

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

You said:
WHAT IS "EVIL"

ChatGPT said:

“Evil” is one of those words that feels obvious—until you try to define it.

At its simplest, evil refers to *serious moral wrongdoing*—actions, intentions, or systems that cause profound harm, injustice, or suffering, especially when done knowingly or deliberately.

But different traditions understand it differently.

1. Moral Evil (Human Action)

In ethics and philosophy, evil usually means intentional harm—cruelty, oppression, exploitation.

- In Augustine of Hippo’s view, evil isn’t a thing in itself but a *privation*—a lack or corruption of good.
- Immanuel Kant saw “radical evil” as the human tendency to put self-interest above moral law.
- Hannah Arendt, writing about totalitarianism, spoke of the “banality of evil”—ordinary people committing terrible acts not out of monstrous hatred but thoughtlessness and conformity.

Here evil is not mystical—it’s about choice, intention, responsibility.

2. Natural Evil (Suffering Without Human Cause)

Philosophers also distinguish “natural evil”: earthquakes, disease, and famine.

These cause suffering but aren’t the result of human intent.

This raises the classic “problem of evil” in theology—if a good and powerful God exists, why does suffering exist?

3. Religious Understandings

In many traditions, evil can be:

- A force or being opposed to good (e.g., Satan in Christianity),
- A distortion of divine order,
- Or, in some strands of thought, an illusion arising from ignorance.

4. Psychological View

Psychology tends to avoid the word “evil” and instead speaks of:

- Narcissism
- Psychopathy
- Dehumanization
- Trauma cycles

Here, what we call evil may be extreme empathy failure, moral disengagement, or radical self-centeredness.

5. A Working Definition

If we strip it down:

Evil is the deliberate or reckless destruction of what is valuable—life, dignity, trust, truth—especially when one knows better.

But even this raises questions:

- Is evil about intention or outcome?
- Can systems be evil?
- Is evil something “out there,” or something potential in all of us?

Since you’ve been asking big conceptual questions lately—meaning, individuality, curiosity—let me ask gently:

When you ask “*what is evil?*”