

EVIL.

**A UNIT FOR DISCUSSION.**

HAS RELIGION GOT IT RIGHT?

Is evil lurking in the human  
psyche, simply waiting to  
be triggered?

# Stanley Milgram's 'shock experiments', (Yale 1960s)

- Throughout history, were monsters like the Nazis, a small minority, or do we all have a capacity for blind obedience that leads us into committing unspeakable cruelty by acts, in which we are simply 'following orders'?
- Milgram investigated this by having participants administer escalating electric shocks, as punishment for not learning, to so-called learners (actually actors) in another room.



# Stanley Milgram. 2

- Many of the participants administered shocks that they believed were 450volts.
- Milgram's experiments seemed to indicate that inhumanity arises, not necessarily from deep-seated hatred or pathology, but rather from a much more mundane inclination to obey orders of those in authority.



# Evil.1

- After observing the trial of Adolph Eichmann for wartime atrocities, political theorist Hannah Arendt developed a theme of 'the banality of evil' (= commonplace).
- However, her theory was tainted by the fact that she mainly attended the sessions in which Eichmann's defence team attempted to portray him as a normal bureaucrat, who had simply followed orders without question, imagination or insight.



# Evil.2

- Arendt should have paid more attention to the prosecution's presentation of compelling evidence that Eichmann was a very committed Nazi, who accepted the organisational challenges of the 'final solution' enthusiastically and developed imaginative methods.
- If he thought that orders were straying from the central goal of extermination of the Jews he would disobey them, and work towards the Fuhrer's bestial designs, in a creative way.



## Evil.3

- The most terrifying characteristic of Eichmann and the rest of the horrendous Nazi bunch is not that they didn't know what they were doing, but they knew full well what they were doing, **and believed they were justified, worthy and noble in doing it.**





# Evil.4

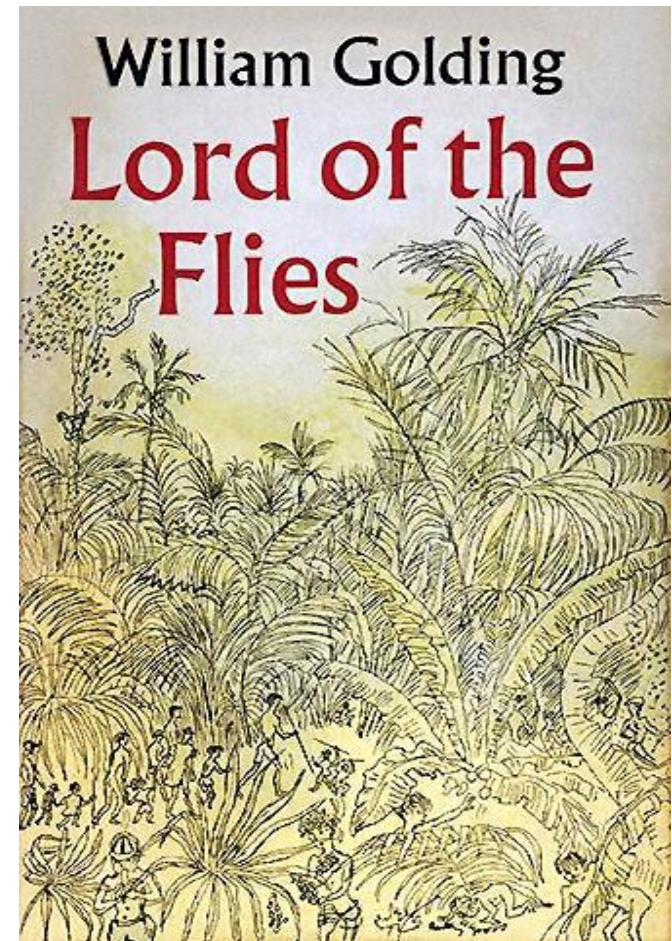
- “It wasn’t my fault, I was only obeying orders”, has been offered as an excuse, for atrocities and lesser crimes, time and again.
- Does it have any validity, especially if the person under investigation is on the winning side, or is the person always able to make a choice, and thus is accountable for her/his acts even when ‘orders’ required/sanctioned those acts?





# Evil.5

- **Lord of the Flies** is a 1954 novel by Nobel Prize-winning English author William Golding about a group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves with disastrous results.
- The book portrays their descent into savagery; left to themselves in a paradisiacal country, far from modern civilisation, the well-educated children regress to a primitive state.



# Evil.6

- Without reference to a metaphysical “absolute entity” how do we define “evil”?
- Quoting an article in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

“During the past thirty years, moral, political, and legal philosophers have become increasingly interested in the concept of evil.



# Evil.7

- This interest has been partly motivated by ascriptions of 'evil' (laying the blame) by laymen, social scientists, journalists, and politicians as they try to understand and respond to various atrocities and horrors of the past eighty years, e.g., the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and killing sprees by serial killers such as Jeffery Dahmer (pictured).



# Evil.8

- It seems that we cannot capture the moral significance of these actions and their perpetrators by calling them 'wrong' or 'bad' or even 'very, very wrong' or 'very, very bad.'
- We need the concept of evil.



# Evil.9

- To avoid confusion, it is important to note that there are at least two concepts of evil: a broad concept and a narrow concept.
- The broad concept picks out any bad state of affairs, wrongful action, or character flaw.
- The suffering of a toothache is evil in the broad sense as is a white lie”.



# Evil.10

- Question:
- Is a toothache really “evil”.
- What would happen if there was no toothache?





# Evil.11

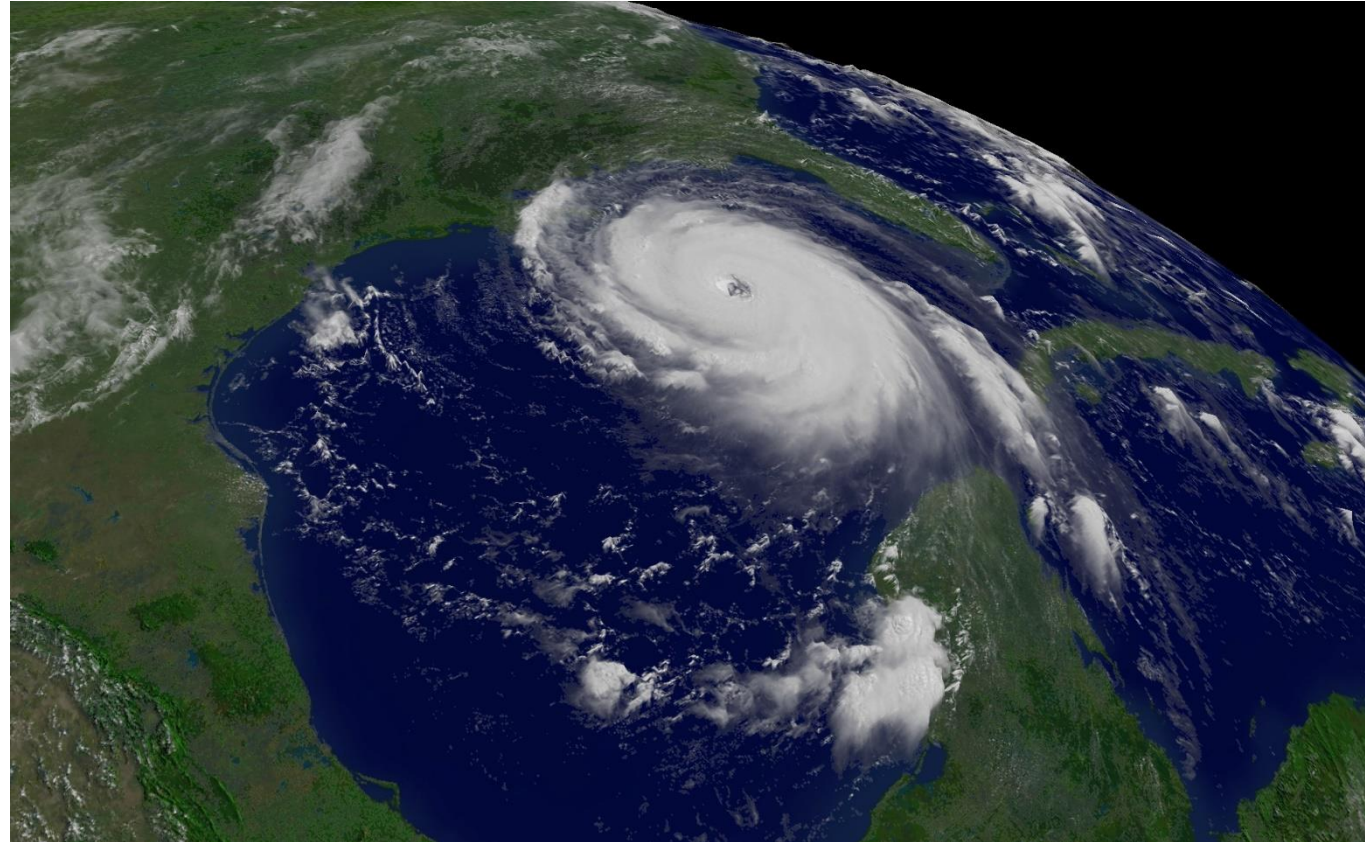
- If things did not decay what would happen?





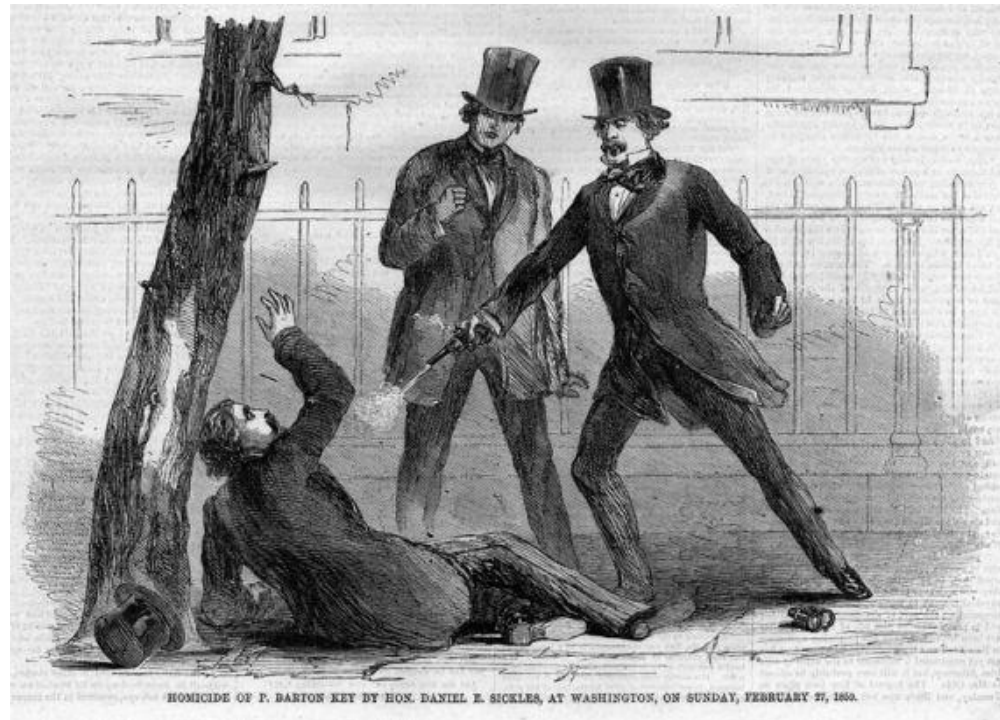
# Evil.12: Returning to Stanford article.

- “Evil in the broad sense has been divided into two categories: **natural evil** and moral evil.
- Natural evils are bad states of affairs which do not result from the intentions or negligence of moral agents.
- **Hurricanes and toothaches are examples of natural evils.**



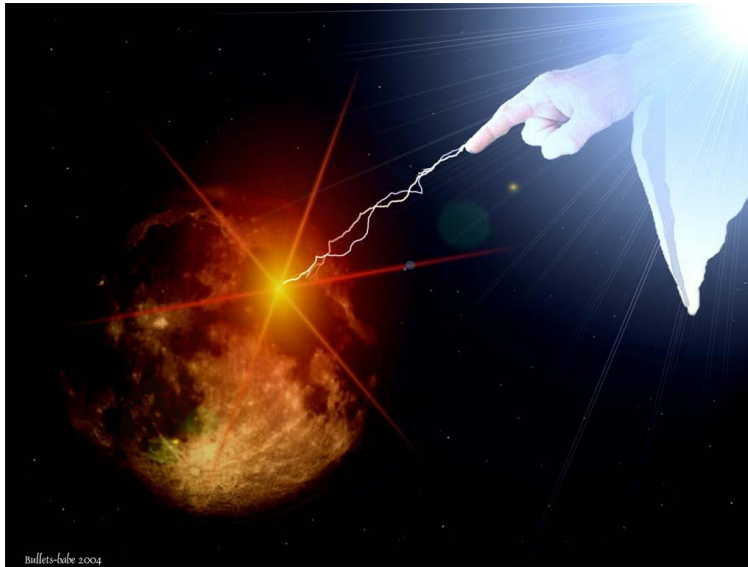
# Evil.13

- By contrast, moral evils do result from the intentions or negligence of moral agents.
- Murder and lying are examples of moral evils.



# Evil.14

- Evil in the broad sense, which includes all natural and moral evils, tends to be the sort of evil referenced in theological contexts, such as in discussions of the problem of evil.
- The **problem of evil** is the problem of accounting for evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God.



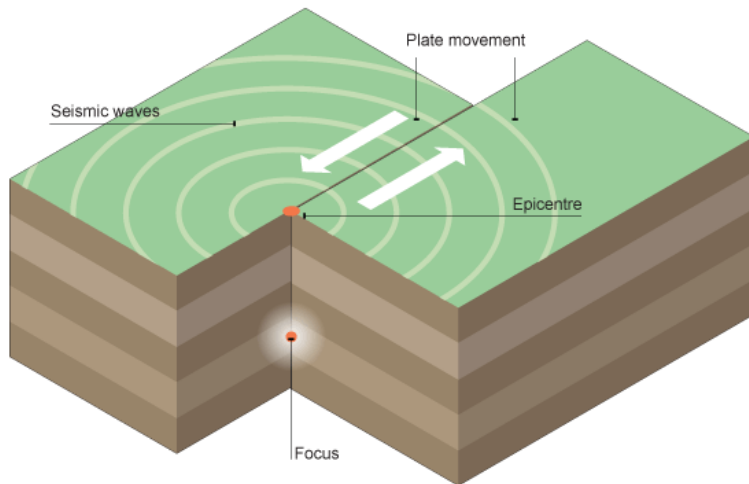
# Evil.15

- It seems that if the creator has these attributes, there would be no evil in the world. **(so the argument goes, but I disagree).**
- But there is evil in the world.
- Thus, there is reason to believe that an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good creator does not exist”.



# Evil. 16; Questions 1.

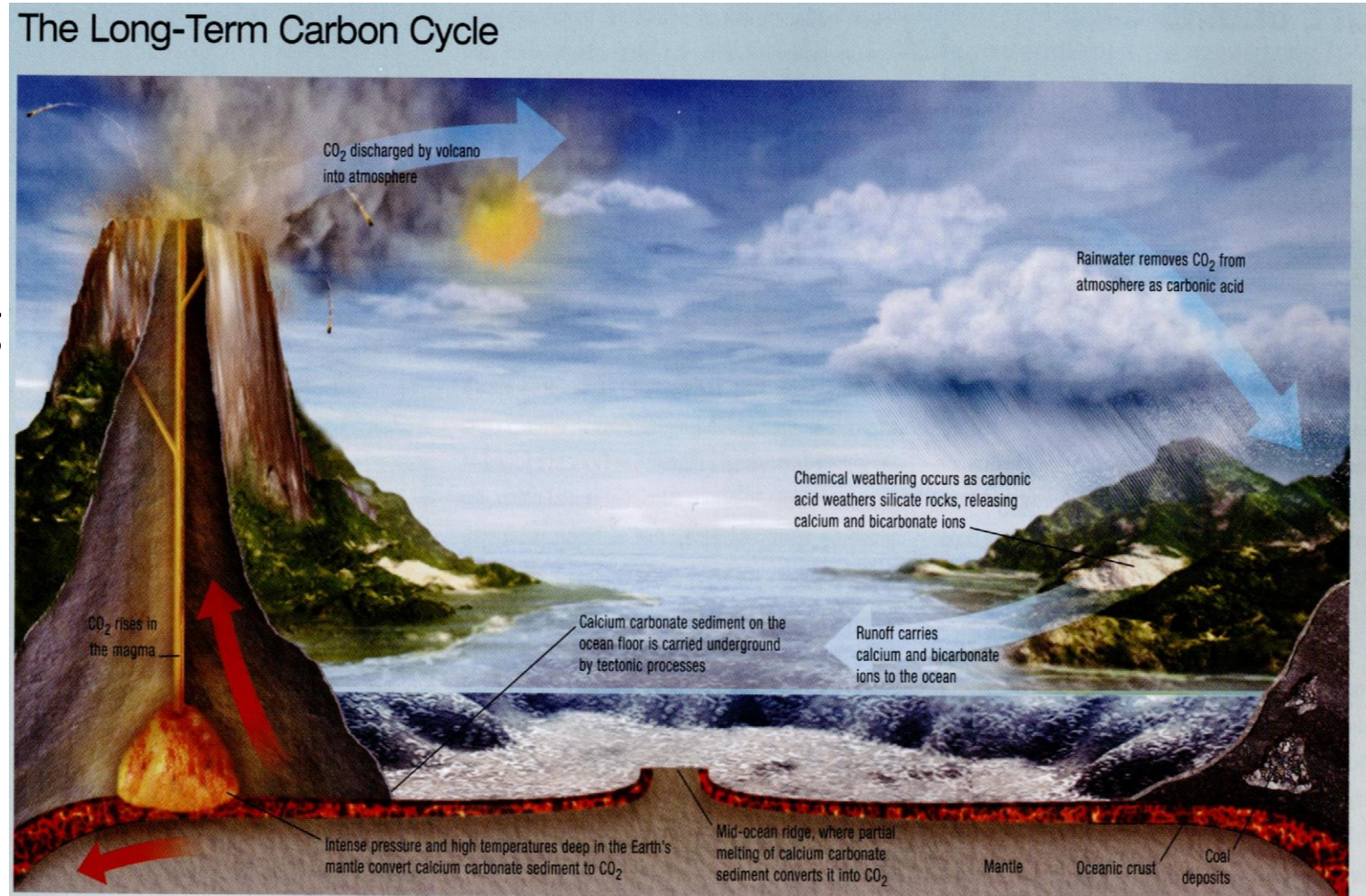
- Question.
- Is the existence of evil equivalent to there being no “All-good God”?
- Consider so-called “natural evils” e.g. earthquakes and hurricanes.
- If you were creating a universe would you create one **without natural disasters**?





# Evil. 17; Questions 2.

- How would you create a long-term carbon cycle, which is essential for life, without involving volcanoes, tectonic plates, tsunamis etc.?



# Evil. 18; Questions 3.

- Rephrasing: is it possible to create physical laws in which **nothing can go wrong**, e.g. is it possible to create a law of gravitation which holds us on the surface of the earth but does not cause 'evil' when we fall out of an aeroplane without a parachute?





# Evil. 19; Questions 4.

- How would you create stars that generate energy by fusing hydrogen into helium but not allow this reaction to happen on Earth (as a hydrogen bomb)?



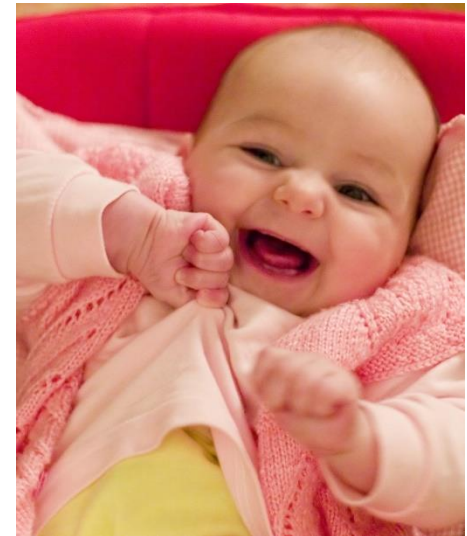
# Evil. 20; Questions 5.

- Hurricanes are intense low pressure areas that form over warm ocean waters in the summer and early fall.
- Their source of energy is water vapour which is evaporated from the ocean surface.
- How would you prevent hurricanes without preventing evaporation which produces rain?



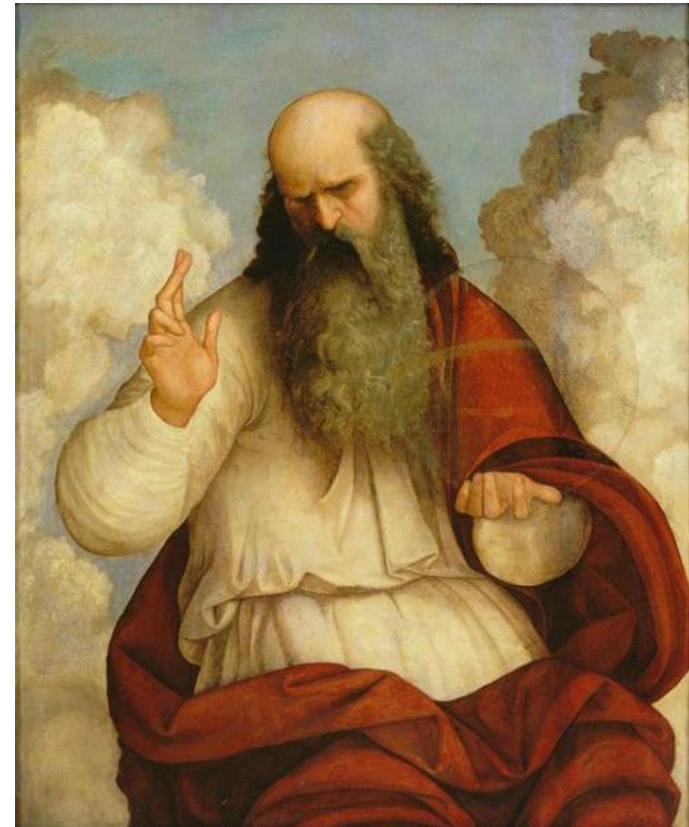
# Evil. 21; Questions 6.

- The arguments against an “all good” god focus on what happens when some physical/chemical/biological process or processes “goes wrong” e.g. when a baby is inflicted with cancer.
- Would you restrict each physical/chemical/biological process to a single possible (**good**) outcome?
- What would be the implications of this action?



# Evil. 22; Questions 7.

- Presuming you would allow more than a single outcome for each process would you restrict them all to ensure a “good” final outcome in every case e.g. would you prohibit evolution?
- If only good things happen would our choices be meaningful?
- What would be your guiding principles, when you structure the laws of the physical universe, so that you become an “all good” god?



# Evil. 23; Questions 8.

- Would you ensure that changes in DNA produced only “good” mutations, or would you accept randomness as a “fair” trait?
- Is the physical/chemical/biological behaviour of the physical universe with all its aches, pains and grief relevant to the nature of God, if he exists?





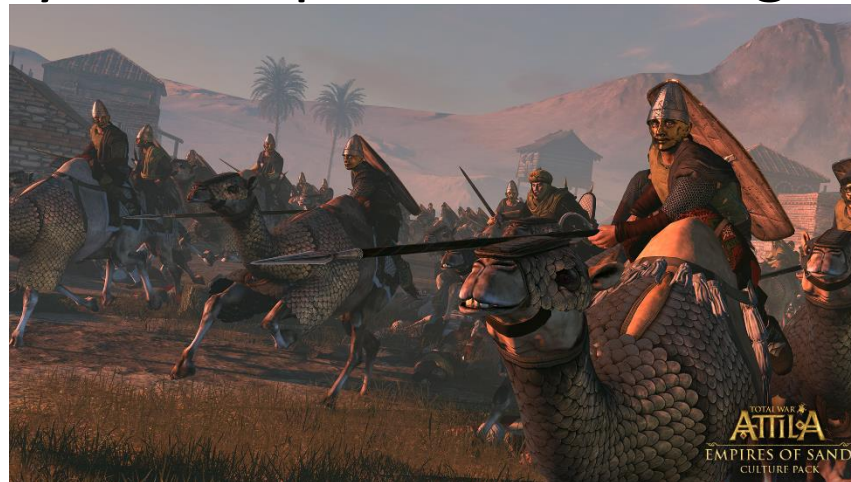
# Evil.24

- Continuing with the Stanford site.
- In contrast to the broad concept of evil, the narrow concept of evil picks out only the most morally despicable sorts of actions, characters, events, etc.
- As Marcus Singer puts it “‘evil’ [in this sense] ... is the worst possible term of opprobrium imaginable” (Singer 2004, 185).



# Evil.25

- Since the narrow concept of evil involves moral condemnation, it is appropriately ascribed only to moral agents and their actions.
- For example, if only human beings are moral agents, then only human beings can perform evil actions.
- Evil in this narrower sense is more often meant when the term 'evil' is used in contemporary moral, political, and legal contexts.





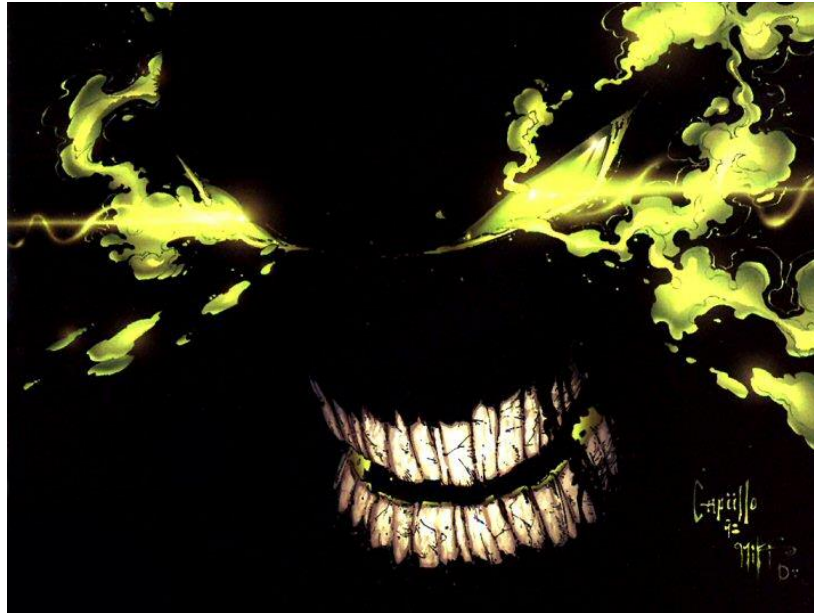
# Evil.26 The Main Issues. 1

- The main issues discussed by philosophers on the topic of evil have been: Should we use the term 'evil' in our moral, political, and legal discourse and thinking, or is evil an out-dated or empty concept which should be abandoned?



# Evil.27 The Main Issues. 2

- What is the relationship between evil and other moral concepts such as badness and wrongdoing?
- What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for evil action?
- What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for evil character?



