

My half-baked solution to the problem of evil

The world is an absurd series of meaningless and random events. These events are not driven by supernatural forces, but rather chance, human will, and scientific laws. Events are meaningless in the sense that they unfold through a natural and unwavering mechanism that, in my world view, was established by God. Events become meaningful once human perception becomes involved and forms a reaction to it.

Now, human suffering in this world can be attributed to three causes: inequality, evil, and certain natural phenomena. Philosophers argue that if God is benevolent and omnipotent, he would act to stop inequality, evil, and certain natural phenomena. Hence the theist's problem of evil; if God is all-loving and all-powerful, why is there human suffering in the world? My argument in response to this borrows from Jesus, the free-will defence, the soul-making thesis, existentialism, and even deism.

Why doesn't God act to intervene in human inequality? I find this question absurd. It makes sense in a theoretical way, but practically speaking it is incomprehensible. Inequality, which has placed millions in poverty, is a result of an unfair distribution of resources that encourages the rich to become richer and the poor to become poorer. Jesus recognised this, and his message emphasised personal responsibility towards the poor and marginalised. He said that the way that you treat the least in society is the same way that you treat God. As a collective humanity has allowed mass inequality to exist and flourish, and we currently lack the political will to stop it. To sit back and suppose that a moral God has to intervene and stop all inequality is not only incredibly hypocritical; it is contributing to the problem. Do we reasonably expect God to strike down an employer who discriminately hands out pay, the world leader who does nothing to stop a third-world country starving itself to death, or a company who pays handsomely for European imports but unfairly deals with African importers? While it is very easy to like the idea that a God should intervene to stop all suffering that comes from inequality, all of us who live in western countries would be surprised of how much this constricts our behaviour. Whether in a small way or a large way, we all contribute to the problem of wealth inequality and poverty. Blaming God for its existence is dishonest, and reinforces the horrible idea that it is out of our control.

Why doesn't God stop acts of evil? Again, my answer will resort to common sense. For God to stop all acts of evil, we would have to be willing to forgo free will. In another post I argued that the free-will defence is inadequate to answer the question of evil, but to a certain extent it does have a valid point. The criticism that God should have created human beings that always freely choose to do good is redundant, as I don't believe that God has complete foreknowledge of future choices.

Furthermore, acts of human evil are to a large extent attributable to a failing of the social structure. Tens of thousands of suicides/homicides in America every year could be prevented with strict gun control. Genocide would be non-existent in an Africa that had responsible Governments, and a world that cared about human suffering in the third world. These are only two examples, but they rest on the basic idea that acts of human evil are greatest when states are either unable to control the aggression of its population, or too authoritarian and are responsible for the aggression. To blame God for the existence of human evil is to contribute to the belief that we as a society are unable to stop a great deal of it. Instead of using the failings of this world to justify an atheistic worldview, let's use the failings of this world to motivate us to find solutions to them.

Also, it can be said that in a lot of cases human suffering is not entirely a bad thing. Without suffering humanity would be unable to develop endurance, maturity, resolve, bravery, etc. I realise that this is not able to be applied to suffering universally, but it must be said that the milder kinds of suffering can have their uses. And this ties in to where I believe God does intervene within the world; in our hearts. God can give endurance during times of suffering, he can give bravery in the moment of death, and he can give us motivation to do what is moral. Jesus once remarked that God is a spirit, and so we should worship him in spirit. I think it is fair to add that God also helps us in spirit.

Why doesn't God stop natural disasters? There is no more senseless cause of suffering than natural disasters. The South-East Asian tsunami, the cