

The Problem of Evil

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If God is all together good, and if He is all powerful, then why does evil exist? This is the question – no, the blockage to belief – posited by many today. People who are concerned about evil in the world will often punctuate their disbelief in a good and powerful God with the example of the Holocaust: “How could a good and powerful God allow six million innocent people to be slaughtered?” Some, who are more studied in theology, will point out that we Christians consider God to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (the so-called O-3 God). Given these claims, how can such unbridled evil exist? They will further postulate that since evil does exist, an O-3 God cannot possibly exist, for if there were such a God, He would certainly eradicate evil. This is the question, and it deserves a solid, well-reasoned answer.

As a beginning point, evil should be defined so that all are on the same page. But in order to define evil, one must assume a God of love -- a good God – for without the ultimate good of an omnibenevolent God, how could one identify evil? How could one recognize it as the anti-thesis of good, if there were no ultimate good? A relativist, for example, has no standing to assume evil exists, for what is evil to one might well be good to another. No absolutes exist for the relativist. Atheists share the same conundrum. But the question at hand is evil, as it is assumed to be understood in a normative manner by reasonable people. Philosophers have developed what appears to be a reasonable definition: “Evil is the undeserved and unnecessary suffering by a sentient being.” This seems to be an acceptable definition, at least in a broad sense. To clarify the discussion further and to be more specific, there are two major types of evil: Moral and Natural.

Moral evil is caused by the free choices made by moral agents – human beings. This is the type of evil that causes the most outrage among unbelievers (non-Christians) and those who are honestly seeking answers to deeply disturbing questions, whether Christians or those inves-

tigating the rationality of the faith. It is in this category that the Holocaust would fall, as well as the torturing of babies, the odious actions of Stalin, or senseless murders of a serial killer.

The second type of evil is natural evil. This type of evil is caused by non-moral agents, such as the operation of nature as manifested in destructive hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. Innocent people are killed every year by operation of these natural forces; the outcome of which is considered evil due to the loss of life and property, together with the carnage of killing disease.

Now that the question has been posed and the definitions clarified, it is almost time to answer the question, but not quite. The one thing missing is the enormous importance of the question and the proffered answer to the one doing the asking. The issue of evil – where does it come from and why doesn't God eradicate it – is perhaps the main stumbling block – after pride, of course – to a lost person accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. The question must be treated with deference and prayer. The thoughtfulness and logic of one's answer carries eternal consequences: it could open the door to Christ, or perhaps close it permanently. There is no place here for a glib answer, for if the critics are correct, either God is not all powerful (cannot eradicate evil), or He is not all knowing (does not know evil exists), or He is not all good (doesn't care that evil exists - disconnected).

With the above as our launching pad, I believe the best answer to the existence of evil is the "Free Will Defense." God is indeed all powerful, all knowing, and all good. He hates evil, which, of course, is sin. His will is that evil not exist. How then can these statements be true while at the same time evil clearly exists? I will answer with several propositions.

Proposition #1: There are several things that God cannot do – even in full recognition of His omnipotence. This seems prima facie counter intuitive, but upon deeper reflection, becomes apparent. What exactly is it that God cannot do? For example, He cannot act in contravention to His own nature. He is good and can only do good. He cannot lie. He is truth and, therefore, cannot speak untruth. He cannot break His word; His word is His bond. He cannot

make a mistake, for He is all knowing. He cannot make a square circle, or cause 2 + 2 to equal 5, for to do so would be in contravention of His established laws of physics and logic. And most important of all, even God cannot create free moral agents who cannot do wrong.