# Evil.28 The Main Issues. 3

- What is the relationship between evil action and evil character?
- What types of evil actions and characters can exist?
- What is the proper analysis of derivative concepts such as evil institution?



# Evil.29

- Evil-sceptics believe we should abandon the concept of evil.
- On this view we can more accurately, and less perniciously, understand and describe morally despicable actions, characters, and events using more pedestrian moral concepts such as badness and wrongdoing.



# Evil.30

- By contrast, evil-revivalists believe that the concept of evil has a place in our moral and political thinking and discourse.
- On this view, the concept of evil should be revived, not abandoned.





# Evil.31

- Evil-sceptics give three main reasons to abandon the concept of evil:
- (1) the concept of evil involves unwarranted metaphysical commitments to dark spirits, the supernatural, or the devil;
- **Question:** Do we need to believe in God or the Devil to know that Stalin, Hitler etc. were evil?



# Evil.32

- (2) the concept of evil is useless because it lacks explanatory power;  
Question: Can the same **not be said** about “good”?
- (3) the concept of evil can be harmful or dangerous when used in moral, political, and legal contexts, and so, it should not be used in those contexts, if at all.





# Evil.33

- The concept of evil is **often** associated with supernatural powers or creatures, especially in fictional and religious contexts.
- The monsters of fictions, such as vampires, witches, and werewolves, are thought to be paradigms of evil.
- These creatures possess powers and abilities that defy scientific explanation, and **perhaps** human understanding.



# Evil.34

- Many popular horror films also depict evil as the result of dark forces or Satanic possession.
- We find similar references to supernatural forces and creatures when the term 'evil' is used in religious contexts.
- Some evil-sceptics believe that the concept of evil **necessarily** makes reference to supernatural spirits, dark forces, or creatures.

Attila the Hun.



# Evil.35

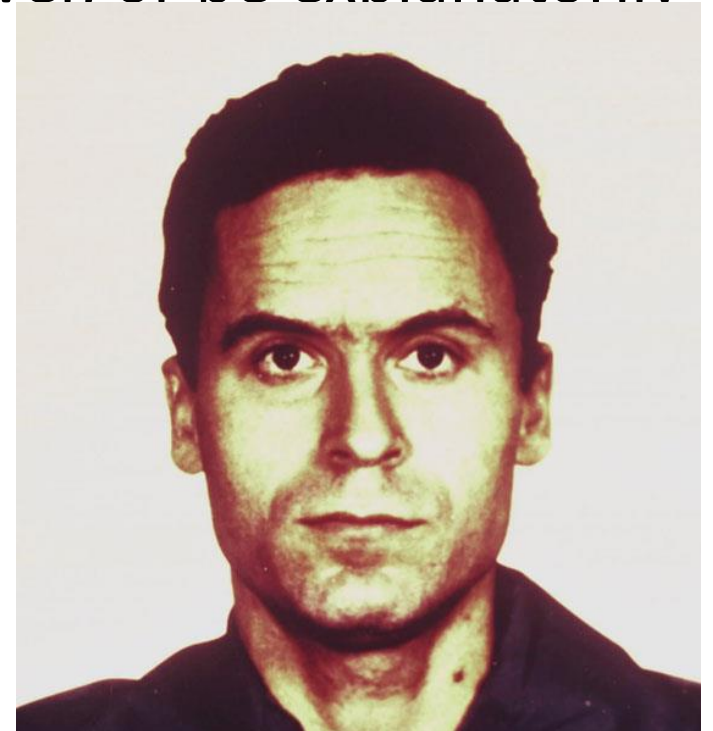
- According to these theorists if we do not believe that these spirits, forces, or monsters exist, we should only use the term 'evil' in fictional contexts, if at all.



# Evil.36

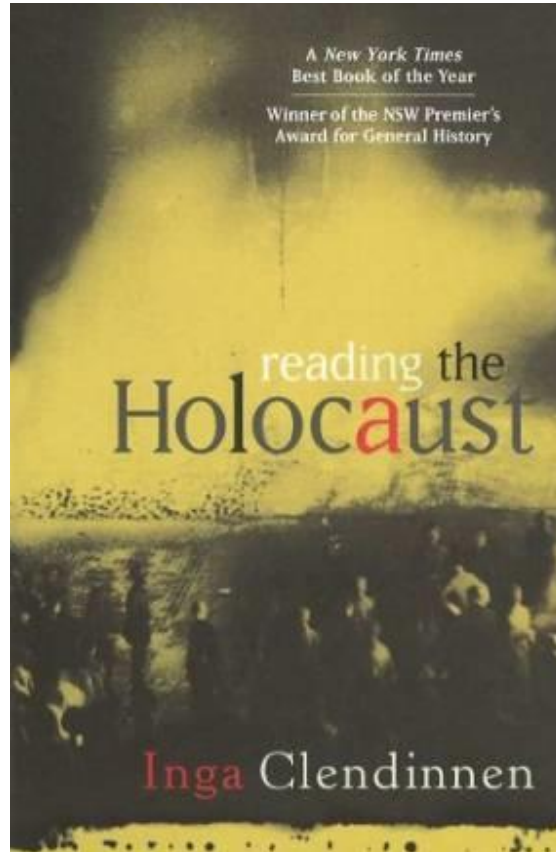
- Some evil-sceptics argue that we should abandon the concept of evil because it lacks explanatory power and therefore is a useless concept.
- The concept of evil would have explanatory power, or be explanatorily useful, if it were able to explain why certain actions were performed, or why these actions were **performed, by certain agents rather than by others.**

**Ted Bundy.**



# Evil.37

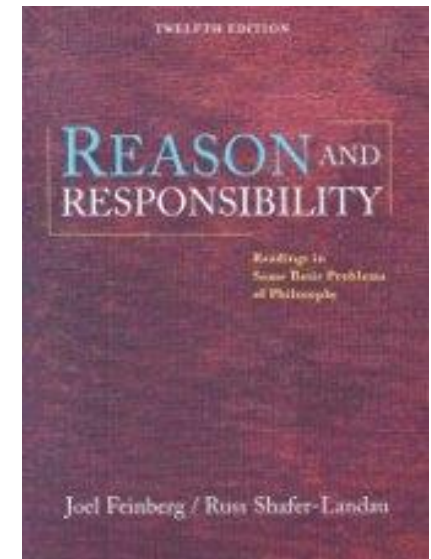
- Evil-sceptics such as Inga Clendinnen and Philip Cole argue that the concept of evil cannot provide explanations of this sort and thus should be abandoned.





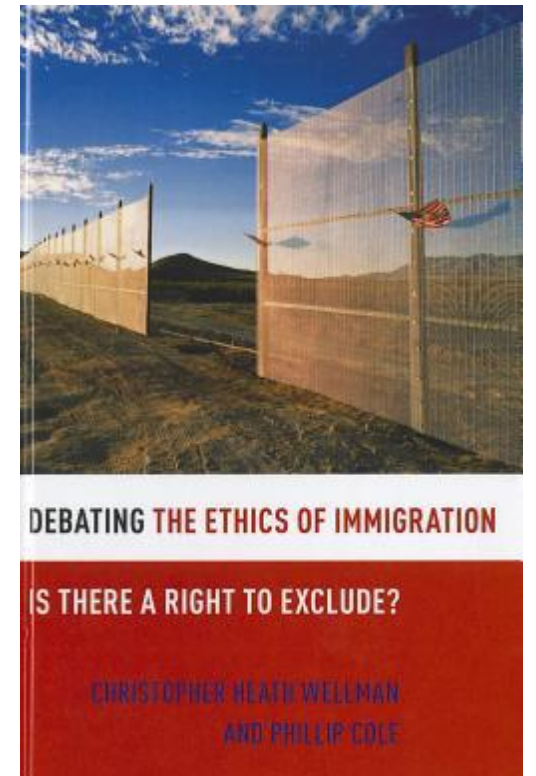
# Evil.38

- According to Clendinnen the concept of evil cannot explain the performance of actions because it is an essentially dismissive classification.
- To say that a person, or an action, is evil is just to say that that person, or action, defies explanation or is incomprehensible.
- Joel Feinberg (2003) also believes that evil actions are essentially incomprehensible.
- But he does not think that we should abandon the concept of evil for this reason.



# Evil. 39

- For instance, we might wonder why two ten-year-old boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, tortured and murdered two-year-old James Bulger while other ten-year-old boys with similar genetic characteristics and upbringings cause little harm?
- One evil sceptic, Cole asserts that the concept of evil is employed in these cases to provide the missing explanation.



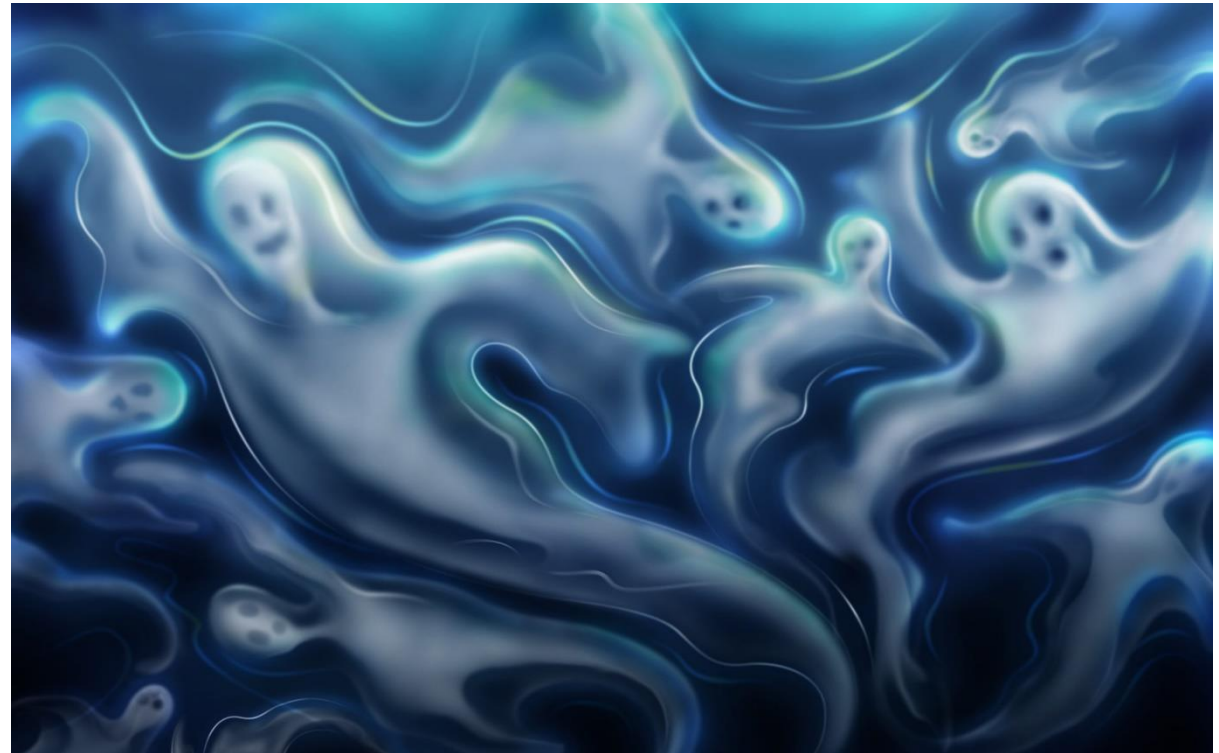
# Evil.40

- However, Cole argues that the concept of evil does not provide a genuine explanation in these cases because to say that an action is evil is just to say either that the action resulted from supernatural forces or that the action is a mystery.



# Evil.41

- According to Cole to say that an event resulted from supernatural forces is not to give a genuine explanation of the event because these forces do not exist.
- To say that an event is a mystery is not to give a genuine explanation of an event, but rather, it is to suggest that the event cannot be explained; at least with the information currently available.



# Evil.42

- By contrast, evil-revivalists believe that the concept of evil has a place in our moral and political thinking and discourse.
- On this view, the concept of evil should be revived, not abandoned.





# Evil.43

- Evil-revivalists have offered several responses to the objection that the concept of evil should be abandoned because it is explanatorily useless.
- One common response is that the concept of evil might be worth keeping for descriptive or prescriptive purposes even if it isn't explanatorily useful.



# Evil. 44

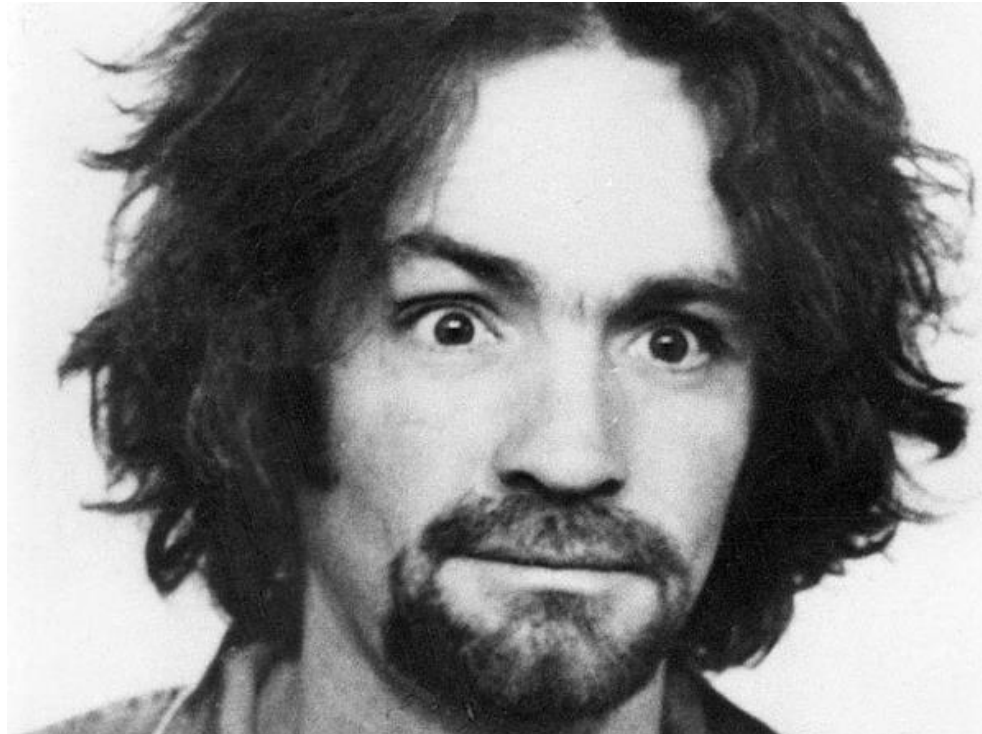
- Evil-revivalists respond that the concept of evil need not make reference to supernatural spirits, dark forces, or monsters.
- There is a secular moral concept of evil which is distinct from fictional or religious conceptions, and it is this secular conception of evil that is meant most often when the term 'evil' is used in moral and political contexts.



