

THE DEFINITION OF EVIL

Ontological Absence, the Clinging Will, and the Contraction of the Mind onto the Finite

Christopher E. Etter

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Abstract

This treatise states and defends the definition of evil on which the perpendicular ontology of Kenotic Effluent Panapotheism rests. Evil is ontological absence — privation, the lack of the fullness of God's presence — and never a substance. This is not a softening of evil but the precondition of its being intelligible at all: a substantial evil would be either a second ultimate principle, restoring the dualism the system rejects, or a positive thing God created, making God the author of evil. Privation alone avoids both. The treatise then answers the standing objection to all privation theories — that mere absence cannot account for evil's devastating force — by locating evil's threat not in the absence itself, which is inert, but in a free mind or soul that moves toward and clings to the absence rather than to God. The absence becomes active evil only through the orientation of a will. Finally, it specifies what clinging concretely is: the contraction of the mind's attention and love onto a single finite abstraction, so that the fullness of God and of reality is eclipsed by fixation on a fleeting part. The drug addict running blindly at four in the morning to get high is the paradigm: his mind is privated not because something evil is present but because everything else has gone absent, his whole being collapsed onto one finite craved outcome. Evil so defined is dimensional collapse — the loss of the vertical orientation toward the ground, the foreshortening of the soul onto a single point in the lower register — and it is self-diminishing, since clinging to the absence deepens the absence. Catharturgy is the reversal: the reorientation of the contracted soul from the finite back toward the fullness.

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I. Why Evil Must Be Absence and Not Substance

The definition of evil on which this entire system rests can be stated in one sentence: evil is ontological absence — the privation or lack of the fullness of God's presence — and it is never a substance. Everything in the perpendicular ontology depends on this, and it is therefore worth establishing first why the definition must take this form, before showing what it means and how it answers the objections it faces.

The argument for it is an argument by elimination, and it is decisive. Evil is real — no honest account denies this — and so the question is what kind of reality it has. If evil is a substance, a positive thing with being of its own, then one of two consequences follows, and both are fatal to a coherent theism. Either that substance is uncreated and ultimate, an independent principle of evil standing over against the good — and then we have the dualism of two co-equal ultimates, the Manichaean settlement, which the system rejects root and branch, since on the governing axiom nothing can stand alongside God as an independent ultimate. Or that substance is created, a positive thing God made — and then God is the author of evil, the maker of a thing whose nature is evil, which is incompatible with the goodness of the source from which all things are poured forth. A substantial evil makes God either not ultimate or not good. There is no third option for a substance.

Privation escapes both horns at once. If evil is not a thing but the absence of a thing — not a substance but the lack of the fullness that should be present — then it requires no independent principle, because an absence is not an ultimate; and it requires no divine authorship, because God does not create absences. God pours forth being, fullness, presence; evil is where that fullness is lacking, and a lack is not among the things poured forth. This is the ancient insight of Augustine and the privation tradition, that evil is *privatio boni*, the privation of the good, having no positive nature of its own. The system adopts it not as a borrowed doctrine but as the only definition compatible with its own foundations: a kenotic-effluent panapotheism, on which all things are the outpoured fullness of God, can give evil no positive being without either doubling God or implicating God in evil's authorship. Evil must be absence, because everything that has substance is the outpouring of God, and the outpouring of God is not evil.

A substantial evil is either a second god or a thing God made evil — the first destroys God's ultimacy, the second God's goodness. Privation escapes both: an absence needs no independent principle and no divine author. Evil must be absence, because all that has substance is the outpoured fullness of God, and that fullness is not evil. This is not the softening of evil. It is the only definition under which evil and a good God can both be real.

II. The Reality of Absence: Privation Is Not Nothing

The first objection to any privation theory is that it appears to make evil unreal — that to call evil a mere absence is to explain it away, to deny the manifest and terrible reality of what evil does. This objection rests on a confusion between two senses of absence, and clearing the confusion shows

that privation is fully real without being substantial.

An absence is not the same as a nothing. A nothing is the absence of everything, indifferently; a privation is the absence of something specific that ought to be present — and that determinate lack is entirely real. Cold is the absence of heat, possessing no positive thermal substance of its own; yet cold is real, and cold can kill. Blindness is the absence of sight, no positive thing; yet blindness is real and changes everything for the one who suffers it. A hole is the absence of material in a determinate place; yet one can fall into a hole and die. In each case the reality is the reality of a determinate lack — a lack of just this thing, just here — and such lacks are among the most consequential realities there are. Privation is real precisely as the absence of what should be present, and it is no less real, and often far more devastating, for having no substance of its own.