God created both angels and mankind with the unique gift of free will. He loves us and wants our love in return. A created being that is required by design to love brings no satisfaction to its creator. Such a being is a robot. God wants His creation to show their love for Him by obeying Him. A created being that obeys by programmatic design brings no joy to its creator. Such a being is nothing more than a computer. God created angels and humans to love and obey Him freely, because they want to. Herein resides His joy. Not even God can create a free moral agent without the possibility of doing wrong. Freedom carries with it the possibility of wrong doing, or evil. God, therefore, did not create evil, He allows it, for to disallow it would mean that we (the created) would have no choice in any thought, action, belief, or opinion. We would be robots, and that is not what God wants, and not what He created. We could not, for example, choose Him over the world; we could not be saved to eternity in Heaven with Him, for to be saved requires a choice, and choices can only be made by free moral agents. Freedom always comes with the possibility of good or evil; that's the nature of freedom, otherwise it is slavery or a mechanistic device. Further, if God were to eradicate evil, where should He begin? How about with you? And where would He go from there? It wouldn't take long to eradicate the entire human race, for all have done evil.

Proposition #2: As far we know from Scripture, evil first appeared in Heaven through the disobedience of Lucifer, the most beautiful and powerful Archangel. Lucifer (Satan) rebelled against God, wanting to be like God, and wanting to displace Him. Pride and arrogance seemed to be the progenitors of Lucifer's incredible sin. Certain passages of Scripture in Revelation lead us to surmise that Lucifer convinced one third of the company of Heaven (the angels) to take part in his rebellion. Here we can point to the first display of evil. Evil began with Lucifer exercising his free will to produce a chain reaction that has infected all of creation. This first sin

– evil – was committed in the spirit world of Heaven. How then did it affect the physical world of mankind?

Proposition #3: As we know from Scripture, God created Adam and Eve and all of our physical world. He created it and it was good in its original form. Satan then appeared in the Garden of Eden for the express purpose of tempting Adam and Eve to the end that they would sin against God. Adam and Eve, through the exercise of their free will, crumbled under the temptation of Satan, thus bringing evil into the physical world. From that point, known as the Fall of Man, evil (sin) was part of the human condition, being passed on from person to person, generation to generation, throughout the ages, as if part of our human genome.

Evil entered God's creation through the exercise of Lucifer's free will. Evil entered the world of mankind through the exercise of Mankind's freewill. God did not want it that way nor did He plan it that way. He allowed it for reasons fully known only to Him, but partially understood by us through the logical insight that not even God can create a free moral agent with no possibility of doing wrong. The price of freedom is the possibility of evil. God, of course, knew this, but He loves us so much that He allows us the choice of good or evil, life or death. And He is gentleman enough to respect our decision. So, where does evil come from? It comes from us.

Proposition #4: As to the issue of evil coming from natural sources, or the workings of nature, I do not know the reason or the cause, but I do have a theory to offer, a priori. We know from Scripture that there was no mention of bad weather prior to the Genesis Flood. No rain or storms of any type, magnitude, or description were mentioned in the Bible until the global flood that destroyed all of mankind, with the exception of Noah and his family.

We might draw an analogue of sorts between the fall of man and the fall of nature. Just as all of mankind fell victim to the sin of Adam and Eve – again, as if passed on through the genome – perhaps the same fate fell upon nature. Until sin entered the world, the weather was perfect – all was in balance. Following the occurrence of sin in the world, the weather became

erratic and degenerated, taking on the propensity of causing destruction. This theory is sometimes referred to as entropy, which is both a scientific and a theistic term. Scientifically, it refers to the disorganization or degeneration of the universe. All things physical begin whole and complete and then degenerate. Take for example a nail left out in a warm, humid climate for a long period of time. It would rust and degenerate. According to the laws of physics, disorder comes from order; disorder can never produce order. Theoretically, it could be that entropy entered the physical world with the Fall of Mankind, causing disorder and degeneration in the weather patterns, as well as the degeneration of all living and non-living things.

This is no more than a thought, certainly open to criticism. Only God knows why or how natural disasters occur. But we do know that there was no evidence of such occurrences in the early creation, only after sin flourished.

Regardless of the cause of moral or natural evil, we can be assured that God did not create it, nor does He approve of it. It does not logically follow that the presence of evil in the world means that God does not exist, or that He is unable to deal with it. Moral evil comes from us – you and me. God will deal with evil in His own way and in His own time. It will be punished. And it is only by the cleansing blood of Christ that we who submit to His Lordship will be spared His judgment.