## Evil. 45

- Evil-revivalists seek to offer plausible analyses of evil which do not make reference to supernatural spirits, dark forces, or monsters, but which fully capture secular uses of the term 'evil.'

- Charles Manson.



## Evil. 46

- Another common response is to argue that evil is **no less explanatorily useful than other moral concepts such as good, bad, right, and wrong.**
- Thus, if we should abandon the concept of evil we should abandon these other moral concepts as well.

Aileen Wuornos.



# Evil. 47

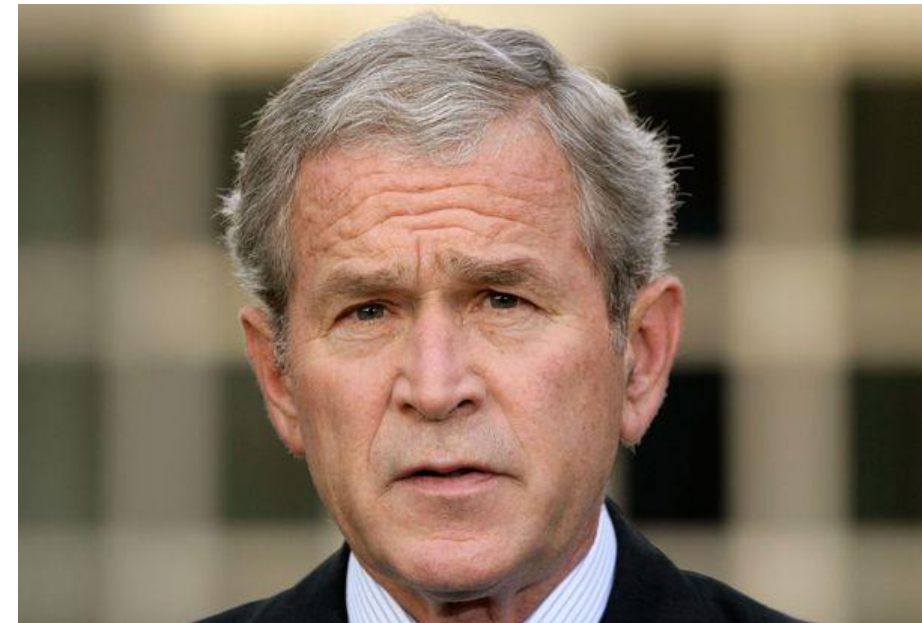
- Furthermore, even if the concept of evil cannot provide a complete explanation for the performance of an action, it can provide a partial explanation.
- For instance, it can be argued that evil actions result from a particular kind of motivation.





## Evil. 48

- Some evil-sceptics believe that we should abandon the concept of evil because it is too harmful or dangerous to use.
- For instance, it is likely that by calling terrorists 'evildoers' and Iraq, Iran, and North Korea 'the axis of evil' former US President George W. Bush made it more likely that suspected terrorists would be mistreated and less likely that there would be peaceful relations between the peoples and governments of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea and the peoples and government of the United States.



## Evil. 49

- But should we abandon the concept of evil because it leads to harm when it is misapplied or abused?
- Claudia Card argues that “If the likelihood of the ideological abuse of a concept were sufficient reason to abandon the concept, we should probably abandon all normative concepts, certainly ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’”



# Evil. 50

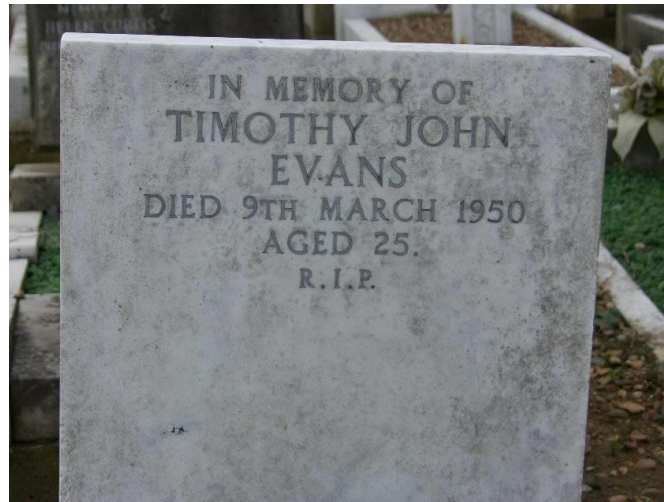
- And yet evil-sceptics do not believe that we should abandon all normative concepts.
- So why do they believe that we should abandon the concept of evil?
- An evil-sceptic might reply that we should abandon only the concept of evil, and not other normative concepts, because the concept of evil is particularly dangerous or susceptible to abuse.

- Pol Pot Regime Cambodia.



# Evil. 51

- We can discern several reasons why ascriptions of evil might be thought to be more harmful or dangerous than ascriptions of other normative concepts such as badness or wrongdoing.
- First, since ascriptions of evil are the greatest form of moral condemnation, when the term 'evil' is misapplied we subject someone to a particularly harsh judgement undeservedly.



# Evil. 52

- Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that evildoers not only deserve the greatest form of moral condemnation but also the greatest form of punishment.
- Thus, not only are wrongfully accused evildoers subjected to harsh judgments undeservedly, they may be subjected to harsh punishments undeservedly as well.





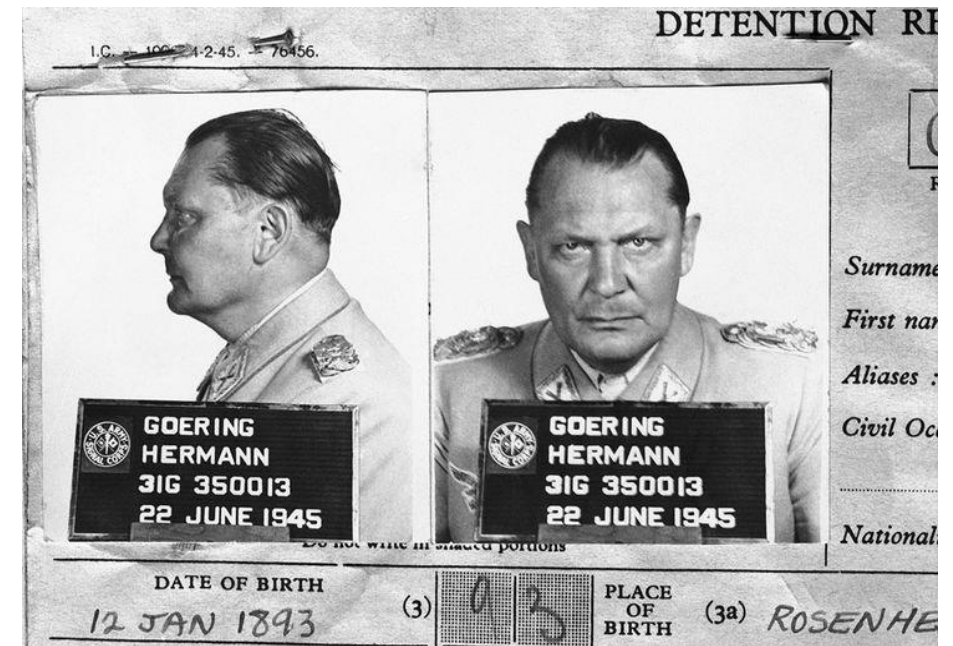
# Evil. 53

- Another reason that ascriptions of evil can be particularly harmful or dangerous is that it isn't always clear what people mean when they use the term 'evil.'
- As Eve Garrard puts it “the general obscurity surrounding the term makes some thinkers very reluctant to appeal to the idea of evil”.



# Evil. 54

- For instance, some people believe that to say that someone performed an evil action implies that that person acted out of malice while others believe that evildoing can result from many different sorts of motives, even good motives.
- Given this ambiguity, it might be unclear whether an attribution of evil attributes despicable psychological attributes to an evildoer, and this ambiguity might result in an overly harsh judgment.



# Evil.55

- Other ambiguities concerning the meaning of the term 'evil' may be even more harmful.
- For instance, on some conceptions of evil, evildoers are possessed, inhuman, incorrigible, or have fixed character traits.
- These metaphysical and psychological theses about evildoers are controversial.



# Evil.56

- Many who use the term 'evil' do not mean to imply that evildoers are possessed, inhuman, incorrigible, or that they have fixed character traits.
- But others do.
- Rudolph Heydritch.



# Evil.57

- If evildoers have these traits, and thus will continue to perform evil actions no matter what we do, the only appropriate response might be to isolate them from society or to have them executed.
- But if evildoers do not have these fixed dispositions and they are treated as if they do, they will likely be mistreated.

- Joseph Mengele





# Evil.58

- Thus, while most theorists agree that the concept of evil can be harmful or dangerous there is considerable disagreement about what conclusion should be drawn from this fact.
- Evil-sceptics believe that because the concept of evil is harmful or dangerous we should abandon it in favour of less dangerous concepts such as badness and wrongdoing.



If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

— *Joseph Goebbels* —

AZ QUOTES

# Evil.59

- Evil-revivalists believe that because the concept of evil is harmful or dangerous more philosophical work needs to be done on it to clear up ambiguities and reduce the likelihood of abuse or misuse.
- Card and Kekes argue that it is more dangerous to ignore evil than to try to understand it.



# Evil.60

- For if we do not understand evil we will be ill-equipped to root out its sources, and thus, we will be unable to prevent evils from occurring in the future.



# Evil 61: Arguments in Favour of the Concept of Evil

- Some people believe that we should revive the concept of evil because only the concept of evil can capture the moral significance of acts, characters, and events such as sadistic torture, serial killers, Hitler, and the Holocaust.



# Evil. 62

- As Daniel Haybron puts it “Prefix your adjectives [such as ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’] with as many ‘very’s as you like; you still fall short.
- Only ‘evil’, it seems, will do”.
- According to this line of argument, it is hard to deny that evil exists; and if evil exists, we need a concept to capture this immoral extreme.

- Daniel Haybron:





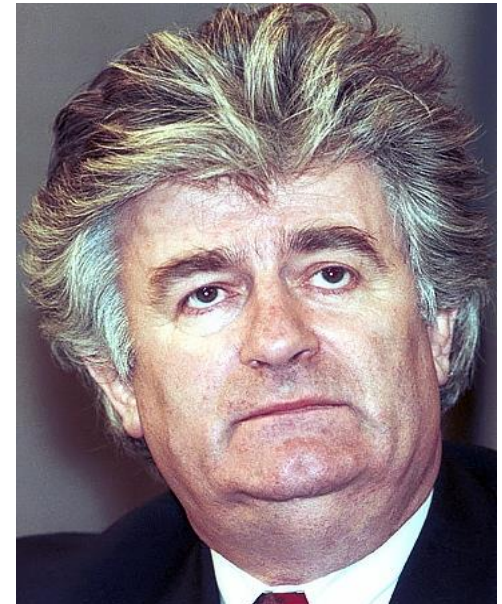
## Evil. 63

- A second argument in favour of the concept of evil is that it is only by facing evil, i.e., by becoming clear about its nature and origins, that we can hope to prevent future evils from occurring and live good lives. (Kekes, Card )



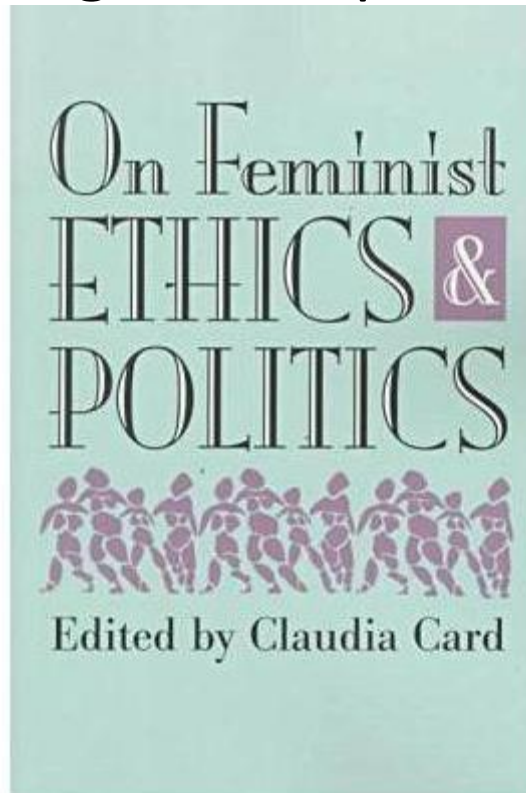
# Evil. 64

- A third reason to revive the concept of evil is that categorizing actions and practices as evil helps to focus our limited energy and resources.
- If evils are the worst sorts of moral wrongs, we should prioritize the reduction of evil over the reduction of other wrongs such as unjust inequalities.
- Serbian war criminal Radovan Karadžić, who trained as a psychiatrist!!