Evil as the privation of God's fullness is real in exactly this way. It is the determinate absence of the presence, the goodness, the being that ought to fill the soul and the world — a lack of just this, the fullness, just here, in this soul. That this lack has no positive substance does not make it unreal any more than cold or blindness is unreal. It makes it the kind of reality an absence is: real as lack, devastating as deprivation, requiring no substance to do its terrible work. The cosmos itself displays this at the largest scale. The universe is the divine energy poured forth, expanding and cooling toward emptiness; the expansion into the void, the cooling, the drift toward the maximal absence of heat-death, is the cosmic form of privation — real, measurable, the very engine of the universe's differentiation, and yet not a substance but a spreading-toward-absence. Privation is woven into the structure of creation as the frontier the outpoured fullness expands toward, and it is as real as the expansion itself.

III. The Threat Is in the Clinging, Not the Absence

The deeper objection to the privation theory is not that absence is unreal but that absence is inert — that a mere lack, however real, cannot account for the active, aggressive, devastating force of evil as it is actually encountered. Evil does not merely fail to be present; it seems to move, to pursue, to destroy. A theory that makes evil a passive absence appears unable to explain its terrible energy. This is the strongest objection privation theory faces, and the system's answer to it is the heart of this treatise.

The answer is that the threat of evil is not in the absence itself, which is indeed inert, but in a free mind or soul that moves toward and clings to the absence rather than to God. The void cannot hurt anyone; emptiness has no force; privation as such is passive. What converts inert absence into active, threatening evil is the orientation of a will — a free being that turns toward the absence, moves into it, and clings there rather than turning toward the fullness. The energy that evil seems to have is not the energy of the absence; it is the energy of the soul, real positive energy poured forth from God, now directed toward the privative rather than the full. Evil's force is borrowed force — the misdirected energy of a good being oriented toward a lack.

This locates evil's menace exactly where the moral life knows it to be: not in things, but in the direction of wills. It also completes the privation theory against its strongest objection, because it

grants the objection its truth — that absence alone cannot account for evil's force — while denying its conclusion. Absence alone cannot; absence clung to by a free soul can, because the force is the soul's own, turned the wrong way. The terrible energy of evil is the energy of love and will and attention, all of them good and all of them poured forth from God, fastened upon a privation. Nothing evil need be added to the world to account for evil's force; it is enough that the good energy of a free being be oriented toward the absence and cling there. This is why evil requires freedom to exist as a threat at all: the void is harmless until a free being loves it.

The void cannot hurt anyone. Emptiness has no force. What makes evil terrible is not the absence but a free soul that moves toward and clings to the absence rather than to God — and the energy it then seems to wield is not the absence's but the soul's own, real and good and poured forth from God, fastened upon a lack and turned the wrong way. Evil's force is borrowed force: the misdirected energy of a good being clinging to an absence.

IV. What Clinging Is: The Contraction of the Mind onto the Finite

It remains to say concretely what clinging to the absence is, for it is not an abstract metaphysical posture but a recognisable condition of mind, and naming it precisely is what makes the whole account livable rather than merely formal. Clinging to the absence is the contraction of the mind's attention and love onto a single finite abstraction, so that the fullness of God and of reality is eclipsed by fixation on a fleeting part.

Consider the drug addict running blindly through the streets at four in the morning to get high. His mind is privated, and the privation is exact: his entire being has collapsed onto one finite, fleeting outcome — the next high — and the whole fullness of God, and of everything else that is real and good and present, has dropped out of view. Nothing evil is present to him; there is no substance of evil in the street or in the drug. What has happened is that everything else has gone absent, because his mind has clamped onto one thing. The privation is not that a dark thing has arrived but that the fullness has been eclipsed — narrowed away, foreshortened to a single craved point. This is what clinging to the absence concretely is: not the embrace of a positive evil but the contraction of the soul's focus onto a finite abstraction at the expense of the fullness, the eclipse of the infinite by fixation on a part.

