

Why Were Dangerous Animals Created?

David Snoke

Nature is filled with many examples of violent and ferocious creatures. Many Christians cannot imagine that God would create such things in an unspoiled, "very good" world. To explain their existence, some Christians hold to a view that demons created such things, while other Christians hold to a view that all such things were created as a response to human sin. The latter view typically entails belief in a recent creation. I argue that violent and dangerous creatures are affirmed as good creations of God in the Bible, and discuss the biblical rationale for their creation.

My grandfather loved the outdoors, and often taught me camping tips and facts of nature. One of his favorite sayings was "NITRIC" – "Nature In The Rough Is Cruel." By this acronym, he warned every woodsman to remember that nature, real nature, can treat you in the same

that the world created by God was “very good,” while these things seem obviously “bad.”

Recently, the creationist movement was stimulated by the scientific analysis of the Intelligent Design movement, represented by authors such as Michael Behe,² William Dembski,³ and Phillip Johnson.⁴ The Intelligent Design movement is faced with a dilemma, however. Do we point to all life as examples of good design, or do we exclude some types of life as bad? If we do, we risk excluding other things that do not fit the preconceptions that many

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species, they just “twisted” them to evil behaviors. This explanation indicates a lack of knowledge of the types of things found in creation. Some species, such as sharks and viruses, are perfectly designed killing machines. They could not have had other behavior without being entirely re-designed from scratch. Like turning an Oldsmobile into a heat-seeking missile, “twisting” a shark from a friendly creature to its present form would amount to a new creation. The Bible in no place credits demons with the power to do any such thing. According to Scripture, demons could not even light a fire when asked (1 Kings 18). To give them such credit nearly amounts to demon worship.

God Takes Credit

If not demons, then we have only two other choices—either (1) God created these dangerous species, or (2) God is not in control of the world. The second choice amounts to either atheism or dualism. The Bible, on the other hand, is full of statements which give God the credit for creating all things, including all kinds of cruel things. In the latter chapters of the book of Job, for example, God takes credit for creating several things which may surprise us.

- ◆ God takes credit for the “birth pangs” of wild goats (39:3), far from the influence of any humans. This is a representative example of animal suffering without any human influence.
- ◆ God takes credit for creating the “ostrich” which he “did not endow with wisdom,” so that she is “cruel to her young” (39:16–17). This is a representative example of another type of “natural evil”—creatures which neglect their young or even eat them. God claims this behavior as his own creation. One also can include in this category all types of behaviors which imply overproduction and inefficiency in propagation, such as animals in rut which attempt to copulate with the wrong thing (such as a dog on a person’s leg), animal homosexuality, and all types of creatures which disperse seed in places where it will never grow up.
- ◆ God takes credit for creating creatures like the eagle, whose babies “drink blood” (39:30). This is a representative example of carnivorous animals. The carnivorousness is not an “aberrant” behavior of the

creatures, but part of their behavior from birth. Besides the eagle, God mentions the lion, which hunts its prey (38:39), and the raven (38:41), which eats only dead creatures, as creatures of which he is proud.

- ◆ God takes credit for the warhorse, which “strikes terror” into the hearts of those around it (39:20). The horse loves warfare (39:25). This is a representative of animals which not only practice violence, but seem to love it. Cats which seem to enjoy torturing mice also fall into this category.
- ◆ God takes credit for creating the “leviathan,” which has “rows of sharp teeth” (41:14). This is a representative example of animals that are designed for killing.

In Isa. 45:6–7, God also talks of his creative acts:

I am the Lord, and there is no other.
I form the light and create darkness,
I bring prosperity and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things ...
Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker,
to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground.
Does the clay say to the potter, “What are you making?” ...
It is I Who made the earth and created mankind upon it.
My own hands stretched out the heavens;
I marshaled their starry hosts.

Note that God says that he creates “evil.” This word is translated “disaster” in the New International Version (NIV), but is the exact same Hebrew word as “evil” elsewhere in the Old Testament, and therefore I have used that word in the above passage. The translators of the NIV chose “disaster” because many theologians have argued that the “evil” which God claims to create here is “natural evil,” not human sin. I agree that human sin is not in view here as the “evil” which God has created. But God does claim direct responsibility for the creation of natural evil, that is, things in nature which terrorize us.