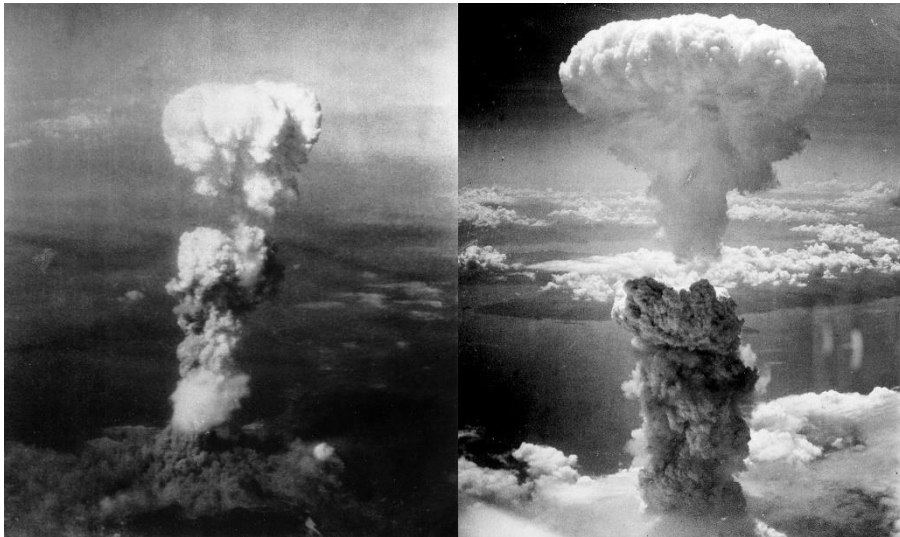
## Evil. 65

- For instance, Claudia Card believes that it is more important to prevent the evils of domestic violence than it is to ensure that women and men are paid equal wages for equal work.



# Evil. 70

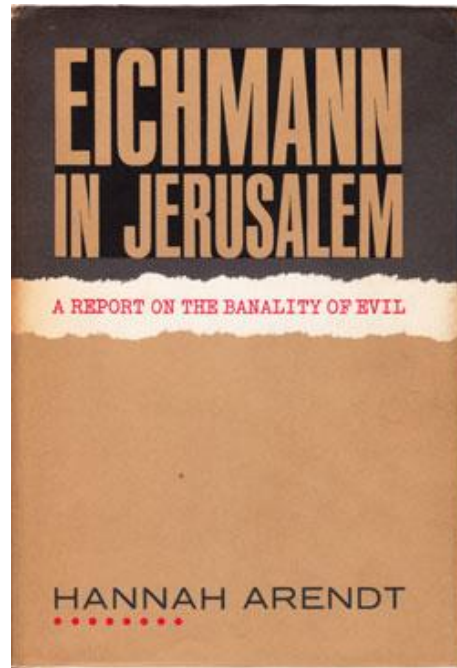
- A fourth reason to revive the concept of evil is that by categorising actions and practices as evil we are better able to set limits to legitimate responses to evil.
- By having a greater understanding of the nature of evil we are better able to guard against responding to evil with further evils.





# Evil. 71

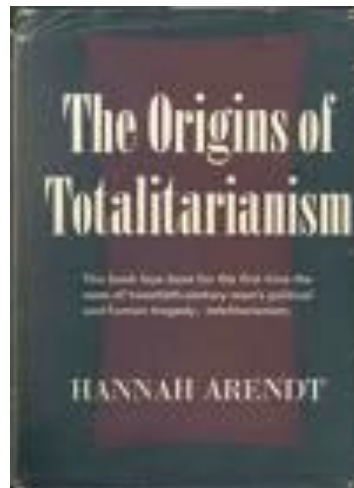
- Secular analyses of the concept of evil in the narrow sense began in the twentieth century with the work of Hanna Arendt.
- Arendt's thoughts on the nature of evil stem from her attempt to understand and evaluate the horrors of the Nazi death camps.





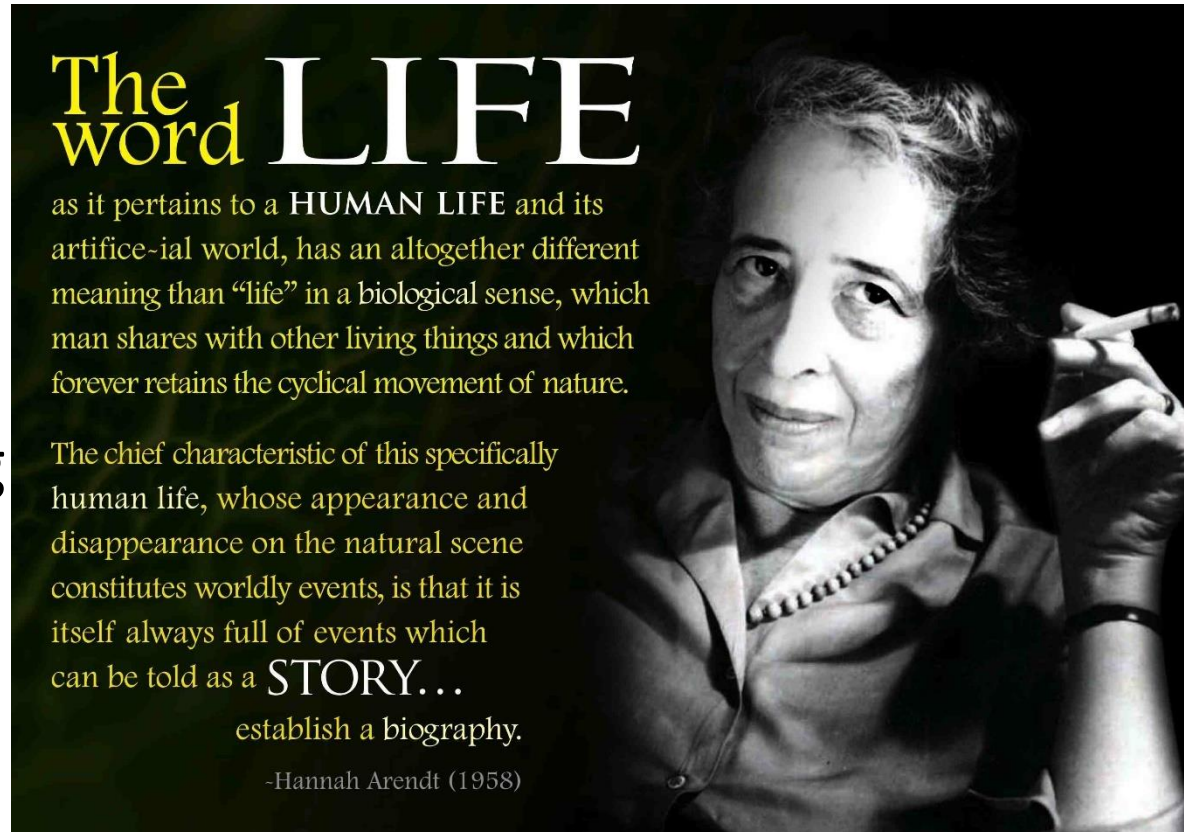
# Evil. 72

- In the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt borrows Kant's term 'radical evil' to describe the evil of the Holocaust.
- Arendt uses the term to denote a new form of wrongdoing which cannot be captured by other moral concepts.
- For Arendt, radical evil involves, treating human beings as human beings, superfluous.



# Evil. 73

- This is accomplished when human beings are made into living corpses who lack any spontaneity or freedom.
- According to Arendt a distinctive feature of radical evil is that it isn't done for humanly understandable motives such as self-interest, but merely to reinforce totalitarian control and the idea that everything is possible.



# Evil. 74

- In *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt's analysis of evil focuses on evils which results from systems put in place by totalitarian regimes.
- Her analysis does not address the character and culpability of individuals who take part in the perpetration of evil.
- In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt turns her attention to individual culpability for evil through her analysis of the Nazi functionary Adolf Eichmann who was tried in Jerusalem for organizing the deportation and transportation of Jews to the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.



# Evil. 75

- Arendt went to Jerusalem in 1961 to report on Eichmann's trial for *The New Yorker* magazine.
- In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she argues that “desk murderers” such as Eichmann were not motivated by demonic or monstrous motives.
- Instead, “It was sheer thoughtlessness—something by no means identical with stupidity—that predisposed [Eichmann] to become one of the greatest criminals of that period”.



# Evil. 76

- According to Arendt, Eichmann's motives and character were banal rather than monstrous.
- She described him as a “terrifyingly normal” human being who simply did not think very deeply about what he was doing.
- Johanna "Hannah" Arendt was a German born Jewish American.

**Where all are guilty, no one is;  
confessions of collective guilt  
are the best possible  
safeguard against the  
discovery of culprits, and the  
very magnitude of the crime  
the best excuse for doing  
nothing.**



# Evil. 77

- Arendt's reflections on Eichmann and her concept of the banality of evil have been both influential and controversial.
- Some theorists take Arendt's thesis of the banality of evil as a datum to be explained.



"Forgiveness is the key to  
action and freedom."

~ Hannah Arendt

# Evil. 78

- For instance, social psychologists Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo have attempted to explain how social conditions can lead ordinary people to perform evil actions.
- Others, such as Claudia Card have contested Arendt's suggestion that ordinary people can be regular sources of evil.

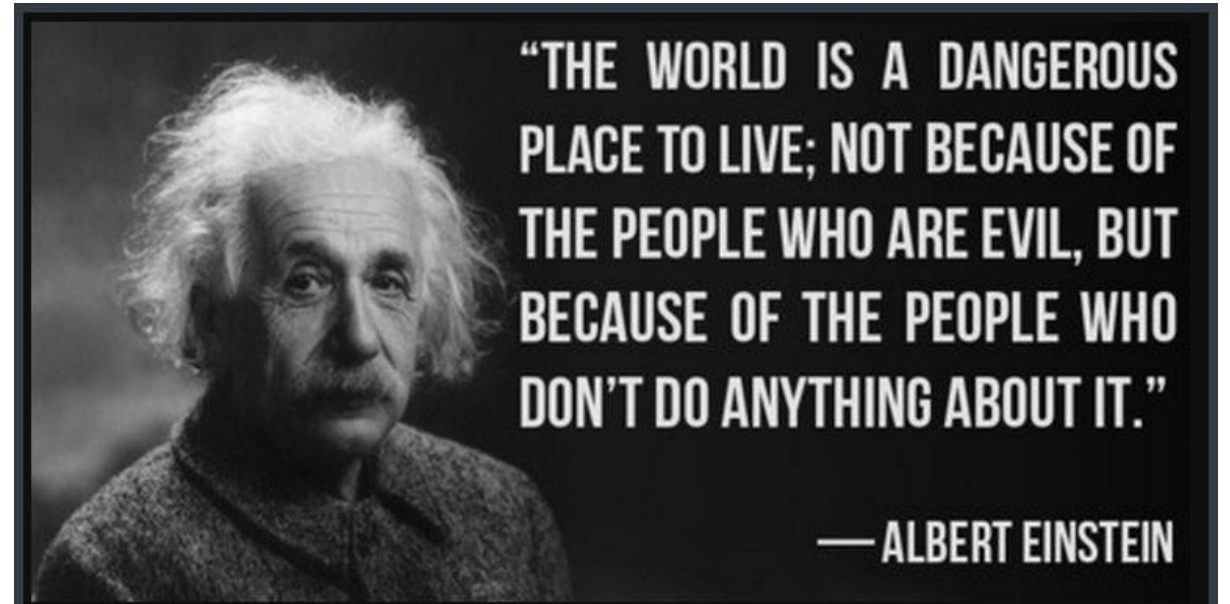


Under conditions  
of tyranny it is far  
easier to act than  
to think.

Hannah Arendt

# Evil.79

- Spurred on by Arendt's work, and dissatisfied with analyses of evil found in the history of philosophy, several theorists over the past twenty-five years have sought to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for evil.
- Some theorists focus on evil character, or evil personhood, as the root concept of evil.



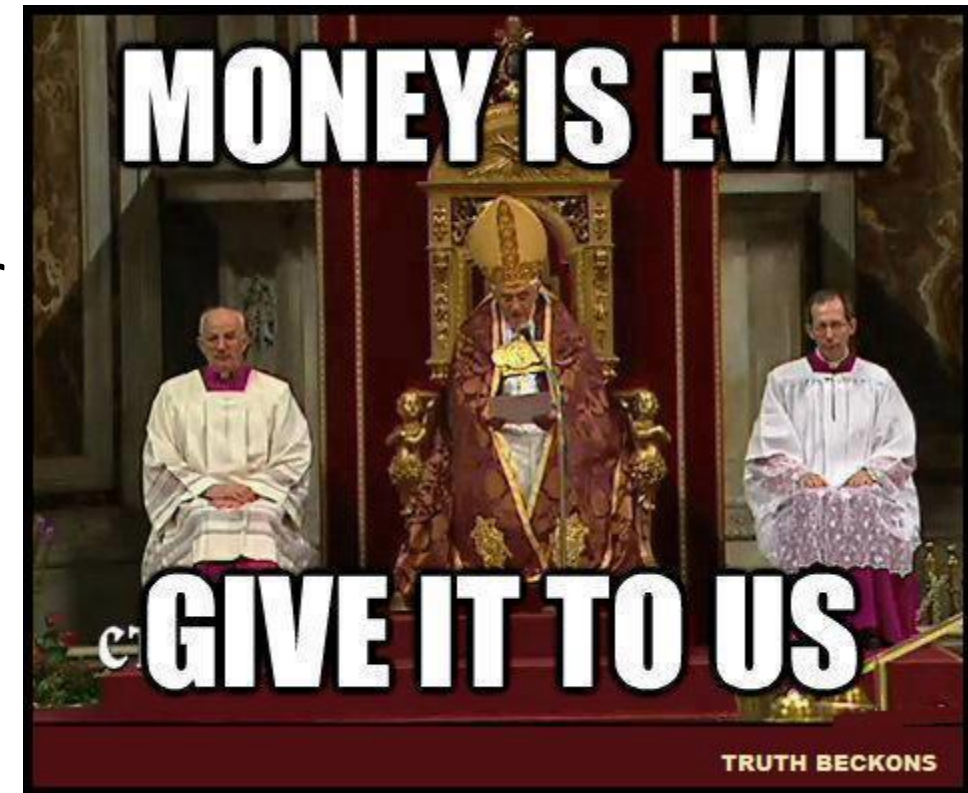
# Evil.80

- These theorists consider the concept of evil action to be a derivative concept, i.e., they define an evil action as the sort of action that an evil person performs.
- But just as many theorists, or more, believe that the concept of evil action is the root concept of evil.



