

Wickedness Redux

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Abstract: Some philosophers have argued the concepts of evil and wickedness cannot be well grasped by those inclined to a naturalist bent, perhaps because evil is so intimately tied to religious discourse or because that it is ultimately not possible to understand evil, period. By contrast, I argue that evil—or, at least, what it is to be an evil person—can be understood by naturalist philosophers and I articulate an independently plausible account of evil character.

Wickedness Redux

There are, perhaps, good reasons for doubting that the concept of evil can be well grasped by philosophers inclined to a naturalist bent. Some point out that many moral philosophers decline to even discuss the concept of evil because it is so intimately tied to religious discourse at odds with naturalism.¹ Others worry that invoking talk of evil suggests a vision of the universe as a stage for battling supernatural powers beyond our control², that full-blown evil, if it exists at all, belongs to the realm of the supernatural.³ Some commentators suppose that it is ultimately not possible to understand evil, period.⁴ By contrast, I am inclined to agree with Susan Neiman who insists that:

To claim that evil is comprehensible in principle is not to claim that any instance of it is transparent. It is rather to deny that supernatural forces, divine or demonic, are required to account for it. It is also to say that while natural processes are responsible for evil, natural processes can be used to avoid it...⁵

It may be true that the term ‘evil’—like ‘wickedness’—has fallen on hard times.⁶ Yet some of our best moral philosophers (including Stanley Benn, Joel Feinberg, and Ronald Milo) have found wickedness important enough to discuss at length.⁷ One reason to reconsider the concept of wickedness is that they have.

Another reason to reconsider the concept of wickedness is that further consideration might reveal something about the concept of evil. Indeed, I shall ultimately argue that Benn, perhaps unwittingly, comes terribly close to providing an adequate account of what it is to be an evil person. One standard primary definition equates being wicked with being “evil or morally wrong.”⁸ Admittedly, not everyone is willing to equate evil and wickedness.⁹ But no matter. To forestall confusion, I simply stipulate that I mean to use the words ‘evil’ and ‘wickedness’ more or less interchangeably, and insofar as I am trying to understand evil I am trying to understand wickedness and vice versa.

Further, I simply stipulate that there is a particular *sense* of the term ‘evil’ that I am interested in. Peter Van Inwagen notes one “ordinary sense” of the term according to which ‘evil’ is equated with ‘bad’—nothing more—and its use connotes only mild opprobrium. But he also notes that sometimes we mean more when we speak of evil, something like the extreme reaches of moral depravity.¹⁰ Thus, Andrew Delbanco commends the suggestion that “we should not try to connect in a single concept the gas chambers of Auschwitz and a father who slaps his child.”¹¹ And in her penetrating study of evil, Claudia Card commends a heuristic that calls for focusing on, not just any morally dubious events and actions, but atrocities—paradigmatically evil events like genocide, slavery, torture, and rape—partly because to understand evil “it is necessary... to distinguish evils from other horrors.”¹² Given this “extreme sense,” the term ‘evil’ is the worst possible term of opprobrium at our disposal.¹³ And, so understood, ‘evil’ functions as a superlative; As Lance Morrow puts it, ‘evil’ so understood “has the quality of *ne plus ultra*: Where do you go from there?”¹⁴ It is this extreme sense of ‘evil’ that I am interested in.

So, while we undoubtedly sometimes use ‘evil’ as a mass noun and a count noun—we can sensibly ponder why there is so much evil in the world and why there are

so many evils—I am interested in understanding the term when used as an adjective. And while we might speak of evil actions, I am interested in what we mean when we suggest that some *person* is evil. *Something* distinguishes evil people from merely bad people, consistent with the common assumption that describing someone as ‘evil’ is qualitatively different from describing them as ‘bad’ or even ‘very, very bad.’¹⁵ There might be some conceptual connection between, say, evil personhood and evil action. I am inclined to follow Card’s suggestion that any plausible account of evil personhood will clarify which psychological properties and states are constitutive of evil character in virtue of which evildoing is no accident.¹⁶

But what are those psychological properties and states? I tend to think that Feinberg offers a useful heuristic for answering that question:

Suppose that we rank character traits, including those that are virtuous and those that are vicious, on a progressive scale. As persons line up to be assigned their places in the rankings, they are judged steadily worse as they are linked to steadily more blameworthy traits... As a person descends the scale to each ranking position, he gets worse and worse, that is, he qualifies as more and more blameworthy until he reaches some maximum point at which he is as evil as he can be...¹⁷

So understood, the very worst sort of people—those who are as “evil as they can be”—take up residence at the far nasty end of Feinberg’s continuum and they suffer from the worst sort of character with the most blameworthy of character traits, and so forth. But what *is* the worst sort of character? Is that psychological property multiply realizable or is there only one way to be evil? What are the worst vices and the most blameworthy character traits? Are there any vices that evil people must suffer from? I have tried to answer some of these questions elsewhere.¹⁸ Here, I want to offer an independent account of evil personhood, albeit one consistent with my earlier work, that is inspired by Benn and Feinberg and Milo’s work and at home in a naturalistic setting.

1. Varieties of Wickedness

Again, I am interested in the concept of wickedness because I am interested in the extreme sense of ‘evil’ and in understanding what makes a person evil and not merely vicious or bad or whatever. Unfortunately, it is fairly clear that ‘wickedness’ is a philosophical term of art and that not everyone is quite talking about the same thing. For example, Benn initially offers a minimal account of wickedness as ““whatever it is about someone that warrants our calling him a wicked person”¹⁹ while Christine McKinnon regards it as “the deliberate desire to do that which is wrong” and supposes that wicked people will “deliberately choose to act in ways they know to be harmful, and often quite consciously develop those traits that will incline them to act in those ways.”²⁰ No surprise, then, that a number of philosophers have offered typologies and taxonomies of wickedness. Insofar as I am interested in understanding what evil people are like, it might prove useful to consider not just *any* variety of wickedness, but the very *worst* sort.

It is fairly clear that some particular strains of wickedness are not likely candidates for the worst variety of it and thus do not plausibly track the property of being

an evil person. For example, Milo distinguishes *perverse wickedness* in which someone is guilty of wrongdoing but falsely believes that she acts rightly and *amorality* in which someone similarly lacks the belief that she acts wrongly but only because she lacks moral principles necessary to form that belief.²¹ In cases of moral negligence, an agent is guilty of unconscious wrongdoing and recognizes that certain act-types are wrong but fails to recognize that her action is of that type and thus fails to believe that she acts wrongly.²² But by Milo's own lights, evil people are not merely perversely wicked, since someone who wrongly believes that she acts rightly exhibits the "saving grace of conscientiousness"—a morally redeeming property that evil people presumably lack.²³ For similar reasons, evil people are probably not evil in virtue of suffering from *conscientious wickedness*, a sort of ruthlessness in pursuit of something regarded as morally good²⁴, nor are they likely to suffer from *preferential wickedness* which consists in a desire to perform some particular wrong action that outweighs a comparatively weaker desire to act rightly.²⁵ Both the conscientiously wicked and the preferentially wicked might, for all that has been said, care vary much about morality and greatly want to do the right thing—another morally redeeming property that evil people presumably lack. The amoral among us, so defined, are probably not plausible candidates for being evil, not because they have some morally redeeming property that evil people lack, but because they lack some morally blameworthy property that evil people presumably have. Milo's amoralist is not clearly culpable for the fact that she fails to recognize that her action is wrong; she may lack moral concepts altogether—just as animals and young children probably do—and thus are wrongly regarded as evil, as Rousseau suggested some time ago.²⁶

2. Satanic Wickedness

Far and away, the strain of wickedness most popularly nominated as constitutive of evil personhood is the sort of wickedness that Kant presumably thought is impossible. Famously, Kant denies that human beings could be "devilish"—beings "whose reason is entirely exempt from the moral law."²⁷ And some philosophers find this denial implausible and reject Kantian moralizing on that very basis. Here is John Silber:

Kant's ethics is inadequate to the understanding of Auschwitz because Kant denies the possibility of the deliberate rejection of the moral law. Not even a wicked man, Kant holds, can will evil for the sake of evil. [Since Kant denies] the possibility of a person knowingly doing evil for its own sake... Kant proposed a theory that rules out the contravening evidence of human experience.²⁸

Silber's argument is a straightforward reductio: if Kant's ethical theory is correct then there should be no devilish people, but experience reveals that there are devilish people; therefore, Kant's ethics is not correct. And, apparently, human experience indicates, *pace* Kant, that knowingly doing evil for its own sake is possible.

