



**Boston Catholic Journal**



NIHIL NISI IESUM

DEDICATED TO MARY MOTHER OF GOD

---

[www.boston-catholic-journal.com](http://www.boston-catholic-journal.com)  
[editor@boston-catholic-journal.com](mailto:editor@boston-catholic-journal.com)

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL:



## EXONERATING GOD

Updated June 25, 2018

By: Geoffrey K. Mondello

# PREFACING THE PROBLEM

**No single factor is invoked more often in people turning away from God, or in their failing to believe in Him, than the *occurrence* — note that I do not say “[existence](#)”<sup>\*</sup> — of evil, especially as it manifests itself in suffering. The occurrence of evil appears incompatible with God, or at least a coherent conception of God as both — and simultaneously — *absolutely good* and *absolutely powerful*. That God and the occurrence of evil should coexist appears logically contradictory and ontologically incompatible. The one is effectively the abrogation of the other. The existence of God, it is argued, precludes (or ought to preclude) the occurrence of evil and the occurrence of evil precludes (or ought to preclude) the existence of God.**

While we can readily adduce empirical evidence, that is to say, tangible instances, of evil to *discredit* the existence of God, the availability of evidence to *corroborate* the existence of God, on the other hand, is so exiguous that even *when* such instances are invoked they are deemed extraordinary events in the affairs of men; indeed, events so far from commonplace that we call them miraculous — that is to say, inexplicable interventions conditionally attributed to God in the absence of alternate explanations *that may yet be forthcoming*. Whether or not this is a sufficient, if concise, summary, the general implication is clear: evidence of evil overwhelmingly exceeds evidence of God. If sheer preponderance is the criterion to which we appeal, God loses.

Evil comes as a scandal to the believer who asks, “How can this be, given the existence of God?”

To the *disbeliever* no such scandal arises — only scorn for the believer who is left in perplexity, unable to deny the existence of God on the one hand while equally unable to deny the occurrence of evil on the other.

We appear to be consigned to either nihilistic resignation in the one camp (evil is somehow ontologically inherent and rampant in the universe although we cannot explain why), or an unreasoned and therefore untenable affirmation of the existence of God — *despite* the contradictory concurrence of evil — in the other. Both appear to be damned to perplexity.

Neither has satisfactorily answered the question implicit within every occurrence of evil: “**Why?**”

## THE PROBLEM ... AND WHY WE MUST RESPOND TO IT

Before we begin our attempt to arrive at an answer to the problem of evil, we must first clearly summarize and completely understand the nature of the problem itself.

While this may appear obvious, all too often our efforts to make sense of the experience of evil in our lives and in the world fail to adequately address *implicit or unstated premises* apart from which no answer is either forthcoming or possible.

Failing to follow the premises, we fail to reach a conclusion. Instead, we reflexively seize what is incontrovertible (the occurrences of evil) and, understanding nothing of its antecedents, satisfy ourselves that it is entirely a mystery — in other words, utterly incomprehensible to us — in fact, so opaque to our ability to reason it through (which we do not) that we throw up our hands in either frustration or despair, declaring that either it is the will of God in a way we do not understand, or that there can be no God in light of the enormities that we experience. In either case — whether we affirm that God exists *despite* them, or deny that He exists *because* of them — we confront the experience of evil as an impenetrable mystery. Such a facile answer, I suggest, is not a satisfactory state of affairs at all.

## ANTECEDENTS

**We can only speculate upon the *pre-Adamic origin* of evil. That evil *preceded* the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise is clear. We are given no explanation of the genesis of evil as it predated the creation of man. We only know that it had already manifested itself in the Garden — as something *already* extrinsic to — and antagonistic toward it. That is to say, in the Creation Narrative, we encounter from the outset the parallel existence of the serpent (an embodiment of evil) with man prior to the Fall (I say *parallel*, because the serpent possesses a *supernatural* existence *not in kind* with, but *parallel to and contemporaneous with*, the *created nature* of man, much in the way that the *supernatural* being of Angels coexist with the *natural* being of men).**

While we are unable to explain evil prior to the creation of man (simply because no narrative exists to which we can appeal apart from one utterance of Christ <sup>1</sup>), we are

not, however, for this reason absolved from explaining not only how evil came to obtrude upon the affairs of men, but why it is *not* incompatible with our conception of God as all-good and all-powerful. Philosophy calls this endeavor a theodicy. We needn't be intimidated by this, nor think ourselves unequal to it, as we shall see.