This type of passage is common in Scripture. The Psalmist, for example, praises God for his acts of creation:

He appointed the moon for seasons,
the sun knows its going down. You make darkness, and it is night,
in which all the beasts and creatures of the forest creep about.
The young lions roar after their prey,
and seek their food from God (Ps. 104:19–21).

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Again, carnivorous animals are included in the things which God appointed along with the sun and moon. God neither apologizes for making these things, nor weeps over them—he glories in them.

The Fall-Recreation Theory

Although Scripture has many passages in which God takes credit for these things, we react against this claim. How can a good God make such creatures? In the beginning, God made all things “very good.” How can such creatures be good?

Many Christians answer this question by saying that God did create them, but they are not “very good.” In this argument, God did not make these creatures in the beginning; the world of Genesis 1 knew nothing of them. Instead, God created them only after the Fall of humankind into sin.⁷ All of these creatures came into being as part of the curse on the ground that God gives in Gen. 3:17. Because of this, God is not ultimately responsible for these terrible things; humans are. All of these things are part of God’s response to human sin.

Romans 5:12 which says “death came through sin” is sometimes used to support this view. Carnivorous animals, it is argued, could not have existed before death. Romans 8:20–22 also is used to support this view, which says that “the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” The argument is made that the “subjugation” of the creation to futility could only have come about because of human sin.

While this is a common view among Bible-believing Christians, it has several major problems. First, like the Gap theory, which says that natural evil was created by demons in a major war that Scripture just happens to brush past in going from Gen. 1:1 to 1:2, this view also inserts a major event into a passage in Scripture that, on the face of it, says no such thing. The sum total of the effect on the natural world mentioned in the curse of Genesis 3 is that the ground will produce thorns and thistles. There is no mention of the creation of entirely new species like sharks and lions which are designed to kill, no mention of new species like larvae and parasites which cause suffering, no mention of any major change in the natural world at all. Adam and Eve depart from the garden into a world that—for all we can tell—is pretty much the same as it always was. The picture of the curse is an exile into a pre-existing “outer darkness.” This theme of the curse as an outward motion runs throughout Scripture (e.g., Exod. 29:14, Lev. 10:4, 16:10, Num. 15:35, Matt. 25:30, Heb. 13:12–13, Rev. 22:15).

Second, in the most straightforward reading, Genesis 1 describes the creation of all of the animals and plants we

know. There are not two creation stories in the Bible, one for the good things and one for the bad things—there is only one creation story. The natural world is filled with numerous harsh and cruel things, but those who hold to the Fall-recreation view would say that the Bible has a remarkable silence about the creation of such things. There are millions of carnivorous species in the world today. If all of these carnivorous species came into being only at the Fall, then we must imagine a creation event nearly as dramatic as the original creation. Yet all the Bible mentions when Adam and Eve are cursed is that thistles will grow in the fields.

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Some would say that the things created in Genesis 1 are the same species we know today as carnivorous and cruel or stupid creatures, but at the Fall they were “twisted” only a small bit to obtain their present forms. As discussed above, this view shows only ignorance about the degree of specialization of the design of carnivorous and parasitical creatures. To change a tapeworm from a friendly, non-parasitical creature into its present form is akin to changing an Oldsmobile into a heat-seeking missile. Can we even imagine a nonparasitical tapeworm?

Third, Genesis 1 specifically includes “great sea monsters” among the things created before the Fall (Gen. 1:21, KJV). Some translations mute this name to be “great sea creatures,” but the Hebrew really is better translated “sea monsters,” or “great reptile monsters.” This Hebrew word is equated with another Hebrew word, the “leviathan,” in at least two places in Scripture, Isa. 27:1 and Ps. 74:13–14. Hebrew poetry often acts as a dictionary, by saying the same thing twice in different words, a stylistic device known as parallelism. In these two passages, the “great sea monster” is parallel with the “leviathan.” This is important, because as we have seen in Job 41, the leviathan is clearly described as a ferocious carnivore with rows of sharp teeth. While some may want to say that chapters 38–41 of the book of Job are speaking of God’s creation of animals after the Fall, at least one of these creatures is specifically mentioned in Genesis 1 as existing before the Fall.



