

## **The Difference Between Good and Evil and Their Being Absolute or Relative**

### **The Difference Between Good and Evil and the Roots of These Concepts in Life**

Imagine you find a wallet. Do you return it to its owner, or do you seize the opportunity and keep it for yourself? This example reflects the internal struggle between two fundamental forces within us: good and evil. Every person has a drive to do good and a motivation to succumb to evil. This is the internal struggle that flows through our thoughts and feelings and influences our decisions and choices. Our lives are full of such confrontations. In other words, good and evil are always present on our life's path, and the choice between them, directly or indirectly, shapes our destiny. But what is the difference between good and evil? What exactly do we call good, and what do we call evil? And more importantly, what criteria do we use to recognize and define the boundaries of these forces?

Good and evil are two fundamental and decisive forces in our lives. Beyond the outward actions and behaviors, they are rooted in the intentions, motives, and inner values of each individual. Good guides us toward moral growth and excellence and is deeply connected to noble human goals and the meaning of our creation. In contrast, evil is a deviation from the path of perfection and the true self, leading to ruin and downfall.

This article aims to explore the difference between good and evil by examining the various aspects of these concepts and invites the reader to reflect on their own actions and choices. This is because making a conscious decision between these

forces not only shapes the path of an individual's life and the ethical foundations of society but is also a condition for eternal bliss and the fulfillment of the purpose of creation.

## **Definition of Good and Evil**

To explain the difference between good and evil, we first need to define these concepts. Good and evil are concepts that have always been present throughout human thought and conscience. From ancient myths and stories to complex philosophies and the world's major religions, humanity has constantly tried to understand these concepts and distinguish between them in daily life. But what truly are good and evil? What is the difference between them, and how can we tell them apart?

## **What Is Good?**

Good represents anything that leads a person toward human perfection, bliss, and truth. In other words, good is closely linked to the hallmarks of human growth and bliss, such as happiness, peace, and love. For example, imagine you see someone in need of help on your way home. If you help them out of compassion, this act reflects the attribute of “The Most Merciful” (*Ar-Rahman*) of God, which you try to cultivate and strengthen within yourself. Therefore, your good deed is not merely a response to a social need but also a step toward acquiring a divine name and spiritual growth. In such moments, you experience a form of human perfection, even if briefly.

## **Good in Philosophy**

From a philosophical perspective, thinkers like Plato and Aristotle considered good to be absolute and universal. Plato believed that good, like the sun, is the source of light and truth, and that whatever is closer to truth is inherently better. On the other hand, Aristotle believed that the achievement of bliss (eudaimonia) is the ultimate goal of humans, and that good deeds are the means for attaining this state of flourishing.

## **What Is Evil?**

The difference between good and evil becomes clear here, as evil is exactly opposite to good. It means moving away from truth and human virtues. Evil usually refers to an action that distances us from bliss and flourishing, leading instead to individual ruin or social harm in this world and the hereafter. Importantly, evil is often not obvious, but rather deceptive and hidden. It may seem attractive or profitable at first but is ultimately destructive. Consider the example of taking the lost wallet. At first glance, this simple choice might be tempting. You might think it will give you more money and make your life easier. But the truth is such an act not only wounds your conscience and weakens social trust, but also brings consequences like guilt and a distancing from human values. Evil is like a slippery slope that gradually pulls us into deeper darkness and ruin.

## **Evil in Philosophy**

Some philosophers, such as Augustine, define evil as the “absence of good,” viewing evil not as an independent force, but as the absence of light and truth. According to him, evil emerges when humans use their free will to turn away from good and pursue base desires.

## **Good and Evil: A Choice Beyond Mere Right and Wrong in Daily Life**

The difference between good and evil is much deeper than just good versus bad. Good is like a light guiding us toward brightness, truth, and human growth. An example is helping someone in need, which gives our deeds human meaning and strengthens the ethical foundations of society. Evil, on the other hand, is like a heavy shadow with deceptive allure. Taking a lost wallet might bring temporary pleasure at first, but in the long term, it will lead to ethical decay, feelings of guilt, and negative social consequences.

