



# Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics)

*By Susan Neiman*

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## **Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics) By Susan Neiman**

Evil threatens human reason, for it challenges our hope that the world makes sense. For eighteenth-century Europeans, the Lisbon earthquake was manifest evil. Today we view evil as a matter of human cruelty, and Auschwitz as its extreme incarnation. Examining our understanding of evil from the Inquisition to contemporary terrorism, Susan Neiman explores who we have become in the three centuries that separate us from the early Enlightenment. In the process, she rewrites the history of modern thought and points philosophy back to the questions that originally animated it.

Whether expressed in theological or secular terms, evil poses a problem about the world's intelligibility. It confronts philosophy with fundamental questions: Can there be meaning in a world where innocents suffer? Can belief in divine power or human progress survive a cataloging of evil? Is evil profound or banal? Neiman argues that these questions impelled modern philosophy. Traditional philosophers from Leibniz to Hegel sought to defend the Creator of a world containing evil. Inevitably, their efforts--combined with those of more literary figures like Pope, Voltaire, and the Marquis de Sade--eroded belief in God's benevolence, power, and relevance, until Nietzsche claimed He had been murdered. They also yielded the distinction between natural and moral evil that we now take for granted. Neiman turns to consider philosophy's response to the Holocaust as a final moral evil, concluding that two basic stances run through modern thought. One, from Rousseau to Arendt, insists that morality demands we make evil intelligible. The other, from Voltaire to Adorno, insists that morality demands that we don't.

Beautifully written and thoroughly engaging, this book tells the history of modern philosophy as an attempt to come to terms with evil. It reintroduces philosophy to anyone interested in questions of life and death, good and evil, suffering and sense. Featuring a substantial new afterword by Neiman that raises provocative questions about Hannah Arendt's take on Adolf Eichmann and the rationale behind the Hiroshima bombing, this Princeton Classics edition introduces a new generation of readers to this eloquent and thought-provoking meditation on good and evil, life and death, and suffering and sense.

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**Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The word "evil" gets thrown around pretty frequently, especially in connection with certain Axes, but Einstein Forum director and former philosophy professor Susan Neiman reminds us that the existence of evil is a theological and intellectual dilemma through modern Western intellectual history in fact, she argues in her erudite and accessible *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, the question of evil is at the heart of modern philosophy. Neiman looks at how philosophers and writers Leibniz and Arendt, Pope and Sade have sought to explain evil, and traces two divergent strains of thought: one that insists we must try to understand moral evil, and another that maintains we must not.

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From Library Journal

The current director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, Neiman (*The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant*) examines the problem of evil, which she posits as central to philosophy since the 17th century. Philosophy is driven by the need to make sense of a world riddled with natural and moral evil and by our failures to do so. Leibniz (who thought this must be the best of all possible worlds) and Hegel (who thought reality must ultimately prove to be rational) are keys to her story, but Kant's effort to show that our best insights into reality stem from moral sensibilities, and Nietzsche, on the other side, who regarded most attempts to find a meaningful transcendent as moral cowardice, play large roles. Neiman begins with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, perceived at the time as a manifestation of evil, but science and technology are (slowly) teaching us how to deal with such natural calamities. Moral evil, on the other hand, has not elicited as effective a response. Neiman is sympathetic to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and attentive to Emmanuel Levinas, who insisted that we must recover the transcendent or lose our rationality. Oddly, she ignores 20th-century attempts (by Samuel Alexander, Alfred North Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin, etc.) to bring logic to bear on the subject. Still, this is a deeply moving and scholarly book that will interest many general readers.

Leslie Armour, Univ. of Ottawa

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Review

**Winner of the 2002 Award for Best Professional/Scholarly Book in Philosophy, Association of American Publishers**

**Winner of the 2003 Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion, American Academy of Religion**  
**One of *Choice's* Outstanding Academic Titles for 2003**

"Evil has become the subject of one book after another, but [this] is one book unlike any other--by a philosopher unlike any other."--**Bill Moyers, *NOW***

"Scintillating-- a very rare thing in a philosopher."--**Jonathan Ree, *Times Literary Supplement***

"Provocative and profound."--**Damon Linker, *The Wall Street Journal***

"The American philosopher Susan Neiman has written the book for this world-political hour."--***Neue Züricher Zeitung***

"A brilliant new book. . . . No summary can convey the intellectual firepower of Neiman's book. Within her

field of interest, she seems not only to have read everything but to have understood it at the deepest level."--  
**William C. Placher, *Christian Century***