To further compound the issue, the problem is no mere academic matter from which we can stand aloof as so many theorists to hypothetical abstractions. It is a problem that vexes us, lacerates us at every turn, believer and unbeliever alike. It has a direct and painful bearing upon us; it affects us, afflicts us, and, yes, sometimes crushes us. Despite the refuge that the believer has taken in the notion of mystery, or the cynicism to which the unbeliever consigns himself in hopeless resignation, each cry out, equally and withal, "*Why ... ?*" — especially when the evil experienced or perpetrated is an effrontery to justice, or a violation of innocence.

The skeptic, most often *a casualty* of evil, cannot reconcile the occurrence of evil with the existence of God. The two appear to be not just rationally incompatible but mutually exclusive. What is more, the empirical evidence of evil is far more preponderant and far more compelling than any evidence that can be readily adduced to the existence of God. The believer, on the other hand, is painfully perplexed, and sometimes deeply scandalized, by this seeming incompatibility which often buffets the faith which alone sustains his belief — the faith that, somehow, the occurrence of evil and the existence of God are not, in the end, irreconcilable.

First and foremost, then, it is critical to be clear about the *context* in which the problem first occurred, and from which all subsequent instances follow. Even before this, however, and as we have said, we must be absolutely clear about the problem itself which, in summary, follows:

## THE PROBLEM SUMMARIZED:

- We understand by God an absolutely omniscient Being Who is absolutely good and absolutely powerful.
- A being deficient in any of these respects — that is to say, wanting in knowledge, goodness or power — we do not understand as God, but as *less* than God.
- An absolutely good, absolutely powerful, and absolutely omniscient Being would know every instance of evil and would neither *permit* it because He is absolutely good, or, because He is absolutely powerful, would *eradicate* it.
- Suffering and evil, in fact, occur.
- Therefore, God, from Whom evil cannot be concealed, cannot be absolutely good AND absolutely powerful.
- If absolutely good, God would eradicate all evil and suffering — but does not, and therefore, while all-good, He cannot be all-powerful.
- Conversely, if absolutely powerful, then God could abolish evil and suffering, but does not, and therefore, while all powerful, He cannot be all good.

- Hence, there is no God, for by God we understand a Being perfect in goodness and power.

Until we are perfectly clear about this, we can go no further. Unless we fully grasp the magnitude of this problem we cannot hope to understand the reasons why men either fail to believe in God, or having once believed, no longer do so. The occurrence, the experience, of evil, as we had said in our opening, appears as nothing less than a scandal to believers, and the cause of disbelief in unbelievers.

It need not be so.

For our part, we must be prepared to follow St. Peter's exhortation, "being ready always to satisfy everyone that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you" (1 St. Peter 3.15). Hence, we begin.

## THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

As mentioned earlier, any attempt to come to terms with the problem of evil vis-à-vis the existence of God inevitably entails linguistic and conceptual complexities especially in the way of suppressed premises, or unstated assumptions. It is absolutely essential that these latent features, these uncritically assumed concepts long-dormant in language, be made manifest.

What really *is* the problem of evil, and what really *is* the nature of God in its simplest formulation? Can God really be exculpated? Can He be exonerated of this ontological cancer that we call evil? And what is the real nature of evil itself? All too often we are facile with our answers through some articulation of faith that we are not adequately prepared to defend.

Our *confrontation* with the problem of evil is the greatest confrontation of all — for it is, in the end, not only the genesis of all that we suffer, but remains the apocalyptic culmination of all that has been and ever will be.

## THE SOLUTION SUMMARIZED

- The problem of evil and suffering is a moral problem with existential consequences that extend to, and are manifested within, the universe of experience.
- The universe of moral discourse within the context of which alone a discussion of the notion of evil is possible, is not coherent apart from the notion of volition (the will; specifically the free will).
- Evil, therefore, cannot be understood apart from moral agency, especially as it pertains to man of whom it is predicated as either an agent or a casualty. That is to say, man either causes evil, is a casualty of evil, or both.

