
The Misuse of Free Will - The Cause of Sin & Evil

Sin & evil are a human invention not a Divine creation

Man was, as we have said, the *image and likeness* of the power that rules all creation; and this likeness to the ruler of all things also extended to man's power of self-determination: man could choose whatever pleased him and was not enslaved to any external necessity. But man was led astray by deception and deliberately drew upon himself that catastrophe which all mortals now share. Man himself invented evil: he did not find it in God. Nor did God make death; it was man himself who, as it were, was the creator of all that is evil.

All who have eyes can enjoy the sunshine, and anyone, if he likes, may deny himself this pleasure simply by closing his eyes. In such a case it is not the sun that withdraws or produces the darkness; rather, man himself puts an obstacle between himself and the sun by closing his eyes. And yet even when the eyes are closed, they cannot cease to function; hence it is the activity of the eyes which bring about the appearance of darkness in man because he deliberately shuts off his vision.

Again, it is like a man who builds a house and does not make any provision for the light to come in. Hence he will obviously be in darkness, since he has deliberately cut himself off from the light.

... sin does not exist in nature apart from free will; it is not a substance in its own right. All of God's creatures are good, and nothing He has made may despised: He made all things *very good* (Gen. 1:31).¹

Each man "makes his own plagues" through his misuse of free will

The Egyptians' free will caused all [the plagues on Egypt] and the impartial justice of God followed their free choices and brought upon them what they deserved. As we follow closely the reading of the text at hand, let us not draw the conclusion that these distresses upon those who deserved them came directly from God, but rather let us observe that each man makes his own plagues when through his own free will he inclines toward these painful experiences. The Apostle says the same thing when talking to such a person: *Your stubborn refusal to repent is only adding to the anger God will have toward you on that day of anger when his just judgments will be made known. He will repay each one as his works deserve.*²

What we are describing is like some destructive and bilious humor which arises in the intestines because of a dissipated life. When the physician induces vomiting by medicines, he does not become the cause of the sickness in the body, but on the contrary it is disorderly eating habits which bring it about; medical knowledge only brought it into the open. In the same way, even if one says that painful retribution comes directly from God upon those who abuse their free will, it would only be reasonable to note that such sufferings have their origin and cause in ourselves.³

¹ *On Virginity (From Glory to Glory, pp.112-3)*

² Romans 2:5ff

³ *Life of Moses 2.86-7 (p.74)*

The frog-like lifestyle of living according to “the passions”

See Exodus 8:1-15 (the plague of frogs)

The breed of frogs is obviously the destructive offspring of the evil which is brought to life from the sordid heart of men as though from some slimy mire. These frogs overrun the houses of those who choose to live the Egyptian life, appearing on the tables, not even sparing the beds, and entering the very storerooms.

One sees in the sordid and licentious life that which is indeed born out of clay and mire and that which, through imitation of the irrational, remains in a form of life neither altogether human nor frog. Being a man by nature and becoming a beast by passion, this kind of person exhibits an amphibious form of life ambiguous in nature. In addition, one will also find the evidences of such an illness, not only on the bed, but also on the table and in the storeroom and throughout the house.⁴

The endless unsatisfying slavery of Egyptian brick making

For this demon who does men harm and corrupts them is intensely concerned that his subjects not look to heaven but that they stoop to earth and make bricks within themselves out of the clay. It is clear to everyone that whatever belongs to material pleasure consists assuredly of earth or water, whether one is concerned with the pleasures of the stomach and the table or with the pleasures of wealth.

The mixture of these elements becomes clay and is so called. Those who yearn after the pleasures of clay and keep on filling themselves with them never keep the space which receives them full; for although it becomes empty again before the next pouring. In the same way the brick maker keeps on throwing yet more clay into the mould while it is constantly being emptied. I think that anyone can easily perceive the meaning of this figure by looking at the appetitive part of the soul.

For if he who fills his desire in one of the things which he pursues should then incline his desire to something else, he finds himself empty again in that regard. And if he should fill himself on this, he becomes empty and a vacant container once more for something else. And we never stop doing this until we depart from this material life.⁵

⁴ *Life of Moses* 2.69-70 (p.70)

⁵ *Life of Moses* 2.59-61 (pp.67-8)