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We are twisting Scripture if we try to make the “monsters” of Genesis 1 anything less than monstrous. Some Christians will fight all day for the literal meaning of the word “day” in this chapter, but they nevertheless try to avoid the most natural meaning of the word for “sea monster.”

The presence of the sea monsters is less surprising if we understand the significance of the presence of the sea in Genesis 1. To many of us, the sea is a wonderful place to spend a vacation, but to the ancient Hebrews, the sea was a place of dread, not only because of the power of the waves and storms, but also because of the lurking sea monsters (which may have included sharks and whales as well as reptilian creatures). The sea is never presented in a positive light; it is always the instrument of destruction, from Noah’s flood to the destruction of Pharaoh’s army to the storms which nearly killed Jonah and Paul. In the book of Revelation, when the wonderful New Jerusalem is unveiled, the striking statement is made “there will no longer be any sea” (21:1). This may disappoint ocean lovers, but the symbolism comes from the Hebrew view of the sea: the sea represents terror, and in Heaven there will be no terror.

The message of the creation story, which is told not only in Genesis 1 but throughout the rest of Scripture, is that God created that terrifying sea, but he is sovereign over it and holds it back. All of the following passages have this theme, God created the sea as a terrifying force but told it “thus far you may come and no further”: Job 38:8, Ps. 33:7, Ps. 93:4, Prov. 8:29, and Jer. 5:22. The sea monsters are part of this terror, constantly mentioned in connection with the sea. See Job 7:12, Ps. 74:13, Ps. 104:25, Isa. 27:1, Hab. 1:14, and Amos 9:3.

In other words, we may read Genesis 1 with modern eyes and see it as an idyllic, peaceful world, but for the ancient Hebrew, the presence of the sea in Genesis 1 gave a very different picture. It said that the dangerous things of the world were under God’s control. The sea and the sea monsters were created by God and ruled by him.

Fourth, if the argument for this view is that animal death and suffering could not deserve the pronouncement of “very good” in Genesis 1, then how can they be good

now? Yet Scripture teaches that all things are good.

Martin Luther said:

For all that God made “was very good” (Genesis 1:31) and is good to this day, as the apostle says in 1 Timothy 4:4, “Every creature of God is good,” and in Titus 1:15, “To the pure all things are pure.” It therefore becomes vain, evil and noxious, etc., without its fault and from the outside, namely, in this way: because man does not judge and evaluate it rightly and because he enjoys it in a wrong way.⁸

As Luther says, Scripture never teaches that God says “now things are not good.” Rather, in the most direct reading, Genesis 1 deals with the creation of the things we know now, and these things are very good. Scripture supports this view with statements that the things which are created testify to us about God. Romans 1:20 says: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” If the things in nature today are “bad,” does that then mean that God’s nature is bad? If some are bad and some are good, how do we know the difference, and glorify God for some and not for others? It would seem from this passage that *all* things testify about God’s nature. In the speech made by God at the end of Job discussed above, it is also hard to miss how God vaunts the *goodness* of the creatures he mentions, such as the blood-sucking eagle babies and the terrible-toothed leviathan. God does not say such things are bad. Rather, he humbles Job by pointing out the greatness of these things, in aspects such as their power, diversity, and unique abilities.

What about the passages from Romans used to support the Fall-recreation view? As stated above, Rom. 8:20–23 says that the whole creation has been subjected to “futility.” Nothing in this passage connects this futility to the sin of Adam and Eve, however. In fact, the exact language of Rom. 8:22 favors the view that it has been subjected to futility since the beginning. This verse says: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” The phrase “right up to the present time” is best translated as “all the way up to the present time”; in other

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words, “from the beginning up to now,” *not* “from some intermediate time up till now.”

Reading the passage this way implies that futility has been part of the creation since the beginning. Is there any other scriptural support for this? Yes, in the famous book of futility, Ecclesiastes. The first chapter begins with a litany of statements about the futility of the world. “Futility,” also translated “vanity,” refers to the fact that things which are done get undone—things strive for life but die, people work for money but lose it, etc. Ecclesiastes 1 gives a list of various types of futility, which include “the sun rises and then it sets” and “the streams flow to the sea, but the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.” What is significant here is that these things—the alternation of day and night, and the balance of the land and the seas—are present in Genesis 1, *before* the Fall. It is only at the end of Revelation, in the New Heaven and Earth, that there is no darkness and no sea. In the world of Genesis 1, these futility elements exist from the beginning. Futility, or vanity, does not imply badness. Instead, the word for futility (“*havel*” in Hebrew) refers to something which has no concrete weight in itself, something which is temporary and fleeting, not evil. Vain things become evil only if we grasp them too hard, instead of grasping onto the Creator.