"Eloquent... [Neiman argues that] evil is not just an ethical violation, it disrupts and challenges our interpretation of the world."--**Edward Rothstein, *The New York Times***

"Neiman follows the argument like a sleuth, and, indeed, her book is a kind of thriller: What is it that menaces us? Will we find what evil is? And how may we escape it? The path leads from a God found absent past a Nature that's indifferent till it fetches up at the house of a man himself. . . . Neiman leads the reader through a careful analysis of the relation of intention, act, and consequence to kinds of useful knowledge and degrees of awareness."--**William H. Gass, *Harper's Magazine***

"This great work....looks into these abysses with astonishing fearlessness."--***Die Zeit***

"An erudite and compelling intellectual treatise that is profoundly interesting, often witty, and constructed without resorting to jargon or obfuscation. . . . In reorienting the history of philosophy, she has made it come alive. . . . This is a fine, even elegant book."--***Choice***

"This is an accessible work of philosophy in the best sense, sharply focused on matters of vital human concern and free of the domain tics that mar even allegedly popular works by Anglo-American philosophers."--**Mark Lilla, *The New York Review of Books***

"Clear, elegant and inviting...suddenly, (philosophy) is again a matter of life and death."--***Die Welt***

"We badly need alternative histories of philosophy. The story told (by me, among others) cries out for supplementation. . . . Neiman's snazzy prose makes this book a pleasure to read, as well as an immensely welcome change from the sort of history of philosophy to which we have become accustomed."--**Richard Rorty, *Common Knowledge***

"A deeply moving and scholarly book that will interest many general readers."--***Library Journal***

"Neiman's book is a welcome contribution to a philosophical conversation too long neglected."--**Barry Allen, *Toronto Globe and Mail***

"Neiman argues that when we ask why the world is the way it is, rather than the way it ought to be, that's the same as thinking about evil. . . . If there is only a single standard of good behavior, then no matter how honestly we believe in our causes--in democracy, for instance, as opposed to tyranny or religious totalitarianism--we are never allowed to stop worrying about our own morality when we march forth to defend them."--**Judith Shulevitz, *New York Times Book Review***

"Neiman argues that, confronted with the enormity of the Holocaust, 20th-century thinkers found new grounds to conclude that what we call evil reflects nothing so much as the unintelligibility of the world. . . . [Her] conclusion is that we should neither abandon reason nor demand the impossible from it but rather rely on it as much as we can to identify the forms of suffering and acts of cruelty that we have the power to prevent, remedy or diminish."--**Peter Berkowitz, *Washington Post Book World***

"Superb... Neiman's claim to have written an alternative history is not an empty boast."--***First Things***

"Neiman's audacity and occasionally morbid wit are a welcome addition to contemporary philosophy. If

there is any hope after Auschwitz, we may find it in the fact that human minds will not stop trying to make some kind of meaning out of it."--**Alan Wolfe, *Books & Culture***

"Neiman's narrative . . . sheds light not just on the writings of particular thinkers, but also on their relation to one another. And it helps us begin to understand certain facts about the modern period that current philosophers find baffling."--**Thomas Hibbs, *The Weekly Standard***

"Neiman's book is written with considerable flair, as many critics have already noted, but it possesses a far rarer and more valuable quality: moral seriousness. Her argument builds a powerful emotional force, a sense of deep inevitability. . . . It is not often that a work of such dark conclusions has felt so hopeful and brave."--**Mark Kingwell, *Wilson Quarterly***

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Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each guide has different aim or even goal; it means that publication has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time for you to read a book. They can be reading whatever they get because their hobby is actually reading a book. What about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book when they found difficult problem as well as exercise. Well, probably you will want this Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics).

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#### **Alice Ybarra:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent they free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent the whole day to reading a e-book. The book Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics) it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book offers high quality.

**Sarah Winship:**

This Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics) is new way for you who has intense curiosity to look for some information since it relief your hunger associated with. Getting deeper you upon it getting knowledge more you know or you who still having tiny amount of digest in reading this Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (Princeton Classics) can be the light food for you personally because the information inside this book is easy to get by means of anyone. These books develop itself in the form that is certainly reachable by anyone, yes I mean in the e-book type. People who think that in book form make them feel tired even dizzy this publication is the answer. So there isn't any in reading a book especially this one. You can find what you are looking for. It should be here for anyone. So , don't miss the idea! Just read this e-book sort for your better life along with knowledge.

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