A tendency to knowingly do evil for its own sake might well be dubbed *satanic wickedness*, recalling Satan's infamous imperative from *Paradise Lost* in the following famous passage:

So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
Farewell remorse, all good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my good; by thee at least
Divided empire with heaven's king I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign...²⁹

A number of philosophers agree with Silber against Kant that satanic wickedness is possible, but also assert that it is wickedness of the very worst sort. Milo suggests that “true wickedness... consists in “deliberately and knowingly doing what is morally wrong,”³⁰ and that it is wickedness in its “worst form.”³¹ Benn makes the weaker claim that satanic wickedness should be “totally abhorred,” but this is a claim he makes about no other variety of wickedness in his typology.³² Marcus Singer declares that satanic wickedness is “evil, in its most extreme or malignant form.”³³ All three, then, appear to accept the following:

(SW): evil personhood consists in satanic wickedness—a person, *p*, is evil just in case *p* knowingly does evil for the sake of evil.

So understood, the difference between merely bad and evil people is that the merely bad merely suffer from a tendency to act wrongly while evil people suffer from a tendency to engage in an especially virulent brand of wrongdoing: they knowingly do evil for evil's sake. And, given (SW), being evil consists precisely in suffering from this tendency.

I suspect that (SW) has considerable pre-philosophical intuitive appeal; it certainly suggests a diabolical picture of the sort of creature that should be loathed and feared if anyone is. Further, (SW) allows that evil people recognize full well what they do and appreciate the gravity of their actions, absent any confusion on their part that might mitigate their blameworthiness, consistent with the thought that evil people are the most blameworthy people deserving of our strongest condemnation.³⁴ Yet (SW) is difficult to assess and at least some philosophers will be inclined to dismiss it as a plausible account of evil personhood on its face. For example, W.D. Ross remarks that “it is very doubtful” that human beings “are ever attracted by the mere thought of the wrongness of an act,” and that “‘Evil, be thou my good’ is the maxim not of a man but of a devil.”³⁵ Yet a commitment to (SW) need not require any commitment to the sort of spooky ontology eschewed by proponents of naturalism.

One concern is that (SW) proves too much. In a series of puzzling passages, Augustine considers what led him to perform a seemingly mild bit of wrongdoing, an instance of theft in a neighbor's orchard. After rejecting possible motives for his crime, including the possibilities that he stole the pears out of a desire to keep company with his fellows or to enjoy the fruits themselves, Augustine ultimately avows that:

O God; such was my heart, on which you showed your pity in the depths of the abyss. Let my heart now tell you what its purpose was; why I was gratuitously evil, and why *there was no reason for my evil save evil itself*. My evil was loathsome and I loved it; I was in love with my own ruin and rebellion. I did not love what I hoped to gain by rebellion; it was rebellion itself that I loved. Depraved in soul, I had leapt away from my firm foothold in you and cast myself

to my destruction, seeking to gain nothing through my disgrace but disgrace alone.³⁶

Given (SW), the youthful Augustine was pretty clearly evil. Yet there is something baffling about Augustine's confession; Augustine himself is certainly confused.³⁷ Further, Augustine's crimes are fairly trivial stuff and hardly resemble those of putative evil people; Augustine didn't engage in serial torture-killing or genocide but instead... stole pears? Finally, how exactly did the evil youth become the pious Saint Augustine? Perhaps it is not inconceivable that evil people might become at least decent, if not saintly, persons if only after great effort.³⁸ How did Augustine recover? We might want more than just reference to an act of grace or divine revelation to explain.

(SW) is difficult to assess for another reason: it is simply not clear what knowingly doing evil for its own sake amounts to. First, it is not altogether clear why evil requires knowingly *doing evil* for its own sake, and not merely knowingly *acting wrongly*. Perhaps the thought is that if evil personhood only required knowingly acting wrongly, then a pattern of slight but deliberate mischief would suffice for being evil and that seems wrong. But then proponents of (SW) are taking some unarticulated account of evil action for granted, thus giving conceptual priority to evil actions. Giving evil action conceptual priority to evil personhood is not obviously objectionable³⁹, but it does conflict with the stated goals of some proponents of (SW).⁴⁰ In any event, absent an account of evil action, one that differentiates evil-doing from mere wrongdoing, it is difficult to assess the merits of (SW).

Second, insofar as it demands that evil people *knowingly* do evil for its own sake, (SW) implies agents who *falsely believe* that they are guilty of evil-doing are not evil, no matter how much they identify with their believed wrongdoing. So, if Satan believes that he is pelting the Yucatan peninsula with hurricanes and that doing so is evil, but in reality he is only causing gentle rain to fall on arid fields, he would not knowingly do evil for its own sake; he is not clearly doing evil at all. But that means that Satan is not evil in spite of his intention to cause grave suffering absent any compunction. Why couldn't simply believing (perhaps falsely) that one is doing evil suffice?

Third, it remains unclear what doing evil *for its own sake* amounts to. Doing evil "for its own sake" might mean that an evil person *desires intrinsically* that she should do evil. Milo at least suggests that the "most evil desire of all" is a desire "to do what is wrong as an end in itself."⁴¹ Alternatively, doing evil "for its own sake" might mean that an evil person *directly intends* to do evil. An agent who directly intends to do evil does not merely intend to act wrongly as a means to realize something else, nor does she merely foresee that she will act wrongly.⁴² Benn, for example, suggests that evil persons do not merely "do evil" but do it "with evil intent"⁴³ and act "under the aspect of evil."⁴⁴ It is commonly supposed that *A* can ϕ intentionally only if she intends to ϕ "under some description," one that reveals what *A* found desirable about her ϕ -ing. Perhaps the idea is that evil people find their actions desirable and form the intention to act only when their acts are described as instances of *evil-doing*. If so, then any instance of evil-doing would be just as desirable as any other, be it drowning a sack full of kittens or torturing an innocent, and other instances of wrongdoing would not be desirable as such if they were described merely as an instance of "a mean thing to do" or "a way of hurting someone's feelings" or whatever. Finally, doing evil "for its own sake" might mean that the evilness

of an evil person's action is her reason for acting.⁴⁵ Feinberg's "purely evil" person, for example, "decides to do an act which he believes wrong in itself" and "will do it precisely because of its wrongness."⁴⁶

It is unnecessary to sort out these various ways of understanding what knowingly doing evil for its own sake amounts to, for *any* expanded version of (SW) is bound to encounter fatal difficulties, and for at least three reasons.

