

# God and the cause of evil according to saint augustine

[Religion](#), [God](#)



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## Introduction

Saint Augustine's belief that God is not the cause of evil is a claim that I am unable to completely agree with. This is simply because St. Augustine leaves the answer to what is the cause of evil, if not God, open-ended. Augustine strongly rejects the idea that the divine Creator could be at all responsible for evil. This raises questions as to why humanity, rationally endowed by its Creator, would choose evil. What is the cause of perversion of the will?

## Manicheism and Free Will

When coming across St. Augustine's philosophy, many have a difficult time justifying his ideas because of his own contradiction throughout his years as a philosopher. Initially his ideas were framed around the " Manichean propaganda". St. Augustine was fascinating with their liberty to criticize Scriptures, like the Old Testament, with such freedom "... they held chastity and self-denial in honor". In later years, "... Its feeble cosmology and metaphysics had long since failed to satisfy him, and the astrological superstitions springing from the credulity of its disciples offended his reason"

(Augustine (354-430 C. E.). When alleviating himself from the influence of Manicheism this oppose his past actions and reason for scorning the Church and disputes with Catholic believers.

In early years when he had been heavily influenced by Manicheism, Augustine seems to have been optimistic the belief of free will. He used free will as reasoning to reconcile his belief that God did not cause even. “ Unlike other aspects of creation, which followed God’s plan without fail, human beings were allowed to determine their own actions.. he allowed human beings freely to choose to believe in Him.. because human beings have free choice.. The possibility of evil, but He was not and is not Himself the cause of it” (A Short History of Philosophy). In other words, God gave humans the gift of free will, meaning free choice and therefore God himself cannot be responsible to have caused those to sin.

## **Happiness and the Connection to the Divine**

Augustine’s position in God’s role in human beings achieving happiness is clear. “ The end, the goal of human existence, he tells us, is contemplation of God in awe and reverence. This and this alone, he insists, will make us happy” (A Short History of Philosophy). Basically Augustine is stating that as long as you give recognition and have a connection to the divine you will be guaranteed happiness.

One criticism of Augustine here would be the need for a fuller clarification from him on what his thought process was concerning the more controversial aspects of Manichean doctrine, in particular since he states in various works

that he never fully assented to Manichean teaching and was waiting for fuller truths to emerge from their initial presentations of doctrine (Saint Augustine). However, despite that lingering drawback the considerations in this critique are recognition of some of the interesting questions that this part of Confessions has stimulated and can bring to the forefront to the observant reader.

## **The Causes of Sin**

Augustine strongly rejects the thought that God could be responsible for evil. He believes the sole cause of evil is simple “the created” which freely turns away from the immutable good. The question then arises, why a rational will endowed by its creator with all its natural capacity should choose evil, preferring the lesser good to eternal perfection? Thinking carefully, it seems that we can find no cause of sin. All explanation by causality would integrate the evil will into metaphysical structures of the universe and bring us to the first cause as the ultimate explanation of evil (Does evil have a cause?)

A similar problem emerges in connection with God’s unlimited power and the idea that evil wills have no cause. Even the sin of fallen humans and those sinners themselves add in some way to God’s perfectly ordered universe, and yet, in no way does this perfect order depend on the existence of those sins or sinners whatsoever (Does evil have a cause?). Augustine’s claim that there is no cause of an evil will since it is “nothing” seems clearly false in view of Augustine’s earlier insistence in the same work that God is in total control of everything, a position that includes all beings and events.

Therefore, Augustine cannot successfully claim that God possesses both

great power and perfect goodness, and when there is a turning point, great power is the doctrine that Augustine will maintain at all costs. In conclusion, Augustine's determination not to bend the belief of God's absolute control over the universe left him in a position of subsequent difficulties with the idea of God's perfect goodness.