Genesis 1 presents a picture of futility from the very beginning.

Another futility symbol in Genesis 1 is the grass of the field. The grass, specifically mentioned in Gen. 1:11-12, is also used in numerous passages (e.g., 2 Kings 19:26; Pss. 37:2, 103:15; Isa. 40:6, 51:12; Matt. 6:30, and 1 Pet. 1:24) to symbolize futility, as something which shoots up and dies quickly. (Although several different Hebrew words are used for grass, these are all equated in Isa. 37:27 as plants which dry up quickly.)

If we add in the evidence of carnivorous creatures like the “great sea monsters,” Genesis 1 presents a picture of futility from the very beginning. This does not make the world bad, however. Ecclesiastes bemoans the fact that humankind is trapped in the cycles of futility in this world. As discussed in the next section, if humans are exempted from these cycles by having eternal life, then the futility of the world should not bother us.

As mentioned above, Rom. 5:12 and a similar passage, 1 Cor. 15:21, are also used to argue for a re-creation at the

Fall. But these verses, which say “death came from sin” and “death came through a man,” do not have animal death in view at all. This is clear in the last phrase of Rom. 5:12: “death came through sin, and in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned.” The same is true of the 1 Corinthians 15 passage, which goes on to say: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.” The contrast is between people who die and people who belong to Christ and therefore live forever.

Animal Death and Human Death

Many Christians believe that no animals died before the Fall, although the Bible does not teach this doctrine explicitly anywhere. If no animals died, then there clearly would be a problem with overpopulation on an earth millions of years old if the creatures multiplied as they presently do. This is one reason why many Christians insist on a young earth, with only a few days before the Fall of Adam and Eve. This explanation does not completely solve the problem, however, because some species of insects are so prolific that if they multiplied at present rates, they would have covered the earth six feet deep by the end of one week, if none of them died. Nevertheless, if one rejects the possibility of animal death before the Fall, the young-earth view looks much more attractive than the old-earth view.

The basic argument against animal death before the Fall is that death is bad, and therefore could not have existed in a “very good” world. This brings us to the core of the problem. On what basis do we say that animal death, suffering, and stupidity are “bad” and therefore a good God could not have made them?

The primary argument seems to consist of anthropomorphization. We imagine ourselves in the place of the animal or insect, and shudder to think of such things happening to *us*. But we are not animals. Is it valid to say that what is bad for people is bad for animals?

Many in the modern world would certainly say so. But this is because the modern world has lost the sense of the distinctiveness of humans as made in the image of God. Scholars now argue that whatever animals do is natural for humans, too—if animals fornicate in public or kill their young, then so may we. By extension, one may argue that it should be normal to defecate in public, eat one’s mate (after all, some spiders do it), fight over food, etc.

The Bible stands against this behavior. Starting with Genesis 1, the Bible creates a clear distinction between people and animals. People have the image of God (1:27) and have dominion over all the plants and animals (1:28). This separateness includes the hope of eternal physical life. In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve are given the Tree of Life which they may eat of and live forever; in the New Testa-

ment, those who are in Christ are promised a new eternal body (1 Cor. 15:35-44).

Notice that eternal physical life was not automatic and natural for Adam and Eve. They had to eat of a special tree. By implication, if they did not eat of it, they would die by natural causes. This principle is stated explicitly by God in Gen. 3:22, when he says: "And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.'" At the end of the Bible, when people are given eternal physical life again in Heaven, they once again eat of the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:2).

No animals ate of the Tree of Life. Why should we assume, then, that they had eternal life? If death was natural for Adam and Eve, if they did not eat of the Tree, then why should it not be natural for animals? This is then the curse on humankind – to be denied the Tree and treated just like the animals. Psalm 49 makes this explicit: "Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish" (49:12) and "A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish" (49:20).