- An all good and all powerful God would not create man imperfectly. If He chose to create an imperfect man, He would not be all-good; if He was unable to do otherwise, He would not be all-powerful.
- Free will is a perfection in man. If we do not concede that free will is a perfection, then we cannot not concede to this concession, which is to say we cannot hold ourselves free to disagree with it, and deem this better (the penultimate of the superlative perfect) than to be free to disagree with it. In a word, if free will is not a perfection, then it pertains more to the notion of perfection that the will not be free. However, apart from free will there is no universe of moral discourse; nothing meritorious and nothing blameworthy, no intention, action, or event in the affairs of men that is susceptible of being construed as either good or evil — and no action is good, and conversely, none is evil — for there is no evil and no good pertaining to the actions of men.
- But there is evil.
- And there is good.
- What is more, if I am not free not to love God, then my loving God — or anyone or anything else — is without value, for we do not ascribe the notion of valuation to that which proceeds of necessity. That the sum of the interior angles in any triangle is 180 degrees possesses nothing in the way of valuation. We do not say that it is good or evil. It is geometrically necessary. If we agree that free will is a perfection (that it is better to possess free will than not to possess it), then in creating man, God would have deprived man of a perfection

in his created nature — a notion that would be inconsistent with either the goodness or the power of God, or both.

- Eve already knew, was acquainted with, good, for the Garden of Paradise was replete with everything good, and devoid of anything evil. Eve experienced no want, no privation.
- Eve chose to know good and evil.
- Eve, by nature created good, therefore chose not to know good, the first term, with which we was already naturally acquainted, but the second term, evil. Eve already knew good but she knew nothing of evil, for only good existed in the Garden of Paradise, and she herself was created good.
- Now, it is not possible to know evil without experiencing evil, anymore than it is to know good without experiencing good. We cannot know, understand, comprehend, pain and suffering without experiencing pain and suffering, any more than we can know, understand, and comprehend the color blue without experiencing the color blue.
- In choosing to know evil, therefore, Eve inadvertently, but nevertheless necessarily and concomitantly, chose to experience evil of which she erstwhile knew nothing. It was not the case that Eve was conscious or cognitive of the deleterious nature of evil (for prior to Original Sin, as we have said, Eve had only known, experienced, good).

- What is more, no one chooses what is evil except that they misapprehend it as a good, for every choice is ineluctably a choosing of a perceived good, even if the good perceived is intrinsically evil.
- The most evil act is latently a choice of a good extrinsic to the evil act. Man only acts for, and is motivated toward, a perceived good, however spurious the perception or the perceived good. It is impossible to choose an intrinsically evil act apart from a perceived extrinsic good motivating the intrinsically evil act. Eve's choice, while free, was nevertheless instigated through the malice and lie of the evil one who deceived Eve that an intrinsic evil —explicitly prohibited by God — was in fact an intrinsic good, which it was not. The susceptibility to being deceived does not derogate from the perfection of man, for the notion of deception is bound up with the notion of trust, which is an indefeasible good. The opposite of trust is suspicion which already, and hence anachronistically, presumes an acquaintance with evil.
- In choosing to know evil, Eve's choice necessitated, precipitated, those conditions alone through which evil can be experienced, e.g. death, suffering, illness, pain, etc. Her choosing to know evil biconditionally entailed the privation of the good, the first term, through which alone we understand evil, the second term. Evil is not substantival, which is to say, evil possesses no being of its own apart from the good of which it is only privative, a negation in part or whole. For this reason we see the two terms conjoined in Holy Scripture in, "*ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali*", or "the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

The existence of the good, does not, as some suggest, still less necessarily entail, the experience of evil. Adam and Eve in the state of natural felicity in the Garden of Paradise knew good apart from any acquaintance with, or any conception of, evil.

- Evil necessarily implicates good, but good in no way necessarily implicates evil. The notion of knowledge by way of contrast and opposition is confined to relatively few empirical instances, and always yields nothing of what a thing is, only that in contradistinction to what it is not. To know what a thing is not, tells us nothing of what it is. We do not know the color Blue by its opposition to, its contrast with, or in contradistinction to, a Not-Blue, for there is no existent “Not-Blue”. There are only other colors we distinguish from Blue — but we do so without invoking the notion of contrast or opposition. I do not know Blue as “Not-Red” (or, for that matter, through invoking any or all the other colors). I know Blue in the experience of Blue only. If there is an “opposite” of Blue, or a corresponding negative to Blue, it can only be the absence of color — not simply another color that is “not-Blue”, for in that case every other color would be the opposite of Blue — and the opposite of every other color as well.
- Once again, in Eve’s choosing to know evil, she consequently and concomitantly chose the conditions under which alone such knowledge was possible. Among the conditions informing such knowledge were death, suffering, pain — and all that we associate with evil and understand by evil.
- Far from being culpable, God warned Adam and Eve to avoid the, “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