# Evil.81 Contemporary Theories of Evil Action.

- These theorists consider the concept of evil personhood to be a derivative concept, i.e., they define an evil person as someone who is prone to perform evil actions.
- Some theorists who believe that evil action is the root concept believe that only one or two component properties are essential for evil action, while others believe that evil action has a multitude of essential components.





# Evil.82

- Most theorists writing about evil believe that evil action requires a certain sort of motivation.
- Some have suggested that evildoers desire to cause harm, or to do wrong, for specific reasons such as pleasure (Steiner ), the desire to annihilate all being (Eagleton ), or the destruction of others for its own sake.

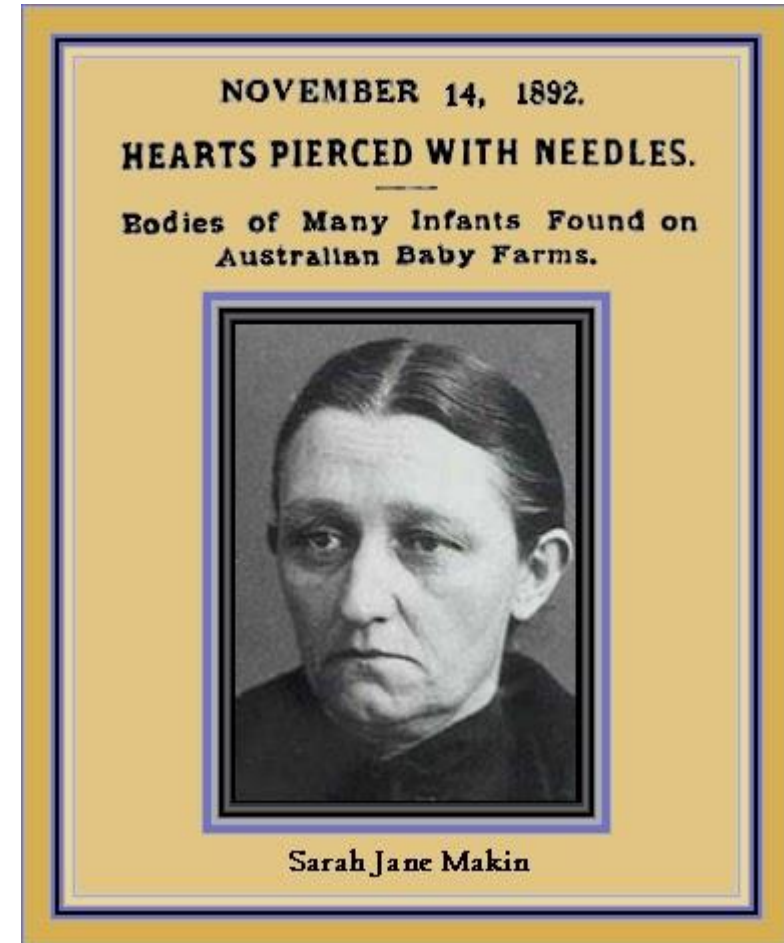
Ivan Milat.





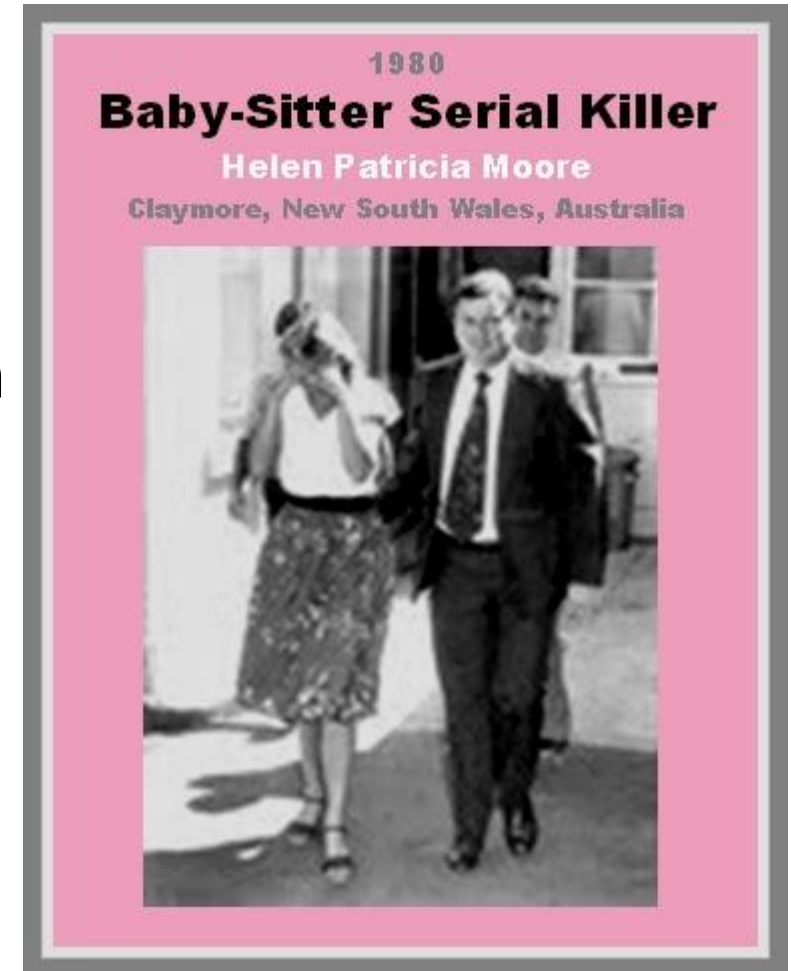
# Evil.83

- While some philosophers argue that certain motives, such as malevolence or malice, are necessary for evil, others focus instead on motives or desires that evildoers lack.
- For instance, Adam Morton contends that evildoers are crucially uninhibited by barriers against considering harming or humiliating others that ought to be there.



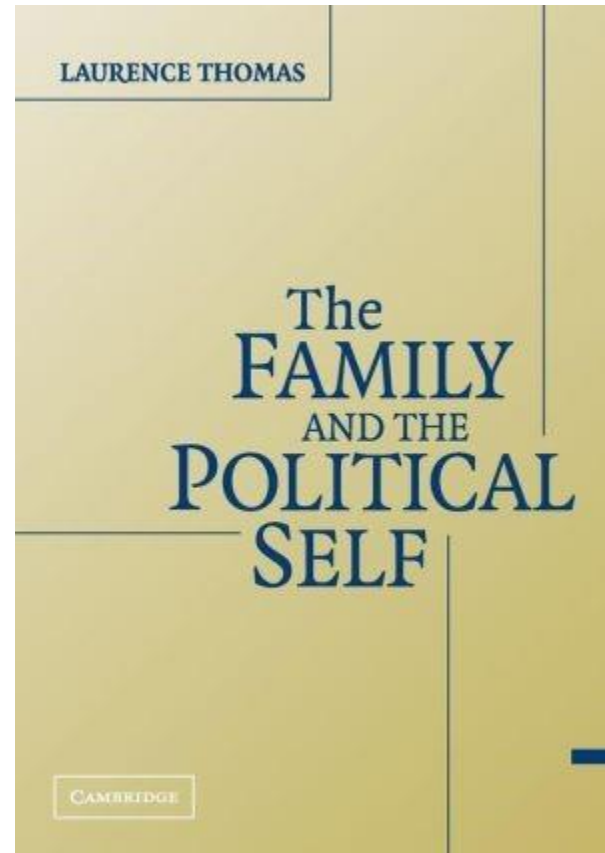
# Evil.84

- Similarly, Laurence Thomas contends that one distinctive feature of an evildoer is that “whereas normally a person's moral sensibilities would get in the way of his/her performing an act of such moral gravity [i.e., one that results in serious harm], this does not happen when a person performs an evil act”



# Evil.85

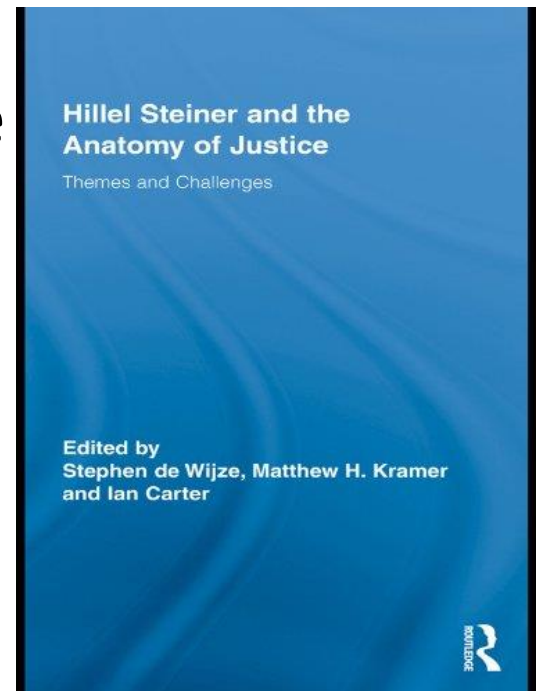
- Some theorists believe that to do evil we must feel a certain way or have certain emotions at the time of acting.
- For example, Laurence Thomas believes that evildoers take delight in causing harm or feel hatred toward their victims.
- Hillel Steiner goes even further by contending that there are just two components of evil: pleasure and wrongdoing.



# Evil.86

- Hillel Steiner claims that “evil acts are distinguished from ordinary wrongs through the presence of an extra quality that is completely absent in the performance of ordinary wrongs”.
- According to Steiner, the extra quality shared by all evil actions and lacking from merely wrongful actions, is the perpetrator's pleasure; evil action consists in taking pleasure in doing wrong.

Hillel Steiner is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Manchester.



# Evil.87

- It is universally accepted that to perform an evil action an agent must be morally responsible for what he/she does.
- Although hurricanes and rattlesnakes can cause great harm, they cannot perform evil actions because they are not moral agents.
- Furthermore, moral agents only perform evil actions when they are morally responsible for what they do and their actions are morally inexcusable.



# Evil.88

- To meet these conditions evildoers must act voluntarily, intend or foresee their victim's suffering, and lack moral justification for their actions.
- It is particularly controversial whether these conditions are met in three sorts of cases:
  - (1) serious harms brought about by psychopaths;
  - (2) serious harms brought about by individuals who have had bad upbringings; and
  - (3) serious harms brought about through ignorance.

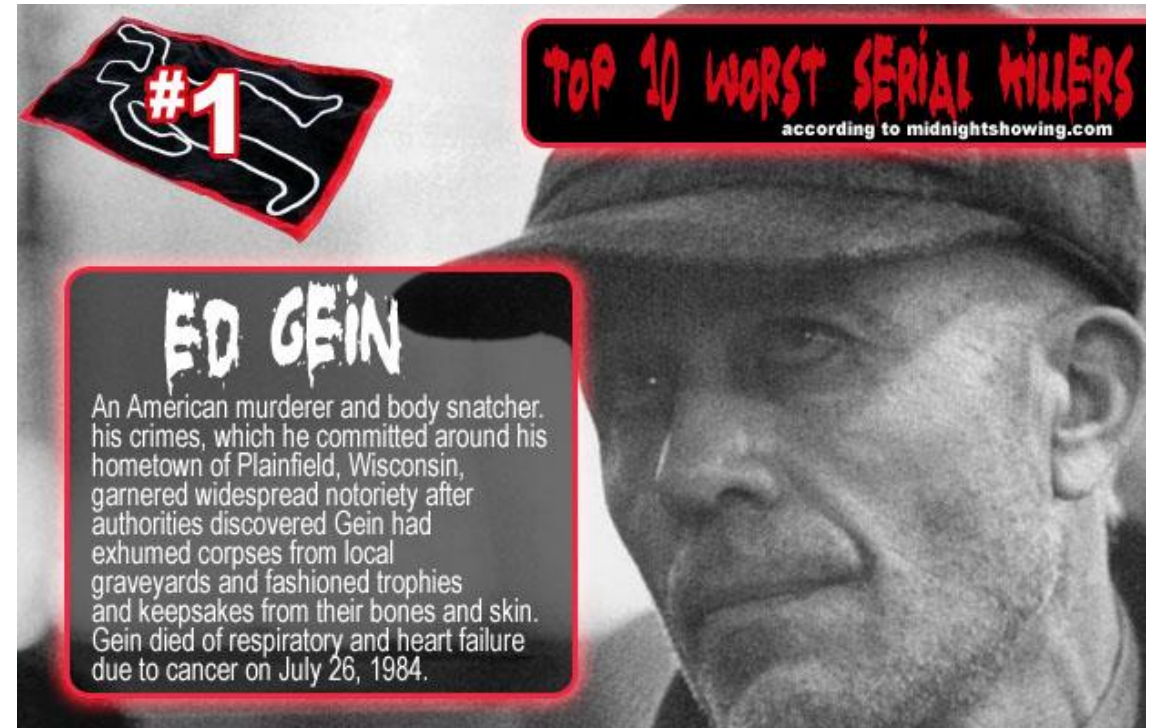


# Contemporary Theories of Evil Character/Personhood.

- There are six main types of theories of evil character, or evil personhood (the two terms are used interchangeably).
- frequent evildoer accounts,
- dispositional accounts,
- affect-based accounts,
- motive-based accounts,
- consistency accounts, and
- extremity accounts.

# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts. 1

- On frequent evildoer and dispositional accounts of evil character the concept of evil action is the root concept of evil, while the concept of evil character is a derivative concept.
- For instance, according to the frequent evildoer approach, an evil person is simply someone who performs evil actions often enough.



# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts.

## 2

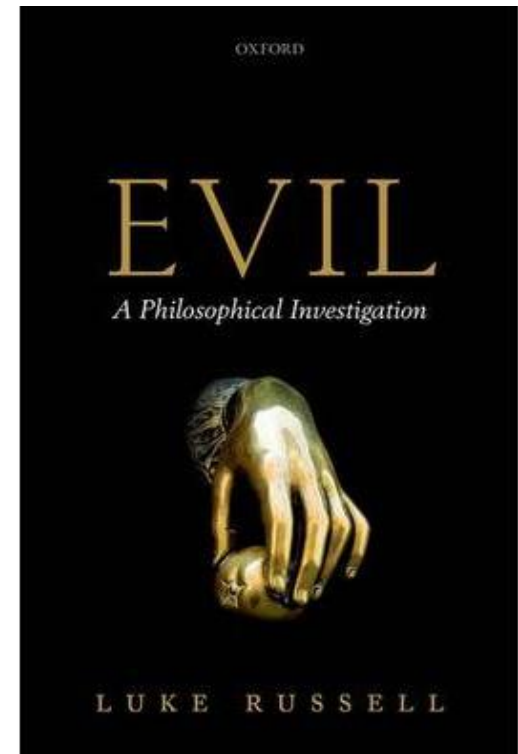
- One serious problem with frequent-evildoer accounts is that they cannot make sense of the fact that an evil person might only very rarely (if ever) do evil.
- For instance, an evil person might only very rarely do evil if he/she is too incompetent or cowardly to carry out his/her evil plans.



# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts.

## 3

- But since incompetence and cowardice do not make our characters any better, it seems that we can have the worst sort of character, i.e., an evil character, and yet very rarely, if ever, perform evil actions.
- In light of this and other problems for frequent evildoer accounts, Luke Russell has developed a dispositional account of evil character that is similar in many respects to frequent evildoer accounts, but which can make sense of the fact that some evil people do not do evil.



# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts.

## 4

- According to Russell, an evil person is someone who is strongly and fixedly disposed to perform evil actions when in autonomy favouring conditions.
- Someone is strongly disposed to do evil if he/she is very likely to do evil.
- Someone is fixedly disposed to do evil if this disposition is unlikely to change over time.
- Luke Russell, Associate Professor of Philosophy Sydney.



# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts.

## 5

- Someone is in autonomy favouring conditions when he/she is not deceived, threatened, coerced, or pressed to act in one way rather than another.
- On Russell's dispositional account, an evil person might never do evil because, although he/she is strongly and fixed disposed to do evil in autonomy favouring conditions, he/she might lack opportunities to perform evil actions or else autonomy favouring conditions might never obtain.





# Frequent Evildoer and Dispositional Accounts.

## 6

- While Russell clearly favours a dispositional account of evil character, he does not say that his dispositional account identifies necessary and sufficient conditions for evil personhood.
- Instead, he suggests that certain sorts of feelings might also be sufficient for being an evil person.



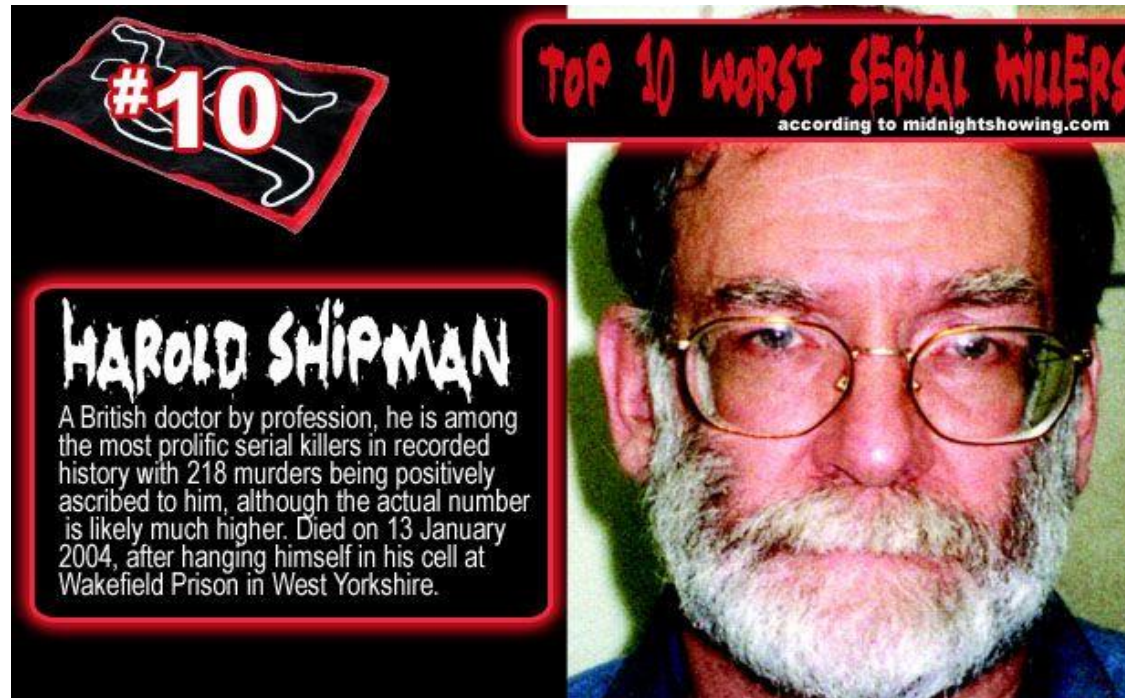
# Affect-Based Accounts. 1

- According to affect-based accounts, evil people have certain sorts of feelings or emotions.
- For instance, Colin McGinn argues that “an evil character is one that derives pleasure from pain and pain from pleasure”.
- There is some initial plausibility to this view since sadism and malicious envy are paradigms of evil.



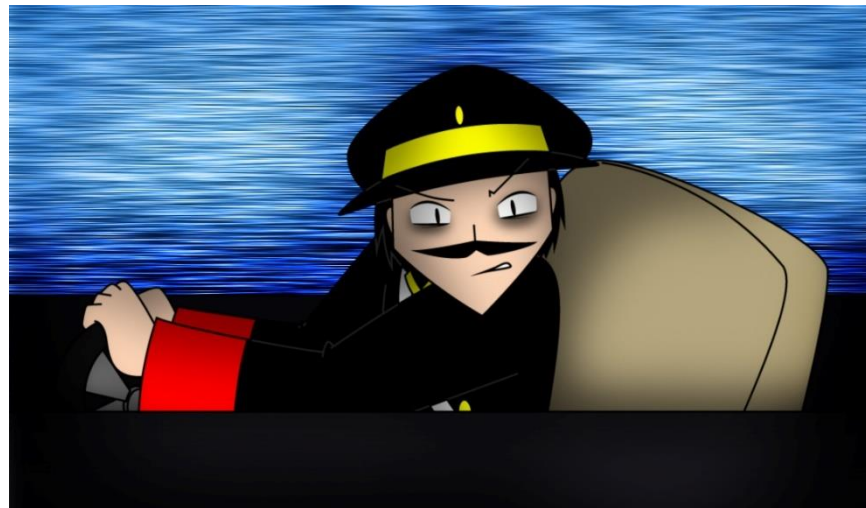
# Affect-Based Accounts. 2

- However, while it is undoubtedly true that some evil people are sadistic, there is reason to believe that feelings of pleasure in pain or pain in pleasure, or any other sorts of feelings, are neither necessary nor sufficient for evil character.



# Affect-Based Accounts. 3

- The problem with thinking that certain sorts of feelings are necessary for evil character is that an evil person might routinely cause serious harm to his/her victims without any accompanying feelings.
- For instance, someone who routinely runs down pedestrians out of indifference for their well-being, and without any accompanying feelings, seems to qualify as an evil person.





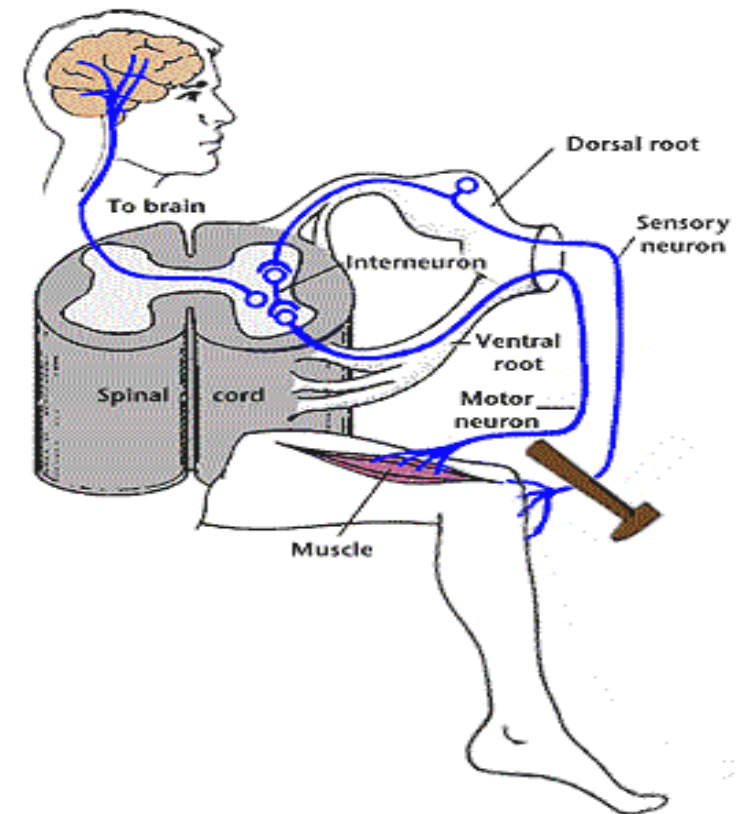
# Affect-Based Accounts. 4

- The problem with thinking that certain sorts of feelings, such as feelings of pleasure in another person's pain, are sufficient for evil character is that these sorts of feelings might be involuntary and not endorsed by the person who has them.
- For instance, John might be just so constituted to experience pleasure in the face of another person's pain.



# Affect-Based Accounts. 5

- If John does not desire to take pleasure in other people's pain, and is horrified by his sadistic feelings, it seems too harsh to call him evil.
- He should be pitied rather than condemned.
- Calling someone like John 'evil' would be like blaming someone for his/her patellar(knee) reflex.





# Motive-Based Accounts. 1

- According to motive-based accounts of evil character, to be an evil person is to be motivated in a certain sort of way.
- For instance, Todd Calder argues that to be an evil person it is sufficient to have a regular propensity for e-desires.
- Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Saint Mary's University Nova Scotia.



# Motive-Based Accounts. 2

- An e-desire is a motivational state that consists in a desire for what is correctly believed to be someone else's significant harm for an unworthy goal or for what would correctly be believed to be someone else's significant harm for an unworthy goal, in the absence of self-deception.

Bennett Chattanooga Times Free Press



'Don't listen to him... He's a socialist.'

©Clay Bennett.

# Motive-Based Accounts. 3

- According to Calder, significant harm is desired for an *unworthy goal* if a state of affairs consisting of the achievement of the goal together with the harm would be less valuable than if the goal was not achieved and the harm was avoided.



# Motive-Based Accounts. 4

- A problem for motive-based accounts is to explain why we should judge someone as evil based solely on her motives.
- In other words, why judge someone as the morally worst sort of person for having certain motives if these motives do not result in significant harm?
- Why not judge people as evil only if they actually cause significant harm?





# Motive-Based Accounts. 5

- One way to respond to this objection is to point out that even if e-desires do not result in significant harm on some particular occasion or for some particular person, e-desires do, for most people most of the time, lead to significant harm.



# Motive-Based Accounts. 6

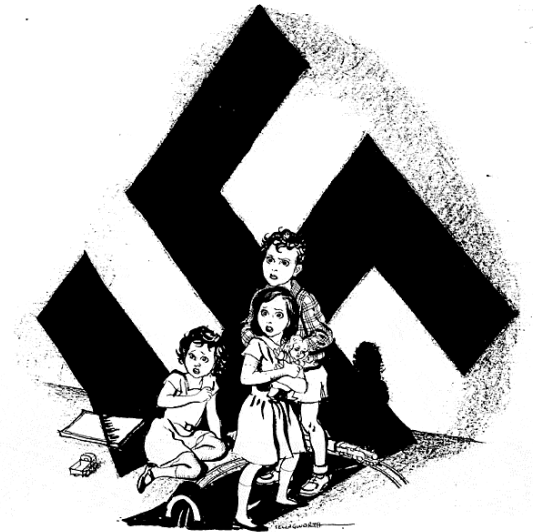
- A proponent of a purely motive-based account could insist that judgements of evil character look inward to an agent's psychology and not to the effects (or likely effects) of her actions.