First, (SW) rather badly handles the most obvious example of a satanically wicked person: Satan himself.⁴⁷ Satan vacillates between remorseful contemplation of his misdeeds and indignation. Satan "in sighs began" the soliloquy containing his infamous imperative and with "grieved look he fixes sad" as he delivers it.⁴⁸ And while delivering his soliloquy, his face "Thrice changed with pale ire, envy and despair."⁴⁹ Only thirty-five lines into *Paradise Lost*, Milton refers to Satan's "guile stirred up with envy"⁵⁰ and Satan laments that "pride and worse ambition threw me down."⁵¹ A grieving, despairing misanthrope is not exactly the full-blooded satanically wicked person suggested by (SW), but neither is (SW) suggestive of someone whose stated motives have something to do with envy and ambition. Satan states that he covets what God has, not that he intrinsically desires to act wrongly nor that the very wrongness of his action is a reason for revolting against God. Ambition arguably calls for intending to succeed; it would be odd to claim of someone both that she is ambitious but does not intend to succeed. Since Satan probably knows that his efforts to defeat God will fail and since, arguably, one cannot intend to do what one believes to be impossible, it is not likely that Satan directly intends to overthrow God. So no disambiguation of (SW) seems to properly characterize Satan, an odd result if he is supposed to epitomize satanic wickedness. Worse, while it is an open question whether a naturalist-friendly account of evil must take fictional super-beings as appropriate datum, Satan is a fairly common putative example of an evil character. And if he is not satanically wicked, then (SW) implies he is not evil.

Recall also that Satan bids farewell to remorse *prior* to uttering his infamous imperative. Suppose Satan becomes satanically wicked as a result of uttering his infamous imperative but that the transformation takes an instant to work: so, at t_1 , Satan is willing to transform himself absent any compunction; at t_2 , he utters "Evil, be thou my good"; at t_3 , he becomes satanically wicked. Arguably, Satan is *as bad* at t_1 as he is at t_3 just because he is willing to become satanically wicked absent compunction. But that suggests that Satan was evil *prior to* becoming satanically wicked. Contrast Satan with Dr. Henry Jekyll in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Jekyll knowingly takes steps that will transform him into Edward Hyde (who is compared to Satan by one character). But Jekyll "preferred the elderly and discontented doctor" to Hyde and only "in an hour of moral weakness... swallowed the transforming draught." Jekyll's remorse for his own moral weakness suggests that he is not evil prior to his transformation while Satan's lack of remorse suggests that he is evil prior to his. "Evil, be thou my good" is not *the cause* of Satan's evil, but *an expression* of it.

Admittedly, Satan is a difficult character to understand.⁵² But the case against (SW) does not turn only the challenge that it poorly handles Satan. More importantly, (SW) is problematic because it generally fails to characterize almost every plausible example of putative evil people. We oddly and implausibly aggrandize the Nazi's motivations, for example, by saying they did "evil for its own sake."⁵³ Singer identifies as evil a motley crew of rapists, murderers, racists, homophobic killers, and sadists—

plausible examples of evil people, all of them.⁵⁴ Yet I can see no reason to suppose that all of them knowingly did evil for its own sake. So with Hitler, Robert Alton Harris, Stalin, Pol Pot, or any other member of the rogues gallery of putative evil persons: whatever else is wrong with them, and of course there is *plenty*, they just are not well characterized by (SW). Insofar as (SW) simply does not cohere with most, if not all, particular judgments about evil persons, it is difficult to see why (SW) should survive.

Finally, if (SW) is correct, then being evil weirdly amounts to having a fetish for evil and evildoing.⁵⁵ On (SW), evil people have no further end, but simply intrinsically desire to engage in evildoing; or, there is nothing especially desirable about evildoing but instead it is the bare evilness of their actions that leads them to form intentions to act; or, by their own lights, there is no deeper reason for engaging in evildoing and evil is its own reason. To put it another way, (SW) implies that evil people care only about performing evil actions where this is read *de dicto* and not *de re*. But this is a remarkable way of trying to capture the evil person's concerns. It demands supposing that the only thing that evil people care non-derivatively about is evildoing—not securing their own fortune or success, not doing harm to any person or group in particular, not increasing injustice and cruelty, and not lying or cheating or torturing or stealing, even if those actions are, in fact, instances of evildoing. (SW) elevates an odd sort of fetish for evildoing per se into the single vice constitutive of evil personhood and that seems wrong. For surely there are any number of vices that are at least relevant to the character of the evil person besides suffering from some irreducible taste for especially egregious wrongdoing. Since the proponent of (SW) is committed to a rather crude piece of moral psychology to explain what is constitutive of evil personhood, given the other failures of (SW) to account for putative evil people, both fictional and real-life, I conclude that (SW) fails as an account of evil personhood.

To be clear: I do not mean to deny that satanically wicked people are evil. I only deny that being satanically wicked *is constitutive* of being evil. If satanically wicked people are in fact evil, they are evil for some other reason—because some other variety of wickedness also characterizes them. But what?

3. Wickedness Tout Court

Benn, like Milo, distinguishes any number of varieties of wickedness, some of which are more plausible candidates for being constitutive of evil personhood, some less so. But he also sometimes speaks of wickedness absent any further qualification—of wickedness *tout court*. Benn suggests variously that for someone to be simply wicked—again, wicked absent any qualification—“they must have within their repertoire some humane principles,”⁵⁶; they “must be disposed to act, or respond, in accordance with evil maxims”⁵⁷; finally, when faced with difficult and painful choices, they must find those choices “neither difficult nor painful since the considerations that would make them so are systematically neutralized.”⁵⁸ Eventually, I shall argue that these three conditions for wickedness *tout court* jointly capture, more or less, what it is for someone to be evil, whether Benn meant to offer an account of evil personhood or not.

But there is bound to be some confusion here and a fair bit of explaining to do. Consider first Benn's insistence that wicked people must have access to humane principles. One might have thought that having access to humane principles would make

someone a *better* sort of person, not an evil one. To put it another way: isn't having access to humane principles, whatever that means, a *good* thing? A morally redeeming property? There is, admittedly, something of a paradox here; if wickedness *tout court* amounts to being evil, why think that wickedness requires access to humane principles? Why suppose that evil people *have*, rather than *lack*, humane principles within their moral repertoires?

Consider also the Kantian suggestion that wicked people must be disposed to act in accordance with evil maxims. Just what is it for a maxim to be evil? Benn has two proposals. First, a maxim can be evil in virtue of its content, if it is a maxim "that no one ought to act on at all."⁵⁹ Unfortunately, Benn says little about which maxims are those that no one ought to act on at all. Intuitively, maxims calling for wanton murder or torturing kittens for fun make the cut, but what else? The difficulty of identifying maxims that no one ought to act on at all notwithstanding, it is not clear that evil people must be disposed to act on evil maxims as such; an evil person might act on maxims that call for giving backrubs if he falsely believes that doing so would cause grave suffering. Conversely, some genuinely decent people might be disposed to act in accord with maxims that no one ought to act on at all; if purchasing fair-trade coffee somehow increases the suffering of children in developing nations then no one ought to act on maxims that call for purchasing fair trade coffee, but it is hard to see why that should make well-intentioned coffee buyers candidates for being evil.

Benn also allows that a maxim is evil if it "systematically excludes consideration of any good"⁶⁰ or "rules that all considerations not directly validated by his primary ideal goal or principle are necessarily subordinate."⁶¹ So understood, a single-minded Nazi hell-bent on executing innocent Jews acts on an evil maxim, but so does a single-minded author so intent on finishing his novel that he disregards his family, and that seems wrong. Further, it is far from clear that a maxim that excludes or rules out all other considerations is an evil maxim. Indeed, on one influential account of moral sainthood, a saint's life is dominated by a concern for others at the expense of other moral considerations such as her own happiness.⁶² But it is a stretch to insist that moral saints are disposed to act on evil maxims, much less that they are evil.

Finally, consider Benn's suggestion that evil people find difficult and painful choices neither difficult nor painful. What makes a choice difficult and painful? Choosing a cell-phone plan or insurance package might be difficult and give rise to a headache, but here too, why should the fact that someone disagrees make them a candidate for being *evil*?