- To argue that the goodness of God is compromised by His injunction against the plenitude of knowledge through His forbidding them to eat of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” is spurious inasmuch as it holds knowledge, and not felicity, to be the greatest good possible to man. In withholding complete knowledge, it is mistakenly argued, God deprived man of an intrinsic good.
- Felicity, or complete happiness, not omniscience, or complete knowledge, is man’s greatest good, and only that which redounds to happiness is good for man, not that which redounds to knowledge, and the two do not entirely coincide.
- To maintain that to know evil, suffering, illness, death ... and unhappiness ... redounds to man’s happiness is an irreconcilable contradiction. Evil is a privation of the good; consequently, to choose evil is to choose a privation of the good, specifically that which vitiates or diminishes the good.
- To maintain, furthermore, that man can know evil, suffering, illness, and death without experiencing evil, suffering, illness and death is equally subreptive. By this line of reasoning, one whose vision is color-deficient can know the color Purple without ever experiencing the color Purple; know what is bitter without experiencing bitterness; know “hot” without experiencing hotness. Purple, bitterness, hot — evil, suffering, illness, death (all that we understand by “evil”) are not concepts (in the way, for example, that a simple binomial equation  $(1+1=2)$  is a concept independent of anything existentially enumerable) but experiences, the knowledge of which demands the experience and cannot be acquired apart from it anymore than pain can be known apart the

experience of pain. Pain, illness, suffering, death, etc. are in no way inherently, intrinsically good. No one who has experienced the death of a loved one, the pain of an injury, or illness of any sort will maintain that such knowledge acquired through these experiences redounds to their felicity; that their

- “knowledge” of any of these evils either promotes or contributes to their happiness.
- God, then, is in no way culpable of, nor responsible for, the existence of evil. The occurrence or experience of evil derogates neither from His goodness, nor detracts from His power.
- If God is all good, He would confer the perfection of freedom upon man in Adam and Eve. If He is all powerful He would permit the exercise of this freedom.
- To confer the perfection of freedom of will upon man does not eo ipso imply that the exercise of the will necessarily involves a choosing between the good and the not-good or the less good, still less a choice between good and evil. Presumably the exercise of this freedom prior to the Fall was exercised in choices between things of themselves inherently good, albeit distinguishable in attributes. The fig and the pear are equally good in nature, but differing in attributes, and to choose the one over the other is not to imply that the one is good and the other not-good or even less-good. The choosing to eat the one and not the other is a choice among alternative goods.

- Nor is the thing not chosen “less good” in itself than that which is chosen. It is good proper to its nature. The pear and the fig are equally nutritious.
- The notion of choice is only coherent in the context of right reason. Choice (the exercise of free will), is never gratuitous, but is always in accordance with reason which alone mediates the choice to a coherent end. What we choose, we choose to coherent ends. In other words, we choose for a reason — and not spontaneously or gratuitously. Choices are always ordered to ends, however disordered the choices themselves may be.
- One does not, for example, choose as the means to nutrition, a stone rather than a fig. The choosing of the fig does not imply that the stone is not good. On the other hand, one does not choose figs to build a house, rather than stones. This does not imply that the fig is not good. The nature of the fig redounds to nutrition, while the nature of the stone does not, and the nature of the stone redounds to building while the nature of the fig does not. One can still choose to eat stones or to build with figs, but such choices do not accord with ordered reason, which of itself is also an intrinsic good.
- Only God can bring good out of evil He does not will but nevertheless permits through having conferred the perfection of freedom upon man. While God could not have endowed man with this perfection without simultaneously permitting the consequences necessary and intrinsic to it, He is not Himself the Author of the evil but of that perfection in man through which — not of necessity (for man is never compelled to choose inasmuch as compulsion by definition abrogates choice) — man chooses evil and subsequently becomes the agent of it.

- The occurrence of evil, consequently, is neither inconsistent with nor contrary to the notion of God as absolutely good and absolutely powerful.