A remarkable characteristic of good and evil is that their impact is not limited to the moment of choice; rather, their consequences can transform our lives in the long term. Good deeds bring humans closer to human values. In contrast, evil, though it may initially appear powerful, ultimately leads to decay, despair, and ruin. These very consequences show that good and evil are not only different in their outcomes; they are also entirely opposite in their origin, nature, and their individual and social effects.

Focusing only on good and individual/social excellence is only one side of the coin. To fully understand the importance of ethics, one must also see its dark half: the

destructive effects of evil. Administrative corruption, class disparity, and social discrimination are all products of unethical choices. These phenomena not only destroy individual lives but also undermine social cohesion and trust. Examining these tangible consequences of evil deepens our understanding of the necessity to adhere to ethical principles.

### **The Absolute or Relative Nature of Good and Evil in Three Dimensions**

A key debate in understanding good and evil is whether these concepts are absolute or relative. This discussion determines the framework and basis for discussing the difference between good and evil. In other words, if the standards are absolute, then the differences are fixed. However, if the standards are relative, the distinction between good and evil can also change. Many believe that good and evil are relative and depend on the circumstances. For example, for a hunter seeking food in the wild, killing an animal might be considered good, while for someone hunting for sport, it might be evil. This makes the boundaries between good and evil seem blurry. However, deeper criteria, such as ethical-human principles and long-term consequences, can help clarify these boundaries.

### **The Individual Aspects of Good and Evil**

On a personal level, good and evil are shaped by personal conscience, upbringing, and experience. Each person, based on their inner values and beliefs, considers certain behaviors to be good or evil. For example, someone who respects others or tells the truth often sees these behaviors as good, based on their own principles

and conscience. Conversely, violating these principles often leads to remorse and feelings of guilt.

### **The Social Aspect of Good and Evil**

In society, norms, values, and laws define the boundaries of good and evil. What is considered good in one culture may be insignificant or even frowned upon in another. For example, eating with one's hands is a sign of respect in some cultures, while in others it may be considered impolite. These differences show that societies' perceptions of right and wrong are not always the same, and communities reinforce these concepts through encouragement or punishment. Social legislation plays a fundamental role in determining what constitutes good and bad.

### **Philosophical and Religious Perspectives on Good and Evil**

The philosophical view of good and evil goes beyond personal and social experience, seeking to uncover the nature and origin of these concepts. Philosophers approach these categories with analytical frameworks. For example, Immanuel Kant believed that the criterion for morality is duty, and that the value of an ethical act depends on the intention behind it, not its external consequences. In contrast, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill defended a consequentialist viewpoint, arguing that the good or evil must be judged by their results for the greatest number of people. Nietzsche, however, held a critical and meta-ethical perspective, challenging traditional values and promoting self-creation of value.

In Islamic thought, the difference between good and evil is not limited to custom or personal experience but is based on the guidance of the intellect and divine revelation. Islam emphasizes that the intellect is human's inner proof (*hujjah*) and reflection on consequences helps us distinguish right from wrong. At the same time, revelatory teachings, namely, the Holy Quran and the practice (*Sunnah*) of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family) provide clearer guidelines for ethical behavior. Certain ethical principles, such as justice, trustworthiness, truthfulness, and benevolence, are considered absolute and timeless values. God commands justice and kindness in the Holy Quran [1], and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family) urged empathy and compassion toward others [2]. From this perspective, in Islam, ethical standards such as justice and trustworthiness are absolute, even if their practical manifestations may vary across different societies. In reality, while examples of good and evil may change over time or across cultures, for instance, what constitutes generosity in one society may take a different form in another, the core essence of these values remains unchanging and stable. This is because human *fitrah* is immutable and unified.

By examining the difference between good and evil, it becomes clear that although their forms and manifestations may change across cultures and times, fundamental ethical principles such as justice, honesty, and kindness have always served as humanity's guide. Strengthening moral values is the path to societal excellence and solidarity, while neglecting them leads to moral decline. Before making decisions, each individual must consider the consequences of their actions for others and society, or seek counsel from knowledgeable and experienced individuals in difficult situations. These recommendations help ensure our choices are more conscious and responsible. Ultimately, despite daily challenges and cultural

differences, ethical values will continue to be the guiding light for the choices and future of both the individual and society.

## References

[1]. Quran, 16:90

[2]. Hussain ibn Saeed, *al-Zuhd*, Ansariyan Publications, 2022, P. 39: