



ZWTF

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2013 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

Purpose and meaning of evil

The key to understanding evil is the realization that it's not necessarily sin.

Isaiah 45:7 is as clear as can be: God creates evil. And yet many Christians refuse to believe this. I ran into one of them up in Michigan one time.

“Excuse me, sir. You seem to be a Christian.”

“How could you tell?”

“There is a picture of Jesus on your T-shirt, stripped to the waist and being mocked by Herod.”

“I forgot about that.”

“May I ask you a question?”

“Okay.”

“Do you believe God creates evil?”

“Of course not. God wouldn't do anything like that.”

“What if I showed you a place in the Bible that says He does?”

“I would have to see that verse.”

“Here it is. Isaiah 45:7. ‘I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.’”

“Yes, that's what *your* Bible says. But I'm afraid I would have to see this verse in the King James Version.”

“This *is* the King James Version.”

“Oh.”

“Now do you believe God creates evil?”

“Oh, look! Here comes Julie.”

“The one wearing the picture of Jesus on the cross getting His heart pierced with a lance head?”

“Yes, that's her. Hey, Julie!”

“Hi, guys. What's up? I mean, besides Jesus on the cross.”

“Julie, this man wants to know if we believe God creates evil.”

“No! God would never do anything like that. Of course we don't believe it.”

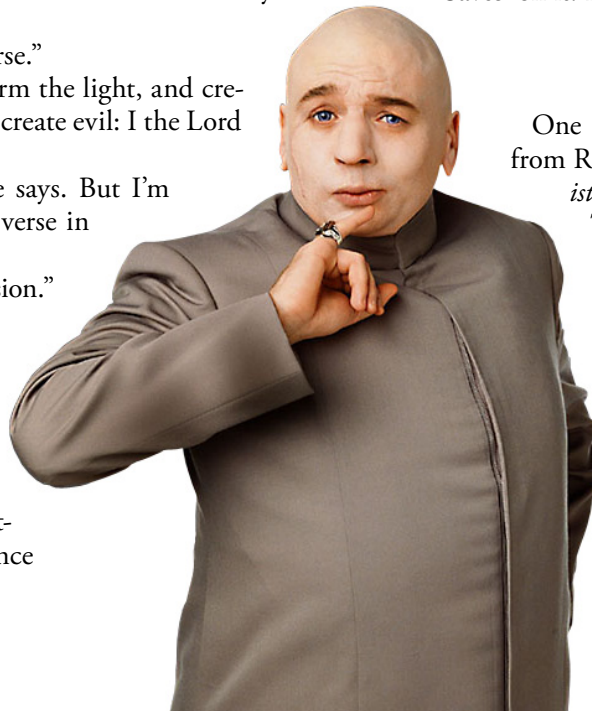
“But he's got a verse ... ”

“I'll show her. Julie, I have a verse here saying that God creates evil. It's Isaiah 45:7, and it says that—”

“I'm sorry, but if it's not in the King James Version, I can't believe it. The King James Version was good enough for the apostle Paul, so it's good enough for me.”

“But this *is* in the King James Version.”

“Oh, look! Here comes Arnold in his new T-shirt showing all the unbelievers burning in hell with the words ‘Jesus Saves’ on it. Hey, Arnold!”



One of the simplest truths there is comes from Romans 11:36—*All is out of God, all exists because of God, and all returns to God.* Take three doses of this verse a day and you will have the universe in the shell of a nut. This will help you make it through any terrible day. This verse is easy to understand, but it strains people's faith so much to think that all is out of God that most “believers” don't even believe it.

They sure don't believe all returns to Him.

Then along comes Isaiah 45:7. Here, God Himself claims to be the Maker of peace and Creator of evil. Being helpfully redundant, God

winds up with, “I the Lord do all these things.”

This is also simple. It is so simple and such a flat place to walk that people who are used to seams and broken chunks of concrete trip over it.



Happy Christian. Believes evil and sin will forever foul the universe.

The problem is that some people have preconceived deceptions about evil and sin. For one thing (the worst thing), they think evil and sin are eternal. That is, they think evil and sin will forever foul the universe. They think evil and sin will damn many of their friends (maybe even their wives, husbands and children) to either eternal torment or annihilation. For another thing, they assume that if God were responsible for evil, He would have to be a sinner. This is a leap of logic.

Latin people refer to it as a *non sequitur*. We say: “It doesn’t follow.”

If God wanted a perfect universe and evil took Him by surprise (let’s say it forced Him from His original plan onto Plan B), then God fell short of accomplishing what He wanted to accomplish. If this were the case, God would be a sinner, for the word “sin” means “to miss the mark.” God would have missed the mark by aiming high (a universe without evil), but having to settle low (dealing as best He could with an unforeseen calamity). Many Christians who would shudder to even think of God as a sinner, actually make Him one by teaching that evil was, originally, never a part of His plans.

But if God meant for evil and sin to come—for an ultimate purpose—then God is not a sinner, because God did not miss the mark. What He wanted to happen, happened. So who is the one who makes God a sinner? The people who paint God as reacting to evil and sin are the ones making Him a sinner. (Wouldn’t this surprise them! But it’s true.) My view, that God meant for this to happen, is the only view that spares Him this stigma.

LET’S HEAR FROM GEORGE

A man named George (this is not his real name; his real name is John) accuses me of heresy because I believe the Scripture that says God creates evil. He accuses me of heresy because I believe God is responsible for everything, including bad things. This is heresy? Believing that God is God and responsible for everything is heresy?

The responsibility of God for everything that occurs is

the only teaching crediting God with true Godhood. It is also quite aligned with Scripture. What is wrong with that? Everything is right with it. The heresy is assuming God can’t talk. The heresy is believing unscriptural things about evil and sin. The heresy is teaching the irresponsibility of God.

Face up to this, George. In whatever measure in your mind God is not responsible for something, anything, He is irresponsible. It has to be so. Irresponsible means “not responsible.” And “not responsible” is the definition of “irresponsible.” So He’s not responsible for evil, you say? Then He’s irresponsible. God is irresponsible.

Chew that. See if you can reduce it to any kind of size where you can get it past your glottis. If you believe it, preach it. You don’t believe God is responsible for evil? Then say: “God is irresponsible.” Say it right now. Say it out loud. Stand in front of a mirror, look at yourself in the mirror, and say it out loud. Say it slowly and separate every word exaggeratingly. Stare at your mouth. “G-o-d i-s i-r-r-e-s-p-o-n-s-i-b-l-e.” Preach it after church. Preach it in church. Preach it under church, because that’s where it belongs. Print flyers, drop them from a helicopter, and make

the world a quagmire of fear, more than what it is.

QUOTE:

In whatever measure God is not responsible for something, He is irresponsible.

You want heresy? How about this, George: Teach the opposite of what God admits to. Because that’s what you’re doing. You are the heretic by assuming instead of believing. You assume things about evil and sin that upend truth. This makes you disbelieve Isaiah 45:7. This is something a heretic would do.

You are the heretic, George.

By saying evil came in the back door and forced God to Plan B, you are the one who makes God a sinner. Is God scrambling to fix a universe gone bad? A scrambling Deity is a sinning Deity, since He obviously aimed too high the first time (a perfect universe without evil, how naive could He get?) and now He has to lower His sights. When evil came, God had to rummage through His Medicine Box for a Fixer/Savior. That’s what you insist, even though you don’t have the guts to say it. This makes God a reactor, not a causer. By trying to protect God from the creation of and the responsibility for evil (He doesn’t need your help, by the way), it is you (an unbeliever, no matter what you call yourself) who make God a sinner, not to mention a bumbling idiot. I know you don’t mean to do this, but that doesn’t matter. You’re doing it anyway.