Clearly, rendering Benn's account of wickedness *tout court* into an account of evil personhood will take some work. I begin this task in the following section.

4. Humane Principles

On my view of things, "having access to humane principles" is most plausibly understood as having a certain epistemic capacity but also having a certain conative capacity. Two of Benn's examples help to illustrate. Benn contrasts perversely wicked fictional Aztec priests who wrongly believe that they act rightly by sacrificing innocents to their gods with Hitler. Hitler, unlike Benn's Aztecs, "had access to humane principles implicit in the European moral tradition" that afforded him ample reason to treat the

suffering of Jews “as of some account.”⁶³ So, while Benn’s Aztecs can be exonerated from the charge of wickedness, Hitler cannot.

It is tempting to understand Benn as claiming that Hitler is worse than his Aztecs because Hitler “should have known better.” However, some philosophers would reject this sort of claim about Hitler’s epistemic capacity. On some views of things, evil people *must* be perversely wicked because it is impossible for them to overcome the ignorance that prevents them from recognizing that they are guilty of wrongdoing. For example, John Kekes insists that the passions of an evil person “disguised from them the true nature of their evil actions”⁶⁴ and that:

The motives and passions provide a point of view that tends to make evildoers systematically miss the significance of their actions. It prevents them from seeing their actions as evil or acknowledging their moral significance.⁶⁵

Kekes is not alone in advocating the *ignorance thesis*—that evil people cannot recognize the true nature and depravity of themselves or their actions. Daryl Koehn repeatedly links ignorance and evil, suggesting that “Evil is the frustration and suffering we experience because we have unwittingly embraced a delusional and paradoxical way of being in the world”⁶⁶ and that “doing evil is identical with unwittingly destroying our power to act and our humanity.”⁶⁷ But the ignorance thesis is wildly implausible. If correct, knowingly and deliberately engaging in evildoing would *exonerate* one from the charge of being evil, since such evildoing requires knowledge that an evil person, *ex hypothesi*, must lack. Worse, plausible examples of real-life evil persons seem to know full well that they are guilty of evil action. For example, Robert Alton Harris—who will receive more attention later—declared that he “took the road to hell and there’s nothing more to say.”⁶⁸ But Harris is certainly not a *better sort* of person in virtue of unapologetically acknowledging his depravity.

All this matters given that there is real debate about whether evil people—say, Adolf Hitler and Osama Bin Laden—genuinely believe that they rightly pursue a morally permissible end.⁶⁹ But perhaps a proclivity for conscious wrongdoing is not necessary to be evil; perhaps simply doing terrible, horrible things is enough whatever one’s beliefs or motives.⁷⁰ Still, there is, I think, a single compelling reason to deny that being an evil person requires believing that one is a wrongdoer: if it did, then even the most blameworthy ignorance would exonerate a person from the charge of being evil. But ignorance does not generally exempt or excuse, and we do sometimes regard the fact that a person does not have some moral belief as a moral failing on their part: if I do not recognize that your hurt feelings count as reasons for me not to tell the joke, then I am callous; if I lack the belief that other people matter morally at all, then I am unjust, and so forth. Insofar as we are interested in determining whether someone is evil or not, the question is not only whether they *do* recognize that they engage in wrongdoing; we also need to know if they are *culpable* for their failure, if they do not.

If the ignorance thesis is false, it would follow that evil people must have some kind of epistemic capacity in virtue of which they can know that that they act wrongly and that allows us to say of them that they “should have known better” if the question of their culpability comes up. But to be clear, Benn’s assessment of Hitler’s moral failings does not solely rest on a claim about Hitler’s epistemic failings; Hitler would hardly treat

the suffering of Jews “as of some account” if he made a mental note of their suffering and gone on as before without hesitation. Surely treating someone’s suffering as of some account requires not simply believing that there are moral reasons to act differently, but translating those moral beliefs into action. So while having access to humane principles seemingly involves “knowing better”—that is, some epistemic capacity for tracking moral reasons for acting—it presumably also involves a motivational capacity to act for moral reasons.

So understood, having access to humane principles requires at least two things: a capacity to be *receptive* to moral reasons for action and a capacity to be *reactive* to moral reasons. The former capacity involves the ability to recognize the existence of moral reasons while the latter involves the ability to translate them appropriately into action. Let *M* stand for whatever mechanism issues in deliberation and action—say, an agent’s capacity for practical reasoning. An agent is weakly receptive to moral reasons only if, holding *M* fixed across possible worlds, there is some nearby possible world in which there is a moral reason, *R*, to perform (or refrain from performing) some action, *A*, and *M* tracks *R* such that the agent believes that she should (not) *A*. Similarly, an agent is weakly reactive to moral reasons only if, holding *M* fixed across possible worlds, there is some nearby possible world in which there is a reason, *R*, to perform (or refrain from performing) some action, *A*, and *M* issues in (or prevents) *A* because of *R*.⁷¹

Moral agency requires, I shall suppose, at least weak receptivity and reactivity to moral reasons. Given Benn’s description of them, it is plausible to suppose that Hitler is at least weakly receptive and reactive to moral reasons; even if he did perversely believe that he acted rightly, he could have recognized the existence of moral reasons to act differently and altered his behavior accordingly. Not so, apparently, with Benn’s Aztecs. So, if Hitler, but not Benn’s Aztecs, are plausibly regarded as evil, then the following is plausible:

(W1): a person, *p*, is evil only if *p*’s action-issuing mechanism, *M*, is both weakly receptive and weakly reactive to moral reasons for action.

So, no one who is not at least weakly receptive and reactive to moral reasons could be evil.

But why suppose that (W1) is correct? Consider what someone entirely unreceptive and unreactive to moral reasons is like: they would be entirely deaf to moral discourse, never believing that there are moral reasons to act differently; they would never be moved appropriately by cries for help or screams of pain, being entirely indifferent to such things; they would never perform a single morally worthy action in all their days, being incapable of acting as such; they would be more akin to monsters from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* universe than to other human beings; they would be *bestial*, not vicious.⁷² Perhaps there is some utility in understanding evil people this way, but it more resembles demonizing than moralizing.

The point can be made in another way. Again, the term ‘evil’ is the strongest term of moral disapprobation in our vocabulary. As such, describing someone as ‘evil’ amounts to exercising negative reactive attitudes, something that makes sense only if the object of those attitudes is an apt candidate for them in the first place. But an agent who is not even weakly receptive and reactive to moral reasons is simply not an apt candidate

for the reactive attitudes insofar as they are entirely unresponsive to moral address and discourse.⁷³ So, if we are to retain the thought that evil people are morally responsible human beings and not inhuman monsters beyond the pale of moral responsibility, we had *better* endorse (W1) with Benn.

So far, so good. But (W1) spells out a fairly modest requirement for evil personhood. What else is constitutive of being wicked *tout court*—that is, evil?

5. Evil Maxims

Again, Benn claims that a wicked person “must be disposed to act, or respond, in accordance with evil maxims.” And, as I noted above, there are at least some difficulties with understanding this Kantian thesis. Still, there is a good reason to suppose that Benn is right in thinking that evil maxims have something to do with evil personhood: evil people are surely disposed to engage in evildoing.⁷⁴ The most plausible examples of evil persons are not passive voyeurs but active agents responsible for causing all varieties of suffering and misery. Any account of evil personhood that fails to capture the truism that evil people are disposed to do evil is implausible on its face and the suggestion that evil people act on evil maxims is one way to articulate this truism.

If evil persons are disposed to engage in evildoing, how should evil action be understood? Atrocities—including acts of torture, genocide, rape, slavery, infanticide, and so forth—are plausible examples of evildoing.⁷⁵ One strategy for providing an account of evildoing is to focus on how morally decent people consider such atrocities and demarcate their reactions from those of putatively evil people. Perhaps an action is evil if no ordinary reasonable decent human being could conceive of herself performing it.⁷⁶ A certain amount of care is needed here; after all, a disturbing number of perpetrators of genocide—say, Rwandan Hutus who slaughtered their Tutsi countrymen—were, in other respects, morally decent people who probably would have denied that they could conceive of acting as they did. An otherwise morally decent person could, if only in a moment of weakness, not only imagine engaging in some sort of atrocity but might actually *do* the unthinkable as suggested in the following anonymous philosopher’s disturbing anecdote about an incident involving “Luisa Pan Dulce,” the three-year old daughter of the family with whom he stayed while studying in Mexico City:

Lucia Pan Dulce and I were on a kind of mezzanine balcony that extended out over a tiled entrance parlor. I threw her up a few times as usual and then I “found myself”(it seemed as passive as that) holding her firmly by her wrists as she dangled over the tiled parlor one floor below. If I had dropped her, obviously she might have been seriously injured. She seemed to have perfect trust in me at first, but then I felt her body become tense. She returned to silence from her squealing and giggling, and an unaccustomed look of alarm was on her face. Then it happened. My arms went weak and felt like jelly. My fingers were cold and sweaty. I began to tremble uncontrollably. I wondered if I was going to open up my hands and let her drop. I felt my fingers twitch. My arms felt weak and shaky from the wrists to the shoulders, and I was terrified. Then I pulled her up and gently set her down. I was so weary in the aftermath of an adrenaline surge that I lay on the floor for ten minutes.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, the anonymous philosopher is confused and more than a little frightened about what he almost did. But dropping her would not be evil on this account precisely because a morally decent person could conceive of himself committing said crime. Can't *you* imagine yourself in this scenario after reading this anecdote?

Still, this account of evil action, while flawed, captures something relevant. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'evil' has its origins in Teutonic words meaning "exceeding due measure" or "overstepping proper limits." Perhaps evil people are willing to overstep limits that constrain even morally bad persons. In this vein, Adam Morton advocates a theory of evil action—a "barrier theory of evil"—according to which an act is evil when the deliberations of its agent bypass psychological barriers against even considering harming or humiliating others, considerations that ought to have been in place and in force.⁷⁸ While Morton offers an account of evil action, not an account of evil personhood, his account nonetheless suggests the following:

(W2): a person, *p*, is evil only if *p* is disposed to act wrongly and to knowingly transgress what morally decent people suppose are prohibitions against such actions.

(W2) implies that evil people are not just disposed to act wrongly but that they are *willing* to transgress moral barriers, barriers that perhaps even morally bad people are not willing to transgress, in the spirit of Benn's suggestion. This proposal can be strengthened, if necessary; perhaps evil people are not simply disposed as such but strongly and fixedly so.⁷⁹ What is crucial is that (W2) grounds the intuition that evil people are disposed to engage in, not just wrongdoing, but especially grave wrongdoing.

While both (W1) and (W2) are individually plausible, they do not jointly suffice as an account of evil personhood. Many of us morally decent folk are sufficiently receptive and reactive to moral reasons as demanded by (W1) but also disposed to act wrongly and to knowingly transgress what are commonly regarded as moral prohibitions as demanded by (W2). Recall that in the infamous Milgram experiments, sixty-five percent of subjects were willing to administer a maximum—and potentially life-threatening—450 volts of electricity to an unseen (and unharmed) associate of the experimenter despite his screaming and protest and after he lapsed into silence that suggested unconsciousness or words. Milgram's results have been replicated repeatedly, suggesting that at least very many of us morally decent people—people who are at least weakly receptive and reactive to moral reasons—are disposed to knowingly transgress common moral prohibitions. But then, if (W1) and (W2) sufficed as an analysis of evil personhood, very many of us are evil, an implausible result.

Tinkering with (W2) is not likely to help. Arguably, the willingness of Milgram subjects to harm seemingly innocent victims does not suffice to show that they are evil because those subjects found themselves in anomalous situations. The real question is what they would do if they were in conditions that favored their autonomy—that is, when they were not compelled by circumstance to act in some particular way.⁸⁰ So perhaps, a person is evil just in case she is disposed to violate moral transgressions when in autonomy-favoring conditions.⁸¹ But this is still not enough for evil personhood. For even persons strongly disposed to violate moral transgressions absent situationalist

influences might genuinely feel regret or shame or remorse for what they do. Even autonomous agents might act wrongly and do so by their own lights and thus feel compunction for their own perceived moral wrongdoing. But someone who feels compunction for their perceived wrongdoing is a significantly better sort of person than someone who does not and is therefore not evil.

To be clear, I do not suggest that either (W1) or (W2) are false; so long as we suppose that evil people are blameworthy and that they are willing to engage in grave moral wrongdoing, they are bound to be plausible. The problem is that something is still missing from an adequate account of evil personhood. Fortunately, Benn has already suggested what we need.

6. Painful Choices

Arguably, a lack of moral concern is the most promising candidate for a single, ultimate cause of immoral behavior.⁸² But lacking morally appropriate concern for one's wrongdoing is not sufficient for being evil. In Camus' *The Stranger*, the prosecutor insists that Meursault is evil precisely because he expresses no remorse—indeed no emotion at all—throughout the trial after his beloved mother's death. However, Meursault's prosecutor is not terribly persuasive, and even if Meursault lacks remorse for causing the death of the Arab on the beach he also lacks the animus we expect of evil people.

Still, if genuinely contrite agents are not plausibly regarded as evil, then lacking guilt and regret and shame and remorse for one's wrongdoing does seem crucial to understanding evil personhood. Benn's suggestion that wicked people find difficult and painful choices "neither difficult nor painful" is illuminating here. To be sure, evil people might well find some choices to be difficult and painful: choosing a cell-phone plan might be complicated and give rise to a headache, and evil people can agree. More plausibly, evil persons fail to find a limited but morally significant range of choices to be difficult and painful: the sort of choices that a morally decent person finds difficult and painful if faced with them.

Some choices are morally difficult because someone will be harmed or will suffer whatever choice is made—moral dilemmas are perhaps like this—and morally decent people will tend to feel empathy for those forced to make those choices.⁸³ I take it that states like empathy have something in common with a whole range of moral emotions expressive of contrition—including guilt and remorse and regret and shame: all of them are associated with a painful phenomenology such that their actual occurrent experience is painful for their agent. Morally decent people tend to feel empathy and contrition when making painful and difficult choices while evil people, by contrast, are not even morally decent and thus should not be expected to feel the pain that morally decent people feel.⁸⁴

If evil people lack the morally redeeming affective states possessed by barely decent people, then the following is plausible:

(W3): a person, *p*, is evil only if, when faced with choices that a morally decent person would find painful, *p* tends to lack any affective state correlated with a painful phenomenology.

Something like (W3) is surely necessary for any plausible analysis of evil personhood, and not simply because of the plausibility of supposing that evil people tend to lack morally redeeming empathy and contrition. The virtues are badly understood merely as dispositions to act; more plausibly, they are multi-track dispositional states involving a range of tendencies, say, to perform certain actions in certain circumstances for certain reasons and with certain feelings. Since evil people surely suffer from extreme viciousness⁸⁵, they will surely lack the sort of morally redeeming feelings tied up with empathy and contrition that are constitutive of the virtues. No surprise, then, that being evil involves the absence of affective states that are tied up with virtuous character.

