

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

(Adapted from, "If God, Why Evil?: A New Way to Think about the Question" by Norman L. Geisler) (Student Copy)

One of the toughest questions **asked** is "Where did evil come from?" It **is tough because we know it** could not have come from God because He is absolutely good. The Bible makes it clear that God created only good things. After almost every day of creation God said, "It is good." Looking back on all His creation, "It was very good" (**Genesis 1:31**). **To set the record straight, God did not create any evil thing. He created only good things, and evil is a privation or corruption of a good thing.** No things (substances) are evil in themselves. But this leads inevitably to the mysterious and difficult question: Where, then, did evil come from? That is, how did the privations or corruptions get there?

THREE VIEWS ON EVIL

The Pantheists believe God exists but deny the existence of evil. They believe God is good, God is All, and hence there is no evil. **The Atheist's** solution to evil is just the opposite. Atheists admit that evil is real, but do not believe God is. **The Christian (theist)** claims that only an infinitely good and infinitely powerful God can solve the problem of evil. But how? **If everything God made was good, then how can evil be real? Or, if evil is real, then how can God not have created it? The matter is further complicated when we consider** what is meant by a "thing" (substance). Evil is real—a real lack, a real corruption. But it is not a real thing (substance).

Example: Evil Is Like Rot to a Tree. Evil is like rottenness in a tree. Here again, pure rottenness exists only in something else. A totally rotten tree is no tree at all—it's topsoil! Rot exists in the tree as a corruption of it, but it does not exist in and of itself.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL'S ORIGIN

If God is absolutely perfect, and if everything He made is absolutely perfect, then how did evil get off the ground to begin with? Biblical Christians believe that fallen human beings are "totally depraved." But we have just seen that nothing can be totally evil. How can this be reconciled? First of all, the Bible speaks of total depravity in a moral sense, not in a metaphysical or ontological sense.

RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL'S ORIGIN

A perfect creature cannot do evil. From a Christian perspective, this is clearly false. God created a perfect archangel, called Lucifer; he sinned and became the devil. How can a perfect creature do evil? The answer is free will. Consider: Certainly, God created only good things. Evil cannot come directly from the hand of the Creator any more than polluted water can come directly from a pure mountain spring. Neither can we deny that free will (the power of free choice) is a good thing. There is nothing evil about it. If there were, then it would be evil for God to have it. And it would be evil for the saints to have it. But it is not. Here on earth, while we're still making our ultimate choice as

to whether we'll do our will or God's will, we must have choice; otherwise, we would be robots, puppets, or automatons.

WHAT ABOUT SATAN? ISN'T HE TOTALLY EVIL?

The Bible speaks about Satan as **"the evil one"** (1 John 5:19) who is a liar by his very nature (John 8:44). Surely there is no good in Satan—is he not totally evil? Yes, he is completely evil in a moral sense, but not in a metaphysical sense. **Ezekiel 28:12–15 (NET 2nd ed)**

WHO CAUSED LUCIFER TO SIN?

According to the Bible, Lucifer **Isaiah 14:12 (NET 2nd ed.)** a created archangel, was the first to sin, thus becoming Satan. **Some scholars say that a** third of all the angels fell with him (Revelation 12:4). **However, the Bible does not explicitly state "one third of the angels fell" in a literal numerical sense. The interpretation is drawn from linking the symbolism in Revelation to other passages about Satan's fall (such as Isaiah 14:12 and Luke 10:18).**

Who caused Lucifer to sin? He was not tempted by anyone else. **It wasn't God, because** God does not tempt anyone to sin. **James 1:13 (NET 2nd ed.).** Lucifer had no evil nature that gave him a propensity (inclination) to sin. Now we can answer the question, "What caused Lucifer to sin?" No one did. He is the cause of his own sin. Sin is a self-caused action, one for which we cannot blame anyone or anything else. Who caused the first sin? Lucifer. How did he cause it? By the power of free choice, which God gave him. Thus, God made evil possible by creating free creatures; they are responsible for making it actual.

HOW DID EVIL ARISE IN A TOTALLY GOOD UNIVERSE?

It is important to note that no evil need exist in order to will evil; for example, willing a lesser good can be an evil. Evil is created by a free person (oneself), and such a person does not have to participate in something outside of himself in order to be evil. The evil of willing oneself to take the place of God is an evil in itself. In fact, this is precisely what the Bible says about the first evil act of Lucifer: It was pride. Paul warned Timothy not to put a novice in office **"or he may become conceited [prideful] and fall under the same judgment as the devil"** (1 Timothy 3:6). This is pictured vividly in **Ezekiel 28**, speaking of the fall of the Prince of Tyre (**many believe** no doubt inspired by the prince and power of the air. **Ezekiel 28:13–17 NASB**. Isaiah paints a similar picture: **Isaiah 14:12–14 KJV**. Thus, sin was born in the breast of an archangel in the presence of God. A stunningly beautiful and extremely powerful creature fell when he made himself, rather than God, the object of his adoration. Who caused Lucifer to sin? No one else did—he was the cause of his own sin.

"WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NATURAL EVIL AND MORAL EVIL?"

Moral evil is evil that is caused by human activity. Murder, rape, robbery, embezzlement, hatred, jealousy, etc., are all moral evils. When people, created in the image of God, choose to act in defiance of God's law, the result is moral evil. Moral evil can also be linked to inaction—to

purposefully ignore a cry for help is a moral evil. Natural evil is that which causes pain and suffering to humanity, but which is not due to direct human involvement. Congenital diseases, tsunamis, earthquakes, drought, and famine are all cases of natural evil. There is no morality involved in such events.

The points below are offered specifically in response to the problem of natural evil:

1. God does not answer to us, but we must answer to Him (**Romans 14:12**). **Romans 14:12 (NET 2nd ed.) — 12 Therefore, each of us will give an account of himself to God.**
 God alone holds the power of life and death. It would be wrong for a person to cause an earthquake that would kill thousands because human beings do not have that prerogative. God, on the other hand, does. He is the creator and giver of life, and He can withdraw that gift when, and in what manner, He chooses. We have all sinned and deserve the death penalty (**Romans 3:23; 6:23**). The fact that God allows any of us to live is a sign of His grace and forbearance.
2. Natural evil is a result of original human sin. Things are not the way they were created to be. With sin, pain and death entered into the system (**Genesis 3**). Broadly speaking, natural evil is God's judgment on humanity. Paul tells us that all of creation is currently suffering, waiting for the time when it is set free from "bondage to decay" **Romans 8:20–22 (NET 2nd ed.)**.
3. Natural evil is exacerbated by human sin. When there is a disaster, there are often many examples of people working and giving sacrificially and heroically in order to help alleviate suffering. Unfortunately, there will also be many examples of people looting, price gouging, hoarding supplies, and acting in selfish and cowardly ways to the detriment of those around them. The singular biggest cause of famine in the world today is not weather but displacement due to warfare. In these situations, food is often available for distribution to refugees, but it rots in warehouses while government officials argue over the distribution or use the opportunity to enrich themselves.

The only hope for people in a world filled with evil (whether moral or natural) is Jesus Christ. He does not promise escape from the evil in this world. In fact, He promises that His followers will experience it (**John 16:33**); **Revelation 21:1 (NET 2nd ed.)**; **Revelation 21:4 (NET 2nd ed.)**

In short, God is the "author" of everything that happens in the indirect and ultimate sense; He is not the immediate cause of evil actions. He neither promotes them nor produces them; He permits them and controls the course of history so that it accomplishes His ultimate purposes.