This is what you get for imposing assumptions on the only and true God.

In better moments than this one, I feel for you. You just want people to like God. And since God does such a lousy job of endearing Himself to those you want to love Him, you and others at your church have dedicated yourselves to helping Him. You have dedicated yourselves to protecting God from His many hasty and careless confessions, such as “I create evil.”

God is not very adept at winning friends and influencing people, is He, George? God confounds His cause by saying He creates the waster to destroy (Isaiah 54:16), He creates the wicked for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4), and creates evil itself. So Isaiah 45:7 must be covered up, ignored or explained away by God’s “friends.” You are one of them, including the quotation marks. *What will be the harm?* you think to yourself. The help should be considerable. Besides, isn’t it the church’s job to present the Deity in the best possible light?

No! It’s the church’s job to get the ✂️👉🙏🕸️🌟🌀 out of the Deity’s way so the Deity can present Himself! I’m sorry I had to use scissors there, but I’m that upset.



The damning word in the sentence, “George assumes evil is sin,” is the word: *assumes*. When asked what is the proper pronunciation of the capital of Kentucky, “Lewisville” or “Louie-ville,” many confident people (including George; I asked him) quickly respond, “Louie-ville.” Unfortunately, the capitol of Kentucky is Frankfort. What a lesson here. George and others have taken their preconceived (and wrong) ideas about God into Scripture. There are things people like George are so sure they know, but don’t. “Knowing” these things, they must then twist or ignore God’s Word to make it fit their assumptions. The same thing happens to pegs and holes of dissimilar construction.

If a person thinks evil is sin, I can see why he or she would fetch a broom and a rug for Isaiah 45:7; God never sins. But if it turns out that people aren’t as smart as they think they are (a novel concept, introduced here for the first time ever) and that evil is not necessarily sin, then these well-meaning “believers” will be able to believe God’s Word, which is another novel concept.

THE MEANING OF EVIL

What does “evil” mean? Is it automatically a wrong thing? No. And there’s the key.

The people God inspired to write the Old Testament wrote it in Hebrew. The word they used in Isaiah 45:7 was “*ra*,” as in, “I create *ra*.” The secret of understanding the meaning of this word is to understand what it meant to the writers. To discover that, we need only look at several other contexts in the Old Testament where the writers used the same word.

A word is defined by its context. For example, when we eat ice-cream, we say “yummy.” Yet when we eat meatloaf (sorry, it’s my least favorite food), we say, “yucky.” This is how kids learn what words mean; they notice how their parents use the words. Without knowing it, the kids are discerning context.

If you want to trick your kids, say “yummy” whenever you eat meatloaf. From that day on, your kids will associate “yummy” with horrible tastes and smells. Follow them through life and jot down their predicaments. If you are a conscienceless person, it will be fun.

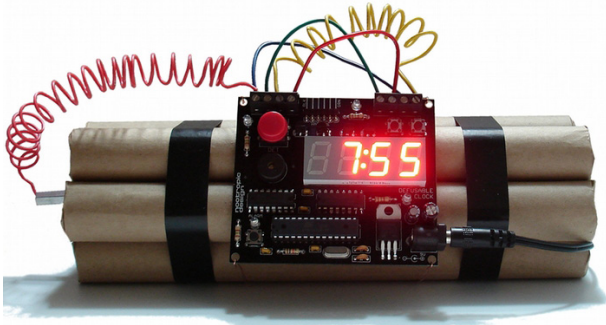


The Hebrew word “*ra*” (translated “evil” 444 times in the King James Version), literally means “to break down, dismantle, rend, tear to pieces, shatter.” That’s all the word means. Period. By itself, evil is neither right nor wrong. It can be either, depending on the circumstance and the user. It is neither, apart from these outside associations. In other words, evil is morally neutral. It’s an indifferent tool, not giving a darn one way or the other who uses it. It is what it is. Being neutral, it is capable of being bent toward either right or wrong purposes. It’s the hammer breaking glass to summon the fire department, and the same hammer breaking glass to rob the jewelry store. Same evil, same breaking, different motive. When considering an evil (breaking) act, motive is everything. It’s only because of our prejudice that we assume it to be sinful.