This contraction is, in the system's terms, a dimensional collapse. The fullness of God is apprehended along the ontological axis, the vertical of depth and orientation toward the ground; the finite fixation is a collapse onto a single point in the lower register, the loss of the vertical dimension of depth, everything foreshortened onto one horizontal craved object. The addict has not gained an evil; he has lost a dimension — the depth along which the fullness is seen. His world has gone flat, contracted to the plane of the single outcome. This is why evil is correctly called a privation even in its most active and consuming forms: the most violent fixation is still, structurally, a loss — the narrowing-away of everything but the craved point, the collapse of the soul's dimensionality onto a finite abstraction.

And it is why evil is self-diminishing, why it spirals rather than rests. The more the soul clings to

the finite outcome, the more privated it becomes, because the clinging is itself the narrowing, and the narrowing reinforces itself: each return to the fixation contracts the field further, eclipses more of the fullness, leaves less of the soul oriented toward the ground. The addiction spiral is the clearest instance, but the structure is general. This is the intrinsic logic of what the tradition called damnation, stated in privative terms: not a punishment added from outside but the self-reinforcing contraction of a soul that clings to an absence, narrowing endlessly toward the finite point it has chosen over the fullness, until little remains oriented toward the ground at all. Evil does not need to be fed from outside; clinging to the absence deepens the absence, and the soul that loves a privation is consumed by the very narrowing it chose.

The addict at four in the morning is not in the presence of evil; he is in the absence of everything but one finite craved point. His mind has not gained a darkness; it has lost a dimension — the vertical depth along which the fullness is seen. Clinging to the absence is the contraction of the soul onto the finite, the eclipse of the infinite by fixation on a part — and it is self-diminishing, because the clinging is the narrowing, and the narrowing deepens the absence it clings to.

V. The Map of Evil Across the System

This definition is not an isolated doctrine but the principle that organises the system's entire account of disorder, and seeing it instantiated across the architecture confirms its reach. The Qliphoth, the husks or shells that are the privations of the Sephiroth and the paths, are precisely this: each is the function of a hub or a connection narrowed to a fixation, the full intelligence collapsed onto a privative loop. The pathologies the system maps — the compulsion that circles one impulse, the shame that fixes the whole self under one verdict, the catastrophic image that eclipses every other possibility, the addiction that collapses the world onto one outcome — are each the contraction of a mind onto a finite abstraction at the expense of the fullness, the same structure in different registers. The Qliphoth of the paths is, read this way, a systematic atlas of the forms that clinging-to-absence takes across the architecture of the soul.

The definition also locates evil correctly with respect to perpendicular freedom. Evil as a threat requires a free being able to orient along the ontological axis — to turn toward the ground or away from it toward the finite — because only such a being can convert inert privation into active evil by clinging to it. Moral evil is therefore structurally downstream of the perpendicular freedom that the system's biological papers trace to the cephalised, bilaterally integrated consciousness; the capacity to fall and the capacity to return are the same capacity, the freedom to orient toward or away from the fullness. The system that can cling to the absence is the same system that can turn back toward the ground — which is why the very structure that makes evil possible is the structure that makes catharturgy possible.

And so the definition issues directly in the cathartic answer, completing the arc. If evil is the contraction of the soul onto the finite, the eclipse of the fullness by fixation on a part, then the active work of purification is the reversal of that contraction — the reorientation of the soul from the finite point back toward the fullness, the recovery of the vertical dimension of depth that the fixation had foreshortened, the turning of the will from the absence it clung to toward the

presence it had eclipsed. Catharturgy is the un-narrowing of the soul: the restoration of the dimensionality that clinging collapsed, the widening of the contracted field back toward the fullness of God. Where the cosmos expands toward the void and the fixated soul contracts toward the finite, the cathartic soul moves the other way — back toward presence, against the drift toward absence. The definition of evil and the definition of the work are one: evil is the contraction onto the finite at the expense of the fullness, and catharturgy is the return to the fullness from the finite.

VI. Dualism as the Confusion of the Axes

There remains a final clarification, and it is the one that most sharply distinguishes this definition of evil from its great rival. The rival is dualism — the doctrine that good and evil are two co-equal, co-eternal principles, two powers contending on a single field, a god of light and a god of darkness, as in Manichaeism and the Zoroastrian opposition of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, and as in the softened modern form of the symmetric Luciferic and Ahrimanic forces flanking a balancing centre. The present system holds that dualism is not, at bottom, a different theory of evil but a structural error: the confusion of the two perpendicular axes, applied to the moral question.