The absence of remorse and regret and shame also suggests that evil people identify with the desires that motivate their morally wrong actions. For identification with a desire involves endorsing acting on that desire wholeheartedly and wholehearted endorsement involves, at the very least, the enjoyment of a certain kind of self-satisfaction with the condition of one's will. And self-satisfaction with one's will in turn requires the absence of restlessness or resistance—the absence of any tendency or inclination to alter the condition of one's will.⁸⁶ Insofar as evil people lack any empathy or contrition, they would, to that extent, lack any inclination to alter the condition of their will and, to that extent, would identify with their wicked desires and motives and reasons for action. Further, to the extent that accounts of moral responsibility that hinge on identification are plausible, evil people would seemingly be blameworthy for their wrongdoing. So, the affective component of an analysis of evil personhood implicit in (W3) goes some way to explaining just how evil people can be blameworthy agents worthy of our strongest term of moral opprobrium.

7. The Face of Evil

The promise of the last section was to develop Benn's discussion of wickedness into a full-blown analysis of wickedness *tout court*, in hope of thereby formulating an analysis of evil personhood. My proposal, in its entirety, is this:

(W): A person, *p*, is evil just in case i) *p*'s action-issuing mechanism, *M*, is both weakly receptive and weakly reactive to moral reasons for action, ii) *p* is disposed to act wrongly and to knowingly transgress what morally decent people suppose are prohibitions against such actions in those circumstances, and iii) when faced with choices that a morally decent person would find painful, *p* tends to lack any affective state correlated with a painful phenomenology.

More prosaically, the idea is this: evil people should have known better, willingly do what decent people do not dream of, and lack the sentiments possessed by the barely decent.

One reason to suppose that (W) is correct is that it coheres with any number of platitudes about evil persons. For example, it is intuitive that evil people tend to be regular sources of harm and suffering and misery; (W) explains why this should be so given that it implies that a disposition to act wrongly and be unencumbered by either typical moral restraints or feelings of guilt and shame and remorse. Also, it is perhaps

too obvious to suppose that evil people are not just somewhat vicious but very much so—otherwise, evil people would be indistinguishable from (merely) morally bad people. Since the sort of person identified by (W) will suffer from both significantly flawed moral motivation and affect, she will undoubtedly suffer from a host of what would be uncontroversially identified as moral vices, including maliciousness and malevolence, but also antipathy, cruelty, callousness, and so on. In short, the sort of person described by (W) will undoubtedly suffer from the most serious of vices in virtue of which she is rightly regarded as evil.

Note also that (W) is consistent with common intuitions about contrition. Intuitively, a person is morally redeemed, if only to a modest degree, if she is genuinely contrite about her past wrongdoing. But a person who is morally redeemed, even to a modest degree, is a better sort of person than she was previously and not evil. Moments before his execution, Robert Alton Harris mouthed “I’m sorry” to the father of one of his victims.⁸⁷ This is in stark contrast to the smirking jerk abhorred even by his fellow death row inmates and suggests a significant improvement in Harris’ character. Intuitions may vary, but if Harris was genuinely contrite then perhaps at the moment of his contrition he is no longer evil, however bad he may still be. (W) is consistent with this result.

Another reason to suppose that (W) is correct is that it is appropriately ambivalent about genuinely difficult cases. Consider the case of Adolf Eichmann. Reflection on Eichmann’s boring persona and lack of animus led Arendt to speak of the “banality” of evil and his own testimony certainly suggests he is evil. For example, Eichmann declared that “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction.”⁸⁸ This suggests that he did not find the choice to initiate and execute the Final Solution to be a painful one. Further, he pointed to an occasion when he helped a half-Jewish cousin of his stepmother emigrate to Switzerland.⁸⁹ If Eichmann could recognize the need of a family member as a reason and translate that reason into action, then Eichmann seems at least weakly responsive to moral reasons. And there can be little doubt that Eichmann was disposed and willing to violate common moral transgressions. As such, (W) suggests that Eichmann is evil.

But things are not so simple. At trial, Eichmann spontaneously declared that he lived his whole life in accord with a Kantian definition of duty, declaring that “the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws.”⁹⁰ Eichmann’s declaration is shocking partly because he invokes Kant’s pious name and partly because he got the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative just about right. But it is difficult to believe that any serious reading of Kant could really justify deporting and exterminating millions.⁹¹ Given Eichmann’s proclivity for self-aggrandizing and conflicting statements, it is appropriate to question his sincerity.⁹² But at least some of Eichmann’s actions suggest that he was not entirely without a conscience. Apparently, after slapping the leader of Vienna’s Jewish community in the face—one of his “favorite Jews”—Eichmann repeatedly apologized in front of his staff and continued to be bothered by his behavior even after apologizing.⁹³ Arguably, if Eichmann really was deeply troubled by the role he played in the deaths of millions, then however twisted he is, he is not evil given that he fails to meet the condition for being evil implicit in (W3).

The point is this: it is difficult to determine if Eichmann is evil partly because certain facts about Eichmann's moral psychology are in dispute. But (W) can make sense of this: if it turns out that Eichmann could have been worse, then (W) implies that he is not evil, but if his occasional morally appropriate behavior does not reflect his true character or amounts to a façade, then (W) allows that he is evil. It is no flaw of a philosophical analysis that it fails to yield unequivocal conclusions in contested cases.

However, another sort of individual is more problematic for (W): the psychopath, or rather, the “psychopath” as is often enough conceived of. It is often enough suggested by moral philosophers that psychopaths fail to be adequately responsive to moral reasons, either because they are incapable of recognizing their existence or because they are incapable of translating those reasons into action—failures of receptivity or reactivity to moral reasons, respectively.⁹⁴ But if psychopaths are not even weakly receptive or reactive to moral reasons, then they are not evil according to (W). And that result is at least problematic given that psychopaths are often regarded as the epitome of evil.⁹⁵

However, the psychopath is only problematic if conceived of in the above manner—that is, as a being entirely unresponsive to moral reasons. It is far from clear that psychopaths, properly understood, should be understood in this way. In his important work, Blair notes that a group of psychopathic prisoners suffer from a diminished capacity to distinguish genuinely moral and merely conventional transgressions, a capacity that allows even typical children to recognize their difference.⁹⁶ But it does not follow that psychopaths misidentify every genuinely moral transgression as a merely conventional one nor that they cannot draw the distinction altogether. And even if psychopaths suffer from a diminished capacity to identify and distinguish genuinely moral transgressions this admittedly diminished capacity might still suffice for moral responsibility.⁹⁷ And if psychopaths are at all able to distinguish genuinely moral from merely conventional transgressions, then it seems that they are at least weakly receptive to moral reasons and perhaps weakly responsive to them as well.

Arguably, (W) squares well with a standard psychological understanding of psychopathy. It is sometimes suggested that psychopathy and sociopathy come to the same thing.⁹⁸ But there are good reasons for not identifying the two. First, some have suggested that ‘sociopathy’ and not ‘psychopathy’ should be used to refer to the products of poor socialization practices.⁹⁹ If sociopathy is the result of situational influences while psychopathy has, say, a genetic basis then the two should be kept distinct. Second, and more importantly, there is a necessary affective component to psychopathy but not sociopathy. Given the criteria specifically mentioned in the DSM-IV-TR, an individual suffering from a chronic “failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest,” “irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults,” and “reckless disregard for safety of self and others” could well be diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder (ASPD), absent any consideration of that individual's emotional or affective states. However, lack of remorse and guilt and empathy are “key symptoms of psychopathy.”¹⁰⁰ (W) captures this difference and indeed makes the absence of constitutive emotional and affective states essential to evil personhood.