MOTIVE IS EVERYTHING

Several years ago, a man named Timothy McVeigh parked a blue van alongside a city street in front of the Alfred P.

Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. The van contained a bomb. Minutes later, after McVeigh had fled, the bomb exploded. In the horrible blast, the Murrah building crumbled. Brick upon brick, it fell upon itself. Rent. Dismantled. Torn. Many precious human lives went down with it.



I was in downtown St. Louis one summer day in 1984. As I looked on, a man parked a blue van alongside a city street, next to a large, government building. He and several helpers loaded dynamite into the building. Watching from a safe distance, I saw the men detonate the load. In the horrible blast, the building crumbled. Brick upon brick, it fell upon itself. Rent. Dismantled. Torn. But no human lives were lost.

What was the difference between McVeigh's act, and the act of the crew in St. Louis? I first want you to think

“Evil is an indifferent tool, capable of being bent toward either right or wrong purposes.”

about the similarities: they both did evil to a building. They both brought nearly identical destruction upon a structure of brick. For this is what evil is: destruction, dismantling, shattering. The word by itself has no moral bias. Remember: evil is an indifferent tool, capable of being bent toward either right or wrong purposes.

In each case, what were the motives? McVeigh's intent was to destroy lives. He was bent on revenge, his heart full of hate. McVeigh committed an evil act. But he also sinned; he sinned grievously.

What about the St. Louis crew? They were a special team, hired by the city to destroy an already-dilapidated building. The building was condemned to make room for

a hospital. Did the crew commit evil? Yes. They broke down, dismantled, and rent a building. But did they sin? No. Their intention was to eventually save lives, not destroy them. They were operating under the law. The workers committed an evil act, but they did not sin.

Once again: Allen grabs a hammer and breaks glass. He's a hero. Leon grabs a hammer and breaks glass. He goes to jail. What's the difference? Allen summoned the fire department, Leon robbed the jewelry store. Smashing glass with a hammer is an evil act, and both youths did evil. But their motives were very much different.

Joe killed a man last Thursday. He washed his hands, picked up his paycheck, then went home to dinner. Bryan killed a man the same day. He was arrested, handcuffed, and led away in a squad car. The difference? Joe worked for the state and was assisting in the death of a convicted, serial rapist. Bryan got burned on a drug deal and was stalking a pusher on the street. Both men killed, that is, they took a life. But one committed murder, the other did not. The difference: motive.

Motive. This is what makes an evil act sin or not. This is why God can do evil without sinning. His motives are always right. They are always right because God eventually turns all evil to good.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXTS; MORALLY UNBIASED EVIL

Here are three proof texts showing that evil, by itself, has no moral bias, and that God could (and did) create it without sinning.

Genesis 37:32-33— “And they (Joseph's brothers) sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father; and said, this have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil (*ra*) beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.”

Most of you know the story of Joseph and his brothers. God gave Joseph dreams of glory that made his ten brothers jealous. Besides, his father Jacob loved Joseph best. Joseph's brothers hated Joseph so much they threw him into a pit. While the brothers weren't looking, Midianite traders pulled him out and sold him as a slave to some Ishmaelites. The brothers hid their treachery by dipping Joseph's coat in goat blood, then taking it to their father Jacob and saying: “Joseph must have been killed by a wild animal.” Note Jacob's reaction: “It is my son's coat; an evil (*ra*) beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.”

Ignoring the father's anguish for now, and the fact that 91.6 percent of his sons were jackasses, focus on Jacob's idea of what an evil beast would do. This is important, because a word's context reveals its meaning.