## THE SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE AS THE LOGICAL ANTECEDENT:

“And He commanded him, saying: Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat: but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”

*(Præceptique ei, dicens : Ex omni ligno paradísi cómede; de ligno autem sciéntiæ boni et mali ne cómedas: in quocúmque enim die coméderis ex eo, morte moriéris)* (Genesis 2.16-17)

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any of the beasts of the earth which the Lord God made. And He said to the woman: Why hath God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of paradise? And the woman answered Him, saying: Of the fruit of the trees that are in paradise we do eat: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die. And the serpent said to the woman: No, you

shall not die the death. For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

*(Sed et serpens erat callídior cunctis animántibus terræ quæ fécerat Dóminus Deus. Qui dixit ad mulíerem: Cur præcépit vobis Deus ut non comederétis de omni ligno paradísi? Cui respóndit múlier: De fructu lignórum, quæ sunt in paradíso, véscimur: de fructu vero ligni quod est in médio paradísi, præcépit nobis Deus ne comederémus, et ne tangerémus illud, ne forte moriámur. Dixit autem serpens ad mulíerem: Nequáquam morte moriémini. Scit enim Deus quod in quocúmque die comedéritis ex eo, aperiéntur óculi vestri, et éritis sicut dii, sciéntes bonum et malum.)*

(Genesis 3.1-5)

## CONCERNING THE GENESIS OF EVIL

**A**s one reader pointed out, the argument above does not address the genesis of evil *ab initio*:

It “does not address *the idea of the origin of evil*. It does not explain how evil came about. It does not exonerate God or explain the conclusion that He did not create in some way, either directly or indirectly, what we call “evil”.

This is a point well taken. The argument thus far articulated is clearly framed within the Biblical context in which it first presents itself to us, and as such may be

understood as a type of *epoche*, or bracketed narrative, the authenticity of which we assume as Catholics — not necessarily apart from discursive reasoning, but not articulated exclusively or even largely in terms of it either. Whatever we can speculate upon regarding the origin of evil, of one thing only can we be certain: that *the origin of evil is radicated in the will.*

If we seek an ontological genesis of evil we shall not find one simply because what we understand as evil is a privation of being and not constituting, let alone instantiating, a being itself whose ontology is tautologically reciprocal with evil. In the strictest sense, there is no purely evil being. This is tantamount to saying there is a being nothing, or, alternately, a nothing being. It is an oxymoron. This is also not to say that there is no single being, or categories of beings, from which the good has been exhaustively, but not totally, deprived, and we understand such beings as evil not in the sense of what they possess in their being but in the sense of what is deficient in their being: specifically the good in whatever measure — and precisely by that measure are they construed as evil. In that inverted and ever mimicking world of evil, just as there are differing magnitudes of goodness in the holy, there are differing magnitudes of the absence of goodness in the evil. As some are to greater or lesser degrees holy, so to greater or lesser degrees are the evil. The ultimate expression of this near total privation of the good is personal because it pertains to a will, and the person in whose will we find this nearly ultimate extinction of the good we understand as s@^@-, or the devil.

Apart from a coherent notion of the will we find nothing to which we can assign moral predicates, nothing inculpatory or exculpatory, praiseworthy or blameworthy, no sanctity and no sin; we find no world of moral discourse. Just as the will is the *radix bonorum*, it is the *radix malorum* as well.

To speculate upon the *radix malorum ab initio* (the root of all evil from the beginning) is to speculate upon the first instance of the corruption of the will. We have no Scriptural narrative to which we can appeal in answering this and thus no phenomenological bracket (*epoche*) in which to address it as Catholics. Consequently, every effort will be, at best, conjectural. We at least know that it pertained to freedom, specifically freedom of the will apart from which there is no moral discussion. We have no narrative through which we can answer the question of why, in the first instance, satan sinned through a willful refusal to cooperate with God. It has been speculated upon by theologians throughout history as attributable to pride (e.g. concerning the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in the Immaculate womb of Mary and the angelic pride this instigated through the refusal to worship God Who became man (*Verbum caro factum est*<sup>4</sup>) — man who was created less than the angels<sup>5</sup> — for the sake of our salvation<sup>6</sup> and to Whom, as True God and True Man<sup>7</sup>, worship is due), itself an expression of the will. Thus, while the circumstances surrounding the first defection of the free will from the supremely good will of God can only be speculated upon, the free will of satan nevertheless is resolved into a *causa sui*, a cause in and of itself originating from no prior cause that would subvert or attenuate the notion of the authenticity of the free will itself.