There is, admittedly, a danger of equivocating here. For even if the sort of individuals that philosophers identify as psychopaths—call them “philosophical psychopaths”—are importantly different from the sort of individual picked out by a more

precise definition of the term, philosophical psychopaths might still be possible; they are certainly conceivable. Thus, there is at least a possible sort of individual—the philosophical psychopath—who is every bit as dangerous and uncaring and unrepentant as we expect psychopaths to be but is not evil precisely because he is not even weakly receptive and reactive to moral reasons. I have already conceded that such individuals are possible, but given that such individuals are more akin to beasts and monsters, I lose the intuition that it is appropriate to hold philosophical psychopaths morally responsible rather than taking up the sort of “objective attitude” that we take towards rabid dogs. As such, I lose the intuition that there is something counter-intuitive about refraining from using moralizing language like “evil” to describe philosophical psychopaths. So, understood in one sense, the psychopath is no counter-example to (W) while understood in another sense, the psychopath actually confirms (W).

Note one final advantage of (W): it can be endorsed by full-blown naturalists but also by theists who countenance the possibility of evil super-beings and supernatural forces. Opponents of naturalism can still allow that evil people are the worst sort of person and, as I have been arguing, being evil surely requires the sort of epistemic, motivational, and affective properties captured by (W). Since the concept of the evil person has a home in folk moralizing and psychology, it should be the sort of thing that is accessible to thinkers who endorse rather different ontological assumptions. The accessibility of (W) therefore counts in its favor.

Most generally, (W) constitutes a plausible account of evil personhood because it characterizes a sort of person so morally defective, so base, so very terrible, that it is difficult to imagine anyone worse. But that suggests that evil personhood consists in wickedness *tout court*: the face of the evil is the face of wickedness.

1 Richard Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion Since 9/11* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 2.

2 Peter Dewes, *The Idea of Evil* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 2.

3 Philip Cole, *The Myth of Evil* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 3.

4 Lance Morrow, *Evil: An Investigation* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 3.

5 Susan Neiman, “What’s the Problem of Evil?”, in María Pía Lara (ed.), *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 43.

6 Stanley Benn, “Wickedness,” *Ethics*, vol. 95, No. 4 (July 1985), p. 795.

7 Benn, “Wickedness,” pp. 795-810; Joel Feinberg, *Problems at the Roots of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 125-92; Ronald Milo, *Immorality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁸ *The Oxford College Dictionary* 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1574. Mary Midgley makes it clear from the outset that her book is about “the problem of evil” although its title suggests it is a philosophical essay about wickedness; Midgley, *Wickedness* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 1.

9 Marcus Singer, for example, suggests that Hitler was “not merely wicked—‘wicked’ is hardly adequate in application to Hitler.” See his “The Concept of Evil,” *Philosophy* 79 (2004), p. 209.

10 Peter Van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 12.

- 11 Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost The Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), pp. 9-10.
- 12 Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2002), p. 12.
- 13 Singer, "The Concept of Evil," p. 185.
- 14 Morrow, *Evil: An Investigation*, p. 53.
- 15 A number of philosophers echo this thought in a recent symposium in *The Monist*, vol. 85, no. 2 (1999): see, for example, Hillel Steiner, "Calibrating Evil," p. 184; Ernesto V. Garcia, "A Kantian Theory of Evil," p. 194; Stephen de Wijze, "Defining Evil: Insights from the Problem of 'Dirty Hands,'" p. 211 and 213; Daniel M. Haybron, "Moral Monsters and Saints," p. 260 and 262; Eve Garrard, "Evil as an Explanatory Concept," p. 321.
- 16 Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, p. 12
- 17 Feinberg, *Problems at the Roots of Law*, p. 131.
- 18 I treat these matters at greater length in my *Evil and Moral Psychology* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2012).
- 19 Benn, "Wickedness," p. 796.
- 20 Christine McKinnon, *Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1999), p. 106 and 150.
- 21 Milo, *Immorality*, pp. 8-11.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 24 Benn, "Wickedness," p. 800.
- 25 Milo, *Immorality*, p. 5-8.
- 26 In the midst of discussing the "noble savage," Rousseau remarks that "men in the state of nature, having no kind of moral relationships between them, or any known duties, could be neither good nor evil." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality* (New York: Penguin Publishing, 1984), p. 98.
- 27 Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson, trans. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 30-1.
- 28 John R. Silber, "Kant at Auschwitz," in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Kant Congress*, ed., Gerhard Funke and Thomas M. Seebohm (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1991), p. 198-9.
- 29 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Alastair Fowler, ed. 2nd ed, (New York: Longman, 1998), p. 221, emphasis added. Benn and Singer capitalize the first 's' in 'satanic' whereas Milo does not. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first entry—"of or pertaining to Satan"—suggests that the first 's' should be capitalized. However, the second entry—"Characteristic of or befitting Satan; extremely wicked"—calls for the use of a lower case 's' here.
- 30 Milo, *Immorality*, p. 55.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 32 Benn, "Wickedness," p. 806.
- 33 Singer, "The Concept of Evil," p. 204.
- 34 Feinberg, *Problems at the Roots of Law*, p. 129; Russell, "Dispositional Accounts of Evil Personhood," p. 232; Singer, "The Concept of Evil," p. 190.
- 35 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 163.

36 Augustine, *The Confessions*, 2.4.9, emphasis added.

37 Ultimately, however, Augustine seems less than convinced by his own diagnosis, concluding Chapter 2 of *The Confessions* by wondering “Who can untie this extremely twisted and tangled knot? It is a foul affair, I have no wish to give attention to it; I have no desire to contemplate it.”

38 Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, p. 21; Dan Haybron, “Moral Monsters and Saints,” pp. 277-8; Luke Russell, “Dispositional Accounts of Evil,” *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010), p. 232.

39 Russell claims that “While some philosophers have suggested that we could derive an account of evil action from a prior account of evil personhood... it is more plausible that an account of evil personhood will depend on an account of evil action.” See Russell, “Dispositional Accounts of Evil,” p. 232.

40 Singer, for example, suggests that ‘evil’ “applies primarily to persons and organizations, secondarily to conduct and practices”; “The Concept of Evil,” p. 190.

41 Milo, *Immorality*, p. 236.

42 Zaibert, “Intentionality and Wickedness,” from *Earth’s Abominations: Philosophical Studies of Evil*, Haybron, ed., (New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 40. Zaibert also insists that “people who directly intend to bring about an evil outcome are more blameworthy than people who are indifferent to the possibility of a side effect of their action eventuating”; *ibid.*, p. 45.

43 Benn, “Wickedness,” p. 796.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 805.

45 Reasons for action are sometimes understood as something akin to normative beliefs and sometimes as akin to normative facts. No commitment to any particular account of reasons is assumed here.

46 Feinberg, *Problems at the Roots of Law*, p. 152-3. Feinberg also suggests that evil is especially bound to generate puzzlement” because purely evil persons seem to “have had no reason at all” and that an action is an instance of pure evil only if it is “done for no intelligible reason”; *ibid.*, pp. 144-5. William Mann notes the similarity between Feinberg’s account of pure evil and Augustine’s testimony; see Mann, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 123.

47 David Velleman criticizes Bernard Williams’ account of shame on similar grounds—because Williams’ account cannot account for the shame felt by Adam and Eve, a paradigmatic case of shame by Williams’ own lights—in “The Genesis of Shame” in his *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 45-69.