The distinction is this. The ontological axis is vertical and asymmetric — the relationship of degree of being, of fullness and its privation, where the lesser term is a diminution of the greater and never its co-equal. The existential axis is lateral and symmetric — the relationship of complementary poles, like the light and dark of Yin and Yang, which are co-equal, co-real, and mutually necessary, neither a privation of the other. Evil, as this treatise has defined it, is privation: a diminution of being, the contraction of a function onto finite fixation, a lack. As privation it belongs to the ontological axis, and it belongs there asymmetrically — parasitic upon the fullness it lacks, dependent on the good as an image is dependent on its exemplar, with no co-equal standing whatever. Evil is less being, not other being; it is the good's diminution, not a second principle beside it.

The dualist makes the axis-confusion in its gravest form. Perceiving correctly that a duality is involved in good and evil, he miscasts it: he takes the asymmetric ontological relation of the good and its privation and reads it as a symmetric existential polarity, two co-equal poles like Yang and Yin. Evil thereby becomes a second principle, co-eternal with the good, a dark power balancing a power of light. But this is to promote a privation to a principle simply by moving it to the wrong axis — to mistake a vertical asymmetry for a lateral symmetry. There is no symmetry between the good and evil, because evil is not a pole opposite the good but a diminution of it; the two are not co-equal complements but fullness and lack. To set them as symmetric poles is the same error that miscolors the Tree and misorders the elements, now committed at the gravest point: it places on the lateral axis of co-equal polarity what belongs on the vertical axis of being and its privation.

This is why the privation theory and the perpendicular distinction of the axes are one teaching, and the vigilance runs in both directions. To hold that evil is privation is to keep it on the asymmetric ontological axis, where it can never be a co-equal principle; and to keep the axes

distinct is to refuse the dualist's relocation of evil to the symmetric existential axis, where it would become a pole and a power. The same vigilance, turned the other way, protects the existential polarity itself: because the dark, the receptive, the Yin pole is an existential complement and not an ontological privation, it must never be miscast as evil — the dark pole is good, and only the confusion that drags it onto the vertical axis makes the darkness seem a lack. One distinction does both works: it keeps evil from being promoted to a co-equal power, and the good dark pole from being demoted to an evil. The full argument is given in the foundational treatise on the conflation of the existential and the ontological; here it suffices that evil, being privation, is ontological and asymmetric, and that dualism is the error of mistaking it for an existential and symmetric pole.

VII. Conclusion

Evil is ontological absence — privation, the lack of the fullness of God's presence — and never a substance, because a substantial evil would be either a second ultimate or a thing God made evil, and both are impossible. This is not the diminishment of evil but the condition of its being real alongside a good and ultimate God. The absence is fully real, real as cold and blindness and the cosmic void are real, real as the determinate lack of what should be present. But the absence is inert; its threat arises only in a free mind or soul that moves toward and clings to it rather than to God, and the force such evil seems to wield is the soul's own good energy, poured forth from God and fastened upon a lack. Clinging concretely is the contraction of the mind onto a finite abstraction, the eclipse of the fullness by fixation on a fleeting part — the addict collapsed onto the next high, the world gone flat, a dimension lost — and it is self-diminishing, since the clinging is the narrowing and the narrowing deepens the absence.

The whole of it holds together as a single structure. A substance-free evil, real as privation, threatening only through the clinging will, taking the concrete form of contraction onto the finite, mapped across the soul as the Qliphoth, made possible by the same perpendicular freedom that makes return possible, and answered by the cathartic reversal that widens the contracted soul back toward the fullness. Evil is the soul's contraction toward the absence; catharturgy is its expansion back toward the presence; and the freedom to do either is the dignity and the danger of a being poured forth from God and able to orient toward the fullness from which it came or away from it toward the finite point it might cling to instead. The definition of evil is, in the end, the definition of the wrong direction along the one axis that matters — and the work of purification is the turning back.

Evil is ontological absence, real as privation, never as substance — inert in itself, terrible only in the soul that clings to it, concrete as the contraction of the mind onto the finite at the expense of the fullness. The addict collapsed onto the next high has gained no darkness; he has lost the dimension along which the fullness is seen. Catharturgy is the un-narrowing: the turning of the soul from the finite point it clung to back toward the presence it had eclipsed. Evil is the wrong direction along the axis that matters; the work of purification is the turning back.

References and Related Papers

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