Jacob called the beast he thought had killed his son,



“evil.” What did Jacob associate with evilness? Look at the words I have underlined: “An evil (*ra*) beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.”

An evil beast is one that breaks down, dismantles or rends. This is the opposite of a good beast, such as a lamb, which just stands around looking cute. But is either a lion or a lamb a sinner?

Your new poodle Godzilla may chew your slippers. And you may swat Godzilla’s rump with a newspaper. But you don’t send him to confession, preach him repentance, or call the police. Why? Godzilla hasn’t sinned. He isn’t a sinner, he’s a dumb dog. Has he done an evil? Yes. He has broken down, dismantled, and rent your slippers. But there’s no sin here.

Once again, “sin” means “to miss the mark.” In breaking down, dismantling and rending your slippers, Godzilla hasn’t missed the mark at all. He has done exactly what his poodle software has told him to do. Even though evil animals may kill and eat one another, chew good footwear, and shed on the couch, none are guilty of moral wrongdoing.

Maybe you’re still not convinced. After all, a lion (if that’s what Jacob thought ate Joseph) does seem grouchy. And lambs seem quiet and peaceful. It’s hard for us not to think of a lion as wrong and a lamb as right. But right and wrong are moral terms that cannot be applied to animals. Neither should they be confused with good and evil.

Here is a Scripture passage where a poor, dying cow is called “evil.” This should convince the recalcitrant reader, at last, that evil is not necessarily sin.

Genesis 41:3— “And behold! Seven other young cows are coming up after them from the waterway, evil in appearance and thin of flesh” (Concordant Version of the Old Testament).

It is possible you will recognize from your religious training the seven lean cows of Pharaoh’s dream. These represented seven years of famine for Egypt. I quoted the verse from the Concordant Version of the Old Testament because King James calls the cows “kine.” Somehow, I

didn’t think you would appreciate that word. It’s an archaic plural of “cow.” Besides, in the King James Version, the cows (“kine”) are described as “ill-favored.” But the Hebrew word there is *ra*, the same word the translators made “evil” in 444 other places. Why didn’t they use “evil” here? Because they were wimps. They were KJBabies. They lost their nerve and could not bring themselves to call sick cows “evil.” But according to the Hebrew text, that’s exactly what they were.

The cows were not sinners, obviously. What were they? They were broken-down, dismantled beasts, whose muscles were rent by starvation. They were, literally, “evil in appearance.” They were all this without having done anything wrong.

One reader is still unconvinced. This next quote is for her. I quote from the King James Version:

Numbers 20:5— “And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil (*ra*) place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.”

Here, the translators got brave again. The Israelites complained this thing to Moses when they couldn’t find a salad bar in Sinai. Note what they called the desert. They called it an evil place. *What? The desert sinned?* No. Land can’t sin. Geographical locations do not miss the mark. The Israelites called the place “evil” because they knew what *ra* meant and didn’t confuse it with wrongdoing. The land was broken down; it could not make a seed grow. The land was dismantled; it could nourish neither fig nor vine. The land was rent by rocks and fissures. Ever try putting a Wendy’s on a rock or fissure?

Evil is morally neutral, which is why God can create it and employ it without sinning. But why would God want to create and employ evil? Because without evil, no one can appreciate good. Why would God want to break something?

So that He can heal it and make it stronger and wiser for the experience. ■ —Martin Zender

Seneca Falls, NY Conference



Location: Cayuga Lake State Park, Pavilion #1 and #2
2678 Lower Lake Rd., Seneca Falls NY, 13148

Dates: Friday to Sunday, May 10-12, 2013

Speakers: Dan Sheridan, Clyde Pilkington, Martin Zender

Hotels: Hotel Clarence, 315-712-4000 (upscale but reasonable, in the heart of Seneca Falls; Microtel, 315-539-8428 (small, clean, comfortable, inexpensive).

For cabins and campsites: Cayuga State Park: <http://nysparks.com/parks/123/details.aspx>

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