48 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 216-7.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

52 Compare Elizabeth Anscombe’s interpretation of Satan in her seminal *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000):

‘Evil be thou my good’ is often thought to be senseless in some way. Now all that concerns us here is that “What’s the good of it?” is something that can be asked until a desirability characterization has been reached and made intelligible. If then the answer to this question at some stage is ‘The good of it is that it’s bad,’ this need not be unintelligible; one can go on to say ‘And what is the good of its

- being bad?’ to which the answer might be the condemnation of good as impotent, slavish, and inglorious... all that is required for our concept of ‘wanting’ is that a man should see what he wants under the aspect of some good. (p. 75)
- And David Velleman’s in his “The Guise of the Good,” *Nous*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1992):
What sort of Satan is this? He is trying to get things right, and so he rejects the good only because he has found respects in which it is unworthy of approval. He rejects the good, that is, only because it is slavish and inglorious, and hence only because shunning the good is a means to liberty and glory. But then he isn’t really shunning the good, after all, since the goods of liberty and glory remain his ultimate goals. Anscombe’s Satan can desire evil only by judging it to *be* good, and so he remains, at heart, a lover of the good and the desirable—a rather sappy Satan. (p. 19)
- 53 Richard Bernstein, “Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself,” reprinted in *Rethinking Evil*, Pía Lara, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 262, fn. 42.
- 54 Singer, “The Concept of Evil,” p. 193-5.
- 55 I borrow this way of putting things from Michael Smith’s *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 74-6.
- 56 Benn, “Wickedness,” p. 801.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 804.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 801.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 796.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 797.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 800.
- 62 Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 79, No. 8 (Aug., 1982), p. 420.
- 63 Benn, “Wickedness,” p. 801.
- 64 See Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 187. See also Edward Hinchman, “On the Limits of Reflection” A Theory of Evil” (last accessed on July 8, 2009 at <http://philpapers.org/rec/HINOTL-2>).
- 65 Kekes, *The Roots of Evil*, p. 119.
- 66 Daryl Koehn, *The Nature of Evil* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 72.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 68 See Gary Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme,” in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 133.
- 69 Ron Rosenbaum, “Degrees of Evil,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 2002).
- 70 Paul Formosa, “A Conception of Evil,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 42 (2008), p. 222.
- 71 I borrow here from John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 63. Since they require that the relevant possible world have the same laws as the actual world, it is nearby possible worlds that are relevant.
- 72 Aristotle distinguishes three states of character to be avoided—vice, incontinence, and bestiality—but at times his remarks suggest that bestiality is something super- or sub-human, noting that bestiality is a contrary state to a “virtue superior to us” and that we “use ‘bestial’ as a term of reproach for people whose vice exceeds the human level;

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Terence Irwin, trans., 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), pp. 97-8. Later, he distinguishes human and bestial vice; *ibid.*, p. 107.

73 This defense of (W1) has its roots in Peter Strawson's seminal "Freedom and Resentment," in Fischer and Ravizza (eds.), *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 45-66. Remainder of footnoted omitted.

74 See Russell "Dispositional Accounts of Evil." Remainder of footnote omitted.

75 Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*.

76 Singer, "The Concept of Evil," p. 196.

77 Feinberg, *Problems at the Roots of Law*, p. 145-6.

78 Adam Morton, *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 57.

79 See Russell's "Dispositional Accounts of Wrongdoing" for a dispositional account that I am generally sympathetic with that includes such further requirements.

80 Actually, I think it is worth wondering whether or not Milgram subjects really were either in anomalous conditions or conditions that frustrated their autonomy. The tendency to defer to a perceived institutional authority in unfamiliar situations is fairly common, especially when subjects are confronted with that authority face-to-face. See John Sabini and Maury Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," *Ethics* 115 (April 2005), pp. 550-3. And even after leaving the institutional setting of the experiment, *not one* Milgram subject called for help or alerted any authority or later checked on the status of the "victim," even after returning to autonomy-favoring conditions.

81 Russell, "Dispositional Accounts of Evil Personhood," p. 247.

82 Milo, *Immorality*, p. 238.

83 Of course, a morally decent person may not be blameworthy for the harm that results from making that choice. Still, it is an impressive fact that most of us would find a person who felt not the least unease for his actions in morally difficult scenarios to be callous and indecent. Imagine, for example, a firefighter who could only save one, but not two, children and shrugged off any concerns that a child perished, claiming "Not my fault, I did what I could do." This is not the stuff that decent people are made of.

84 What is crucial is that the evil person is callously insensitive to the suffering caused by *her* crimes, that she is unrepentant and unremorseful for her morally wrong actions. An evil person might still be pained if she is demeaned by her boss or if a neighbor kills the family dog. Hence, while Satan is pained when he reflects on his fall, he is surely pained by his failures but not at his own wrongdoing—note that just one line prior to delivering his infamous imperative, he bids farewell to remorse.

85 See my "Extremity of Vice and the Character of Evil," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 35 (2010), pp. 25-42.

86 This is the account of identification that emerges from the later work of Harry Frankfurt, but see especially "The Faintest Passion" in his *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 100-5.

87 See Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil," p. 40.

88 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 46.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

91 Even Eichmann admitted to Judge Raveh that the deportation of Jews was not consistent with Kant and that he had lived his life in accord with Kantian morality only

when he was his “own master” and not when he “was under the domination of a supreme force.” See Moshe Pearlman, *The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p. 533.

92 After he declared that no judge could ever “persuade me... to declare something under oath,” Eichmann declared his preference to testify under oath. After insisting he would not ask for mercy, Eichmann submitted a handwritten plea asking for just that. See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 52-4.

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

94 See, for example, R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 178; Jonathan Glover, *Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 138 and pp. 177-8; Steven Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 2006), p. 89; Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 2003), p. 157 and 170; Fischer and Ravizza, *ibid.*, p. 79; Gary Watson, *ibid.*, p. 239; Jeffrie Murphy, “Moral Death: A Kantian Essay on Psychopathy,” *Ethics* 82 (July 1972), p. 286; Benn, “Wickedness,” p. 799

95 Shaun Nichols, “How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is It Irrational to Be Amoral?,” *The Monist* 85 (April, 2002), p. 301.

96 R. J. R. Blair, “A Cognitive Development Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath,” *Cognition* 57 (1997), pp. 1-299 and “Moral Reasoning in the Child with Psychopathic Tendencies,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 22 (1997), p. 731-9.

97 See Shaun Nichols and Manuel Vargas, “Psychopaths and Moral Knowledge,” *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 14:2 (June 2007), pp. 157-62 for discussion.

98 David Shoemaker notes that psychopathy and sociopathy are both “officially classified... under the general term ‘anti-social personality disorder’”; see Shoemaker, “Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community,” *Ethics* 118 (October 2007), p. 79

99 See Robert Hare, et al., “Psychopathy and Sadistic Personality Disorder,” from *Oxford Textbook of Psychopathology*, Million, Blaney, and Davis, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 555; Hare, “Psychopathy: A Clinical Construct Whose Time Has Come,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 23, pp. 25-54; T. A. Widiger, et al., “DSM-IV Antisocial Personality Disorder Field Trial,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 105, pp. 3-16.

100 Robert Hare, *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us* (New York: Guilford, 1993), p. 34. Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)—the standard diagnostic tool used for identifying psychopathic tendencies—includes twenty items and utilizes a three-point scale in determining whether or not a specific item applies: 0 points, if it does not apply at all, 1 point if it applies somewhat, and 2 points if it fully applies. A score of 30 or higher implies that a person either is or has a strong proclivity to become a psychopath. Eighteen of the twenty various items utilized in the PCL-R are divided into two different factors: factor 1 items and factor 2 items—two items, many short-term marital relationships and criminal versatility, are not correlated with either factor. Factor 1 items involve the “selfish, callous and remorseless use of others” while factor 2 items involve a “chronically unstable, antisocial and socially deviant lifestyle.” Thus, it is factor 1 items that are especially relevant to the emotions and affective states of psychopaths. Importantly, even someone for whom all the factor 2 items applied fully would only earn a score of 20 on the PCL-R, a disturbingly high score

but not sufficient to be identified as a psychopath. A genuine psychopath, as identified by the PCL-R, must also suffer from some factor 1 items, including lack of remorse or guilt, shallow affect, lack of empathy, and so forth.