## FURTHER OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

**The** following questions were submitted and the line of reasoning is instructive in further elaborating the problem of evil and a coherent response to it. I have

abbreviated the questions and eliminated redundancies in them for the sake of concision and clarity. Because they are common objections, it is well to state them and answer them in turn.

## OBJECTION 1: WHY DOES EVIL EXIST IN THE FIRST PLACE?

*“I don't think it's necessary as such to pin-point the precise time or place when the first evil thought or act took place, as we should only really be concerned about why it exists in the first place.”*

### REPLY:

The possibility (not the actuality) of evil understood as the privation of good is the condition of the free will. To argue that evil “exists” as a necessary condition to our understanding or apprehending the good (of the sort, “unless we do not know pain we cannot know its opposite, pleasure — which is a discredited argument, for we do not, in fact, know pleasure merely in contradistinction from pain. There are many types of pain. Does each have its opposite in pleasure as a necessary condition to experiencing that pain? If, so, then please tell me what the opposite and corresponding pleasure is to having forcefully struck ones thumb with a hammer and experiencing the resulting pain. Is it is pleasurable thumb? Of course, this is a *reduction ad absurdam* and need not be pursued.

## OBJECTION II: THE PARADIGM OF THE PERFECT PROGRAMMER

*“If we can look at this situation in an analogous way, God could be likened to a programmer, they create something. The programmer has the knowledge and certain foresight to predict how his program would run, he creates his program so that it is safe for the user to run, he has safe-guarded it against attacks as best as he knows how, but eventually over time, due to his finite knowledge, a loophole is found and another user hacks it, or renders it into something for malicious intent.*

### REPLY:

Your analogy fails altogether. Programmers do not create — nor is their “knowledge” in any way possessed of the apodictic certainty that we find invested in, say, analytical propositions such that any possible outcome must follow — and necessarily so — from irrefragable premises. Programmers do not bring something into existence *ex nihilo*; they merely synthesize, constructing source code from already existing binary information into object code. Yes? This is no mere carping. Linguistic precision is absolutely necessary to any plausible explication of the problem evil. You could as well have used a child with Lego’s and wheels as your analogue. This is not being unkind. It is merely being necessarily clear.

Nor is it the case that God is not omniscient, unlike the programmer. I earnestly suggest you read David Hume’s analysis of the Problem of Induction in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* — it is first year freshman philosophy, and very accessible — understanding this will help you see in the problem inherent in your argument. In so many words, all the possible combinations considered by your

hypothetical programmer not merely cannot be logically anticipated, but even the first presumed causal nexus between the source language and the low level compiler is only probable at best in resulting in any intended executable — and may result in something quite different in the next instance.

### OBJECTION III: THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD NECESSARILY IMPLICATES GOD IN EVIL

*“God is omniscient, He knows the results of his actions over an infinite period of time, He knew when that first instance of evil would arise, so in a sense they [the programmer and God] are very alike, but yet very different because God should by definition have (or be able to) create a scenario( program) where no fault arises (evil).”*

#### REPLY:

In other words, God could have created a non-moral universe ... and such a universe would be the best of all possible worlds ... This is a very old argument that would be tiresome to recapitulate, and I suggest that you read it at your leisure. To cut to the chase, God could have created a world of automatons, in your estimation, incapable of choosing evil because there would be no evil from which to choose. Essentially it is a universe without moral predicates — which would, *eo ipso*, be a universal within

which there would be no will or volition to which alone moral predication is coherently both ascribable and attributable. But a world without will or volition is not a moral world. There still could be choices between competing goods, but we could not say of such choices that they possess moral predicates. We could still choose, but we could only choose good, which is tantamount to saying that we have no moral choice. All possible choices would be good. What is chosen would always be good — but we have argued that evil is radicated in the will. Then every will would necessarily be good and incapable of evil. A necessarily good will would necessarily always choose the good even were the good to coexist with evil (even understood as something substantival, which it is not, rather than as a privation of the good, which it is). So, once again, a notion of authentic choice is essentially subverted. What is chosen would always be good and the will which chooses would be indefectibly good. A coherent concept of moral agency under such conditions is impossible. No choice is laudable, because it is necessary, and nothing chosen is other than good.