People were not meant to die, because God ordained a special role for people. People have eternal spirits; animals do not. Our reaction against animal death, then, comes from imagining ourselves in their place and feeling that for *us*, death and suffering like that would be a great evil. We know in our hearts that we were meant for something more. Death and suffering are "futility," and while futility is natural for animals, *we* revolt against it. As 1 Corinthians 15 teaches, g.out15g."g.y

Many people say they do not believe that God is wrathful, but on what basis do they say that? Is it because nature is so gentle and kind that the God who created nature could not have done and said all of those wrathful things in the Bible? On the other hand, some people who believe in the Bible say that they do not believe God would create cruel things. On what basis do they say that? Is it because of the complete lack of cruelty and wrath in the Bible? We have two things which agree completely – the Bible and nature – in giving us a stark picture of God’s wrathful nature, but instead of accepting them, we reject both. On what basis, then, do we reject them? Merely our own wishes? If religion is about believing what is true, not just what we wish was true, then surely we must swallow the har

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when he said: “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Matt. 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35). In the Garden of Eden, marriage was a central theme of the whole story!

We therefore cannot use pictures of Heaven to argue what creation looked like before the Fall. Humankind did not lose Heaven at the Fall; they were never in it. Yet God is loving, because the door is not slammed shut. We still can reach Heaven through the work of Jesus, who solved our main problem—the wrath of God.

Conclusions

The view pressed on us by both Scripture and nature is that God created all kinds of scary things to demonstrate his wrath and power from the very beginning. If humankind had never fallen, we could have looked at these things from a distance and not have been subject to them like the animals. Having fallen, we are cast into that world along with the animals.

The clear message of Genesis 1 is that all creatures of God are very good even if they frighten us with their ability to terrorize. There is no other creation story in Scripture, whether in a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, or in a gap between Gen. 3:24 and 4:1. The creation story of Genesis 1 is the creation story of *our* world; the passage goes to great lengths to say that God created all of the plants and animals at this time, including scary ones like great sea monsters.

Does this change our view of God? Only for the better. Proverbs 1:7 defines the beginning of wisdom as the fear of God. Jeremiah 5:22 defines what the fear of God is:

“Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.”

That sea which appears in Genesis 1, along with all the other things created, should cause us to “tremble.”

Does this mean that we should not strive against disease and death, then, because they were created by God? Absolutely not. People were meant to live forever as physi-

cal beings, and every effort to diminish human suffering and death is a recognition of the holiness and specialness of human life. We have no equivalent mandate to preserve the life of every animal, however. If all death is evil, it would seem to follow unavoidably that we must fight against all animal death, becoming vegetarians and teaching sharks not to kill. The Bible gives a very different view, however. According to the Scriptures, we have dominion over the animals and plants, using them wisely and not wasting their lives, but we may kill them and let them exhibit their killer nature. The great evil is not the suffering and death in nature, but our own sin which causes us to act like animals and suffer the judgment of dying like them.

The young-earth creationist and the atheist Darwinist have in common their belief that God would never create killer things. The atheist removes God from the picture to account for the natural evils of this world, while the young-earth creationist removes the record of killer animals from the picture to preserve the goodness of God. Both of these views need to interact with a fully biblical picture of God, as he is revealed in Scripture and in nature—powerful, uncontrollable, and able to pour out extreme violence, yet also just, merciful, and able to bless beyond all our expectations. **

Notes

- ¹C. G. Hunter, *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001). This book reviews at length the issue of natural evil as treated by Christians in the past two centuries, including Christian evolutionists.
- ²M. J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).
- ³W. A. Dembski and M. Behe, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
- ⁴P. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IN: InterVarsity Press, 1993).
- ⁵For example, this was precisely the line of attack taken by Gerald Massey in response to a talk by Owen Gingrich on March 14, 1997 at the Philosophy Department of the University of Pittsburgh, which I attended, in which Gingrich described the fine tuning in the structure of stars. Johnson and Behe were presented with the same line of argument recently on *Firing Line* on national television.
- ⁶For example, see G.H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages* (Revell, 1900), reprinted in several subsequent editions.
- ⁷For example, H. M. Morris, *The Twilight of Evolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963).
- ⁸Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, W. Pauck, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961).
- ⁹Hunter, *Darwin's God*.

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