877), appeals to what seem like moral considerations (e.g. the fact that false belief can lead to harmful action). If it is *morally* wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, perhaps what we call "epistemic obligation" is just a species of moral obligation, e.g. moral obligations that pertain to belief. More on this in a moment. If this thought is right, then our reaction to the case of the muddled thinker can be understood as a reaction to a *moral* violation.

Another strategy, for identifying what is distinctive of morality, is to appeal not to the sorts of reactions characteristically warranted by moral violations, but to the sorts of

actions characteristically permitted to prevent moral violations (or to the sanctions warranted to punish them). Wolf (1992) writes that moral constraints “are constraints that we are justified in insisting that [people] accept,” and that “it seems completely legitimate for us ... to forbid ... insofar as it is in our power” violations of morality (p. 255), and Morton (2004) contrasts what is wrong with what is foolish by saying that “[p]ersuasion is the appropriate reaction to the foolish, while physical interference is the appropriate reaction to wrongdoing.” (p. 18) We are, at least sometimes, but perhaps characteristically or other things being equal, permitted, or even required, to prevent moral violations through the use of violent **coercion**. Does this distinguish the moral from the aesthetic and the epistemic?

Could it be permissible to employ violent coercion to prevent an aesthetic or epistemic violation? Eaton (2008) argues that one might have an aesthetic obligation to seize stolen paintings by force. It is not hard to imagine a case in which one seems permitted to use violence to prevent an aesthetic violation: a villain threatens to dynamite the Louvre or the Library of Congress; a good thrashing, and only a good thrashing, will stop him. But it does not seem that violence is warranted to prevent *any* aesthetic or epistemic violation: fallacious reasoners and composers of bad poetry should intuitively be left in peace. But, analogously, some moral violations do not call for violent interference, at least for those of us enamored of liberalism. On the other hand, we feel justified in requiring – and in backing this requirement up with state violence if necessary – that children receive some form of education. In what seems like Wolf’s sense, we *insist* on it. What are we preventing in this case? Ignorance and intellectual inability – aren’t these paradigms of *epistemic* disvalue? But could we not (also) say that we are *morally* required to prevent them?

You might argue that our three domains can be distinguished by appeal to that which they apply. We might say that morality essentially concerns right and wrong action, the epistemic essentially concerns right and wrong belief, and the aesthetic essentially concerns right and wrong responses to art, or to beauty, or whatever. But this would require an overly narrow conception of all three domains. There are moral and immoral emotional responses; it can epistemically good or bad to pursue this or that line of inquiry; aesthetic criticism applies to the actions performed by the artist in creation. It may be that the aesthetic *typically* concerns how we respond to art, as spectators, while the moral *typically* concerns what we do, as agents, but the aesthetic does not *essentially* apply to us as spectators, and the moral does not *essentially* apply to us as agents.

At this point the project of distinguishing the moral from the aesthetic and the epistemic begins to look like a philosophical quagmire, and perhaps a particularly foolish one. The viability of these distinctions underlies some apparently interesting philosophical debates – over the relationship between the moral evaluation of artworks and the aesthetic evaluation of artworks (Carroll 1996, 1998, Gaut 1997, 2007, Jacobsen 1997, Kieran 2001), over whether the “pragmatic” encroaches on the epistemic (Fantl and McGrath 2002, 2009, Zagzebski 2004, Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005) – but perhaps these distinctions cannot be made out. We began by asking whether there is moral evil, in some sense in which there isn’t aesthetic and epistemic evil, with the aim of determining whether this might reveal something special about the moral, as opposed to the aesthetic and the epistemic. Perhaps we should simply conclude that we have found no such sense. But it seems to me we can do a little bit better – *if* we want to preserve the distinction between the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic. We can characterize the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic, and once we have done this, we will be able to see that the notion of evil is at home in all three domains.