# Motive-Based Accounts. 7

- However, if we insist that judgements of evil character look inward to an agent's psychology and not to the effects of her actions, why judge evil character solely on the basis of her motives?
- Why not take into account the agent's affective states as well?



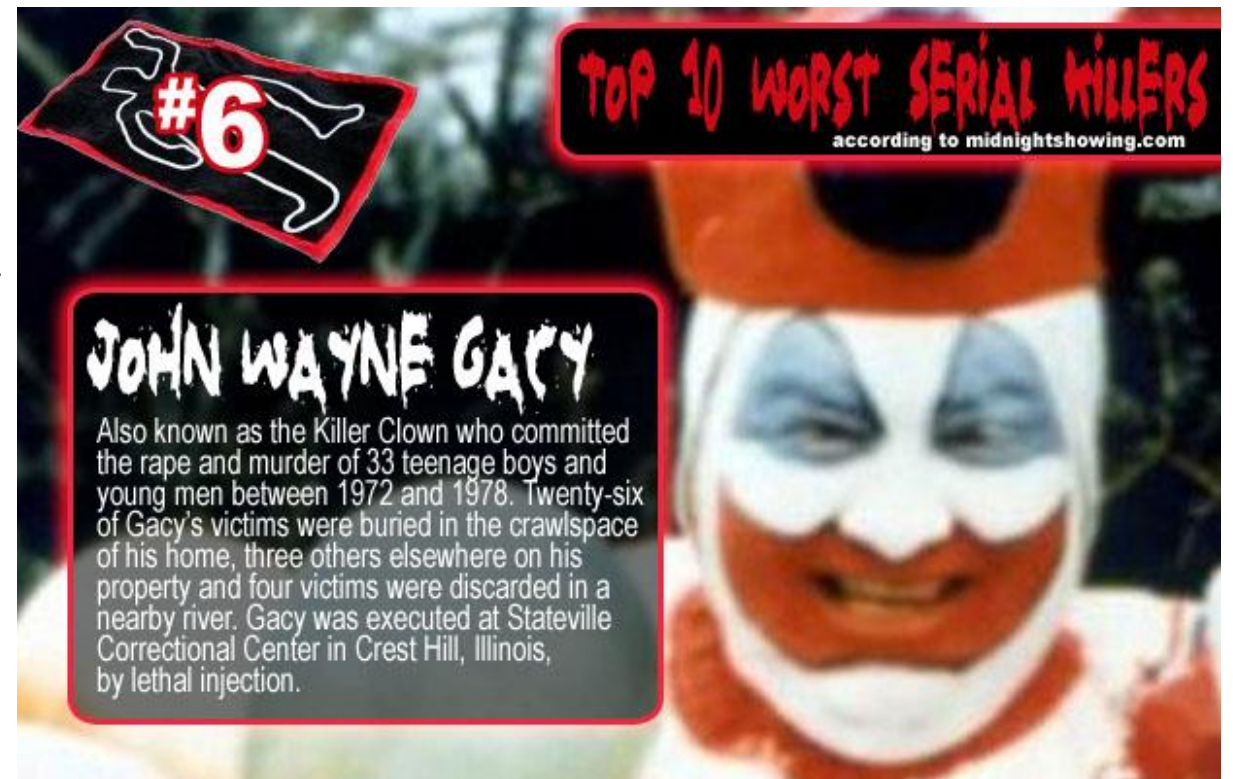
# Consistency Accounts. 1

- According to most, if not all, theories of evil character, to have an evil character it isn't sufficient to do evil, or have evil-making characteristics, only on occasion; it is necessary to have evil-making characteristics regularly, frequently, or repeatedly.
- Consistency accounts take this idea to the extreme: according to consistency accounts to be an evil person we must have evil-making characteristics consistently, or almost always.
- Self-proclaimed German vampire Manuela Ruda.



# Consistency Accounts. 2

- For instance, Daniel Haybron argues that it is necessary and sufficient for evil character to be utterly lacking in motives or sentiments of moral worth.
- For Haybron, evil people almost always lack empathy and concern for others, and they are in no way motivated to help others or to do what is morally right.



# Consistency Accounts. 3

- Critics of the consistency view argue that it is too restrictive.
- Imagine that Bob loves to torture children and does so frequently, but that Bob also displays genuine compassion for the elderly, perhaps by volunteering at a long-term care facility on a regular basis.
- On consistency accounts of evil character, Bob is not an evil person because he does not have evil-making characteristics consistently.



# Consistency Accounts. 4

- And yet most people would want to say that torturing children for fun on a regular basis is enough to make Bob an evil person.





# Extremity Accounts. 1

According to extremity accounts of evil character, evil characters have certain bad-making characteristics to an extreme degree.

For instance, Peter Brian Barry argues that evil people possess extremely vicious states of character in the following sense:

(1) evil people have the worst kinds of vices, such as cruelty and maliciousness rather than more benign forms of vice such as cowardice or laziness, and

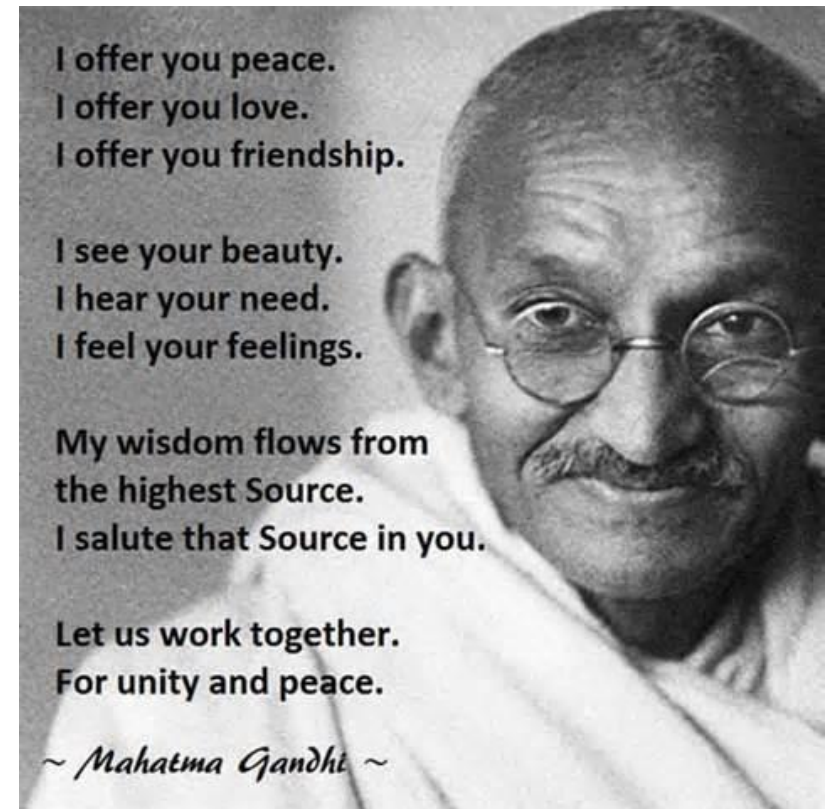
(2) evil people have these vices to an extreme degree.

Professor of Philosophy Saginaw Valley State University.



# Extremity Accounts. 2

- Barry believes that one virtue of his theory is that it makes sense of the mirror thesis: that evil people are the perverse mirror images of moral saints.
- According to Barry moral saints are the mirror images of evil people in the sense that they possess extremely virtuous states of character, i.e., the very best virtues, such as justice and compassion, to an extreme degree.



I offer you peace.  
I offer you love.  
I offer you friendship.

I see your beauty.  
I hear your need.  
I feel your feelings.

My wisdom flows from  
the highest Source.  
I salute that Source in you.

Let us work together.  
For unity and peace.

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

# Evil Institutions. 1

- While most theorists writing about evil focus on evil action and evil character, there has also been some discussion of evil institutions. When we speak of 'evil institutions' we might mean one of two things:
- (1) organizations that are evil or that perform evil actions, or
- (2) social practices that are evil, such as slavery and genocide.



# Evil Institutions. 2

According to Claudia Card, an institution, in sense (2), i.e., a social practice, is evil if it is reasonably foreseeable that intolerable harm will result from its normal or correct operation without justification or moral excuse.

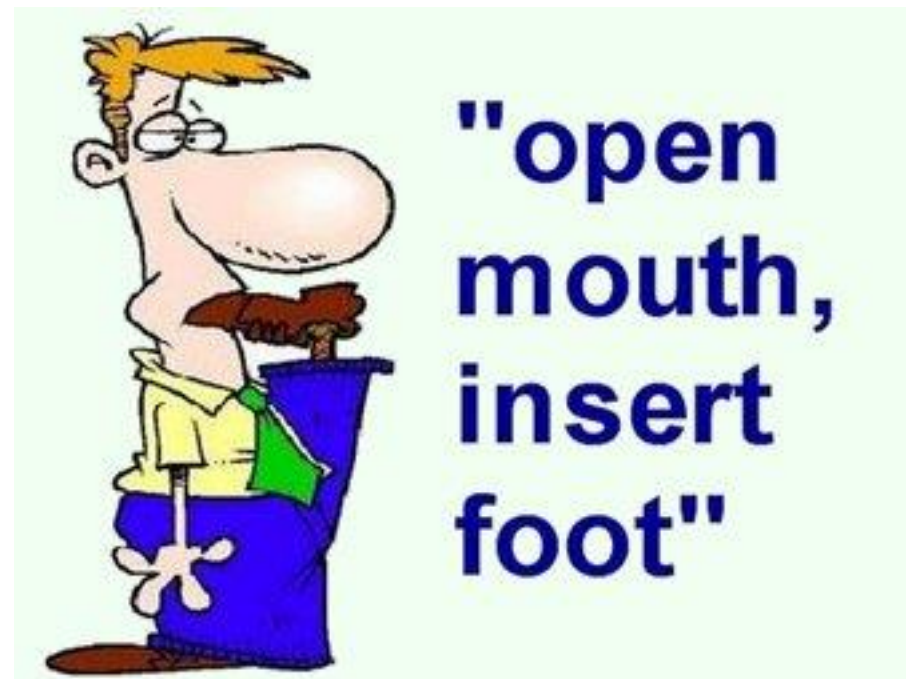
For instance, genocide is an evil institution since significant suffering and a loss of social vitality result from its normal and correct operation without moral justification.

An early genocide: Joshua entering Canaan.



# Evil Institutions. 3

- However, while Card's account of evil institutions correctly identifies genocide and other paradigmatically evil institutions as evil, her account also classifies as evil some institutions which are less obviously evil such as capital punishment, marriage, and motherhood.
- Her classification of marriage and motherhood as evil has been particularly controversial.

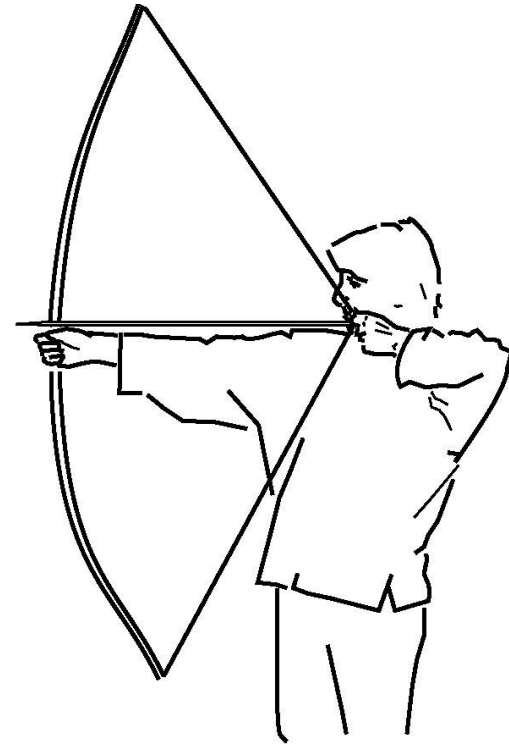




# Evil Institutions. 4

- According to Card, marriage and motherhood are evil institutions because it is reasonably foreseeable that their **normal, or correct, operation will lead to intolerable harm in the form of domestic abuse without justification or excuse.**

Drawing a long bow?



# Evil Institutions. 5

For instance, Card argues that the **normal, or correct, operation of marriage leads to spousal abuse** “because it provides incentives for partners to stay in broken relationships, places obstacles in the way of escaping from broken relationships, gives perpetrators of abuse virtually unlimited rights of access to their victims, and makes some forms of abuse difficult or impossible to detect or prove”.

I don't know what kind of mirror in which she viewed life.



# Evil Institutions. 6

- Card argues that there is no moral justification for the intolerable harm that results from the institution of marriage since nothing prevents us from abolishing marriage in favour of other less dangerous institutions.



# Evil Institutions. 7

- Critics argue that even if Card is correct that it is reasonably foreseeable that the institution of marriage will lead to intolerable harms, it is too heavy-handed to call marriage an evil institution.
- Comment: If motherhood is evil then Card was the fruit of evil.
- How did she overcome that?
- Maybe she was immaculately conceived like the mother of Jesus of Nazareth (according to the Roman Catholic Church).



# Evil Institutions. 8

- For instance, Todd Calder has argued that an institution should be considered evil only if intolerable harm is an essential component of the institution.
- Since suffering and a loss of social vitality are essential components of genocide, genocide is an evil institution.
- But since spousal abuse is not an essential component of marriage, marriage is not an evil institution.





# Divider slide.



*Vintage Joseph Scholz Paper Theater - Altered by EKDuncan - Presented by "My Fanciful Muse"*