To understand the will as the origin of all moral agency, even as it expresses itself materially, and at that the same time also ask what is the origin of the free will is to ask what is the origin of the origin. This question results in an absurd tautology. “What motivates the *will* to *will*?” is a question that is regressive *ad infinitum* unless the will is understood as the motivating agency itself capable of appropriating distinguishable choices freely.

## OBJECTION IV: EVIL IS NOT IN THE WILL

*“I also do not agree with your statement: “that the origin of evil is radicated in the will.” - I think the original of evil maybe realized through free will, but not radicated.*

*For evil cannot occur without there having been a framework for it to occur, in other words the potential for evil to occur must exist for it to have any chance of it existing, and that potential has existed with creation, and hence the creator's hand has been explicitly and solely a part of that."*

**REPLY:**

That necessary framework we understand to be *libero voluntate*, the freedom of the will, which is recognized as a perfection accorded man by God; *id est*, to be endowed with, rather than deprived of, freedom is conceded to be an eminent good redounding to the perfection of man. Moreover, evil is a privation of the good, and the "framework" for the very possibility of evil is the good of which alone it is privative. To argue that there can be a "framework" apart from the good in which alone evil can occur is contradictory since it is precisely a privation of the good by which we understand the concept of evil.

**OBJECTION V:  
EVIL CONTRADICTS GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE**

*"If God has had no hand in creating evil, then that implies that's an element of creation that he has had no control over and that ultimately in his will to create something good he had to have evil necessarily tied in, which contradicts omnipotence, and necessarily implicates him as culpable."*

REPLY:

Evil, as we have repeatedly said, is ontological privation — not, as you appear to suggest, a being of some mysterious sort. It is a privation of what should be. It is much like asking why God created nothing, or the absence of something that should be. One cannot — even God — “create” nothing. God can choose not to create something, but He cannot choose to create nothing, for nothing is the negation of something, and even if it were possible for nothing to be created without contradiction, what would we call it? Nothing. It is a circular, contradictory argument. What is more, all that God created is good according to the Genesis account.

## OBJECTION 6: THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD AND EVIL IN THE FALLEN ANGELS

*“Let's consider the practically observable source of evil, I take it that the rebelliousness of man is the result or at least a part of the actions of Lucifer? If God is omnipotent and omniscient, then He would have foreseen the actions of Lucifer before creating him. Given the infinite powers of God as implied by Scripture, it would have been possible for him to create an angel like Lucifer that he would have known would not have strayed.”*

REPLY:

“... *practically observable source of evil* ...”? I do not understand this statement, so cannot answer it. I will conjecture that you are suggesting that God could have created the angels *less* perfectly, or possessed of a lesser degree of perfection than we find in the perfection of free will with which He endowed them? But then God would

not be perfectly good were He to withhold a perfection in justice due the created nature of a being.

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke 10.18

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the diabolical, by whose instigation Eve was deceived. The provenance of this primeval malice which antecedes the creation of man is the topic of another subject. Evil was in no way intrinsic to the Garden of Paradise. Happiness was. The intrusion of evil upon nature through supernatural artifice only indicates the pre-existence of *supernatural* evil apart from *nature* which was created good. While chronologically antecedent to *nature* it was not manifest within it, even while concurrent with it, for the two — the natural and the supernatural — are ontologically distinct. The present argument purposes to explain the origin of evil as it touches upon human existence *enacted in nature*, not the provenance of evil as it pertains to diabolical being *enacted in the supernatural*.

<sup>3</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus* 4.31, (Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite); *Summa Theologica*, Question 103 Article 8 (St. Thomas Aquinas), etc.

<sup>4</sup> St. John 1.14

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 2.7 &

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:7

<sup>7</sup> *Symbolum Nicaenum* - Nicene Creed – circa 325 A.D.

“ ... by one man's offence death reigned ...” (Romans 5.17)

“ For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of His own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world.” (Wisdom 2.23-24)

**CONTRIBUTED BY:**

Geoffrey K. Mondello

author of *The Metaphysics of Mysticism: A Commentary*

([www.johnofthecross.com](http://www.johnofthecross.com))

Available on [Amazon](#)

---

\* *"Cum essem párvulus, loquébar ut párvulus, cogitábam ut párvulus. Quando autem factus sum vir, evacuávi quæ erant párvuli."* (I Corinthians 13.11)



Copyright © 2004 - 2018 Boston Catholic Journal. All rights reserved.