The characterization of morality that we'll adopt is based on one rejected by Williams (1972, pp. 73-81), on which morality has some essential connection to wellbeing. According to the proposal that Williams rejects:

[I]f one's approval of such ... things as policies, institutions, dispositions, sorts of motive, etc., is to count as moral approval, then one must suppose that those policies, institutions, etc., minister in some way to the achievement of some kind of human well-being. (pp. 74-75)

Williams raises two objections to this conception of morality. First, he asks us to consider a "Protestant outlook," on which "there is no *means* open to man towards" wellbeing, "no set of human projects conceivably adequate to secure this result," and so "[t]he devout man will obey the will of God, as best he can in his forlorn condition, and must retain his consciousness of that condition, but not *in order to* secure for himself or anyone else salvation, which is at best a wild hope." (p. 77) On the present proposal, this is not a *moral* outlook. However (so the argument goes), surely it is. Second, Williams asks us to consider a "Romantic outlook" on which the ideal is not wellbeing but rather authenticity (pp. 78-9), which on the present proposal will not count as a *moral* outlook. However (so the argument goes), surely it is.

These objections can be met. First, we must broaden our understanding as what could count as a conception of wellbeing. We can allow for a "wider, yet contentful, notion of well-being" (p. 80), like one that includes the Protestant's ideal of salvation or one that includes the Romantic's ideal of authenticity. Williams suggests that, for the Protestant, wellbeing consists in, or at least requires, "reconciliation with God," (p. 76) something that we have no hope of on earth and only a meager hope of in the world beyond. It may have nothing to do with "happiness" in the sense of pleasurable satisfaction with one's life. The Romantic can be understood as proposing a conception of wellbeing on which wellbeing consists in, or requires, authenticity. This "ineptly" describes Romanticism, Williams argues (p. 78), but there is nothing misleading about it once we make clear that wellbeing is not to be identified with pleasure, satisfaction, or subjective happiness.

Second, we should articulate our conception of the moral in terms of what is valuable from the moral point of view, as opposed to in terms of some end, to which the moral point of view instructs us to take means. From the moral point of view, what is valuable is human wellbeing. An outlook that sees human wellbeing as unattainable still counts as moral, so long as it posits human wellbeing as valuable. And we can see that Williams' "Protestant outlook" does this: there is "hope ... that God's grace will lift up the undeserving." (p. 77) Although she can't take means to the end of salvation, salvation is, after all, what the Protestant is after, what she prays for, what she values.

It might be objected that an outlook which took into account not only human wellbeing but also the welfare of non-human animals, or of living things in general, would surely be a *moral* outlook. To meet this objection, we should drop the requirement that the moral point of view values *human* wellbeing, and say that what is distinctive of morality is the value placed on *wellbeing*, full stop.

I propose to distinguish between the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic within the framework of "critical domains" articulated by Ernie Sosa (2007, Chapter 4). Sosa argues

that our practices of evaluation can be understood in terms of a plurality of “insulated critical domains.” His example is “the world of coffee”:

One central value organizes the critical assessment distinctive of that domain. I mean the value of liquid coffee that is delicious and aromatic. Think of the assessment of coffee beans, fields, coffee machines, baristas, ways of making liquid coffee, plantations, harvests, etc. What organizes all such evaluation, the value at the center of it all ... is the value of good coffee, of liquid coffee that is delicious and aromatic. (p. 73)

Critical domains are “insulated” in that “one can be an adept critic within such a domain even while discerning no domain-transcendent value.” (Ibid.) The central value that organizes the critical domain of assassination is that of efficient political murder, and I may recognize that someone is a good assassin (i.e. good at executing efficient political murders) without valuing efficient political murder.

For Sosa, critical domains are individuated by what they take to have final value, in other words, by what is valued for its own sake, from the perspective of a given critical domain. Here we shall modify Sosa’s account, so that critical domains are individuated by what they take to have *intrinsic* final value, in other words, by what is valued intrinsically and for its own sake. (The reasons for this are given below, in a footnote.) Given this conception of critical domains, I submit a taxonomy of the critical domains of the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic:

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Intrinsic final value</b>
Moral	Wellbeing
Aesthetic	Beauty
Epistemic	Mind-to-world fit

Four comments on this taxonomy.<sup>3</sup> First, I implied above that our account of the moral will allow genuinely moral outlooks that take the wellbeing of living things into account. Could the concept of wellbeing be extended to inanimate things? Aldo Leopold’s (1968) “land ethic ... enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.” (p. 204) Is this not a moral outlook, if it treats soil quality as having intrinsic final value? The concept of wellbeing could conceivably be extended to apply to other inanimate entities, even inorganic entities: the cave crystals at Naica, for example. We can speak, naturally enough, of their wellbeing, e.g. of their being well preserved (things are going well for them), as opposed to damaged (things are going badly for them). The same when it comes to the preservation of artworks. We can make sense of inanimate things as having perspectives and interests. Alan Tormey (1973) defends a notion of “aesthetic rights,” possessed by artworks: when a musician plays a piece badly, or when a painting is defaced, “[i]t is the *work* itself that is affronted, distorted, defamed, maligned, insulted, or done violence to.” (p. 169) If the concept of

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<sup>3</sup> From the epistemic point of view, mind-to-world fit has *intrinsic* final value. On some conceptions of wellbeing, mind-to-world fit has *constitutive* value – i.e. final value in virtue of being part of a flourishing life. Thus mind-to-world fit may have final value from the moral point of view. But constitutive value isn’t intrinsic value. Our taxonomy is able to vindicate the distinction between, e.g., the (intrinsic) epistemic value of knowledge and the (constitutive) moral value of knowledge.

wellbeing can apply to patches of soil or to paintings, can we make out any sense in which the intrinsic final valuation of wellbeing defines the moral point of view?

On my view, the boundaries of our moral outlook, of our moral concern, will be determined by the boundaries of our conception of wellbeing. If we come to see the concept of wellbeing as applying to the soil, if we come to see the soil as having a perspective and interests, if we are prepared to talk about how well or how badly things are going for the soil, then we have brought the soil within the scope of our moral concern. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, for artworks. But we need not think of artworks in this way: we can deny that wellbeing applies to artworks, and so deny them the kind of moral status that most of us grant to living things, while maintaining that (at least some) artworks have intrinsic and final *aesthetic* value.

The line between that which is the object of our moral concern and that which is not the object of our moral concern must be drawn somewhere. Now we might draw the boundary maximally, so as to include everything that seems in any way valuable. (This is one way of developing the idea we have encountered several times already: the idea that aesthetic and epistemic value matter, *per se*, from the moral point of view.) The moral, on this understanding, subsumes everything: it is an all-things-considered critical domain. I haven't argued here against such a conception of morality. But it seems to me that a narrower conception better captures the notion of the moral.

A second comment on the taxonomy. The proposed characterizations of the aesthetic and the epistemic are controversial. The proposed conception of the aesthetic, in particular, is just a sketch. The notion of the aesthetic has been argued over for centuries, and I don't mean to add anything to that debate, except the idea that the notion can be articulated by saying what, from the aesthetic point of view, has intrinsic final value. "Beauty" is more like a placeholder for a more subtle theory of the aesthetic: a list of aesthetic properties, or a conception of aesthetic experience, or whatever.

The proposed conception of the epistemic is one that I find credible, if what makes for a credible conception is one that captures epistemologists' use of the term "epistemic." Since the term is a bit of philosophical jargon, and emerged relatively recently (by contrast with the term "aesthetic"), this seems as good a criterion as any. The proposed conception of the epistemic (which jibes with epistemologists' use of such phrases as "epistemic justification," "epistemic virtue," and "epistemic value") can be contrasted with a conception of the epistemic on which the epistemic is equated with the cognitive, the intellectual, the theoretical, or the doxastic (which jibes with some other phrases, such as "epistemic agency"). (On that conception of the epistemic, we might think of the epistemic as a subdomain of the moral: morality applied to cognition; think here of Clifford's "ethics of belief.")

The proposed conception should also be contrasted with a conception of the epistemic on which only truth, which is a species of mind-to-world fit, has final intrinsic value from the epistemic point of view. My conception is broader, and is designed to include other species of mind-to-world fit, such as "carving nature at the joints," perceptual "contact" with reality, and acquaintance with fundamental intrinsic properties.

A third comment on the taxonomy. To say the critical domain of the moral takes wellbeing to have intrinsic final value invites the question: *whose* wellbeing? Intuitively, the *moral* perspective is a perspective form which wellbeing in general, and not just my own wellbeing, matter. But this idea is less clear when transposed to the epistemic, as

epistemologists have traditionally assumed that what matters to me, from the *epistemic* point of view, is the extent to which *my own* mind fits the world. What this reveals is the possibility of both **egocentric** and **altruistic** versions of these domains. An egocentric version of morality evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis her own wellbeing; an altruistic morality evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis wellbeing in general. An egocentric version of the epistemic evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis her own acquisition (however this is to be understood) of mind-to-world fit; an altruistic version of morality evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis mind-to-world fit in general. And an egocentric version of the aesthetic evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis her own acquisition (however this is to be understood) of beauty; an altruistic morality evaluates each person in terms of how well she does vis-à-vis beauty in general. I'll assume altruistic versions of our three domains in what follows.

A fourth comment on the taxonomy. We could secure a similar division of the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic by defining morality not in terms of wellbeing but in terms of autonomy or rationality. Suppose we said: morality essentially concerns the proper treatment of beings who are capable of giving and asking for reasons, qua beings who are so capable. I have opted for a conception of morality that I find plausible, but an account in terms of autonomy or rationality would work just as well for my purposes below: articulating the notion of non-moral evil by analogy.

## 5 Non-moral evil by analogy

With these conceptions of the moral, the aesthetic, and the epistemic in hand, we are now in a position to defend the existence of non-moral evil. We described moral evil above (§§1-2). Our strategy will be to describe non-moral evil by analogy: moral evil essentially involves a particular relationship to wellbeing, and aesthetic evil and epistemic evil involve that same relationship, respectively, to beauty and to mind-to-world fit. We'll consider, in particular, evil actions.

We said that evil actions require a wicked affective or motivational profile. The profile in question requires divergence – either through wicked inversion or wicked indifference – from a normal profile. In the moral case, the normal profile is: loving wellbeing, and hating its opposite, e.g. death, pain, and humiliation. The person who suffers from a wickedly inverted moral profile loves death, pain, and humiliation, and hates wellbeing. The person who suffers from wicked moral indifference doesn't care either way.

In the aesthetic case, the normal profile is: loving beauty, and hating its opposite: ugliness, deformity, etc. The person who suffers from a wickedly inverted aesthetic profile loves ugliness and deformity, and hates beauty. The person who suffers from wicked aesthetic indifference doesn't care either way. In the epistemic case, the normal profile is: loving mind-to-world fit, and hating its opposite, e.g. ignorance, falsehood, and misunderstanding. The person who suffers from a wickedly inverted epistemic profile loves ignorance, falsehood, and misunderstanding, and hates mind-to-world fit. The person who suffers from wicked epistemic indifference doesn't care either way.

Given this conception of aesthetic and epistemic evil, we can describe cases of each. (These cases involve inverted profiles, but cases involving indifference could also be described.) Imagine that Omar's motive, when he ordered the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, was not to satisfy a prohibition on idolatry, but to destroy something beautiful, because he hated beauty and loved ugliness. In that case, Omar's

action is aesthetically evil. Imagine that the mob in Jaffna destroyed the library not because it was a symbol of Tamil identity, but because in destroying the library they would promote the cause of historical ignorance, because they hated mind-to-world fit and loved ignorance. In that case, the mob's actions are epistemically evil.

On this conception of non-moral evil, we can see that Moore had it right (§1): lasciviousness is wicked, because it involves an inverted aesthetic profile, namely, delight at ugliness. An aesthetically evil motto is "Ugliness, be thou my beauty." An epistemically evil motto is "Falsehood, be thou my truth." Just as morally wicked inversion is directed towards death, pain, and humiliation, aesthetically wicked inversion is directed towards ugliness and deformity, and epistemically wicked inversion is directed towards ignorance, falsehood, and misunderstanding. Just as a person suffering from morally wicked inversion seeks, or revels in, the destruction of wellbeing, a person suffering from aesthetically wicked inversion seeks, or revels in, the destruction of beauty, and a person suffering from epistemically wicked inversion seeks, or revels in, the destruction of mind-to-world fit.

Suppose you are exhibiting a beautiful painting, of your own making, which I unceremoniously and publicly deface, by painting a satirical moustache on the central figure in your composition (cf. Tormey 1973, p. 165). I have done something morally wrong: I have pained and humiliated you, presumably (and so we can imagine) without excuse. I have also done something aesthetically wrong: I have ruined the beautiful composition, presumably (and so we can imagine) without excuse. Whether my action was not only wrong but evil, either morally or aesthetically, will depend on my motivational or affective profile. If my sole motive was to humiliate you (and I was pained to destroy the beautiful composition), then my action is a candidate for moral evil, and not for aesthetic evil. If my sole motivate was to destroy something beautiful (and I was pained by humiliating you), then my action is a candidate for aesthetic evil, and not for moral evil. In the latter case, I set out (only) to do "violence or injustice" to the work of art (Ibid., p. 167); in the former case, I set out (only) to do "violence or injustice" to you, personally. In the latter case, "the values that are debased are aesthetic values" (Ibid., p. 168); in the former case they are moral values. Of course, it could easily happen that my motivational profile was such as to make my action both morally and aesthetically evil: if, for example, I wickedly aimed to humiliate you, simply for my own amusement, and was wickedly indifferent to the beauty of your painting.

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, in the domain of the epistemic. Consider Miranda Fricker's (2007) case of "testimonial injustice": you suspect Tom Ripley of murdering your fiancé, I shut you up by saying "there's female intuition, and then there are facts." (p. 9) According to Fricker, my treatment of you involves both ethical and "distinctively epistemic injustice." (Ibid., p. 20, cf. p. 17) On my view, we can explain these two distinct injustices by noting that my silencing of you is bad both in terms of wellbeing, since you are mistreated and, in an obvious sense, harmed, but also bad in terms of mind-to-world fit: you may come to doubt your own instincts about Ripley, thereby diminishing your access to the facts, and your testimony, having been silenced, is unable to transmit your reliable instincts to anyone else, thus leaving them woefully ignorant of Ripley's guilt. In cases like this, Fricker writes, "someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*" as the wrongdoer is able to "undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge." (p. 20) As above, the question of whether my silencing of you, which is uncontroversially morally wrong, is also morally or epistemically evil is down to my motivational or affective profile. If my sole motive was to enforce a patriarchal social system (and I was pained to silence your testimony, *qua*

reliable testimony), then my action is a candidate for moral evil, and not for epistemic evil. If my solve motivate was to promote ignorance (and I was pained to harm you), then my action is a candidate for epistemic evil, and not for moral evil. In the latter case, I go against epistemic values; in the former case I go against moral values. As above, it could easily happen that my motivational profile was such as to make my action both morally and aesthetically evil: if, for example, I wickedly aimed to enforce patriarchy, and was wickedly indifferent to epistemic values.

Consider another example that fits this mixed profile: O'Brien's torture of Winston in *1984*. This can perspicuously be described as "epistemic torture": the means by which O'Brien subjugates Winston is by eliminating his ability to recognize simple arithmetical truths. O'Brien is morally evil, but he is epistemically evil as well: he is willing to run roughshod over epistemic rationality, in pursuit of Party control. Something similar applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to our original, non-hypothetical cases of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and the Jaffna Public Library. So although we have not found cases of aesthetic and epistemic evil that are not also cases of moral evil, we can isolate the aesthetic and epistemic evil that is present in some cases of moral evil.<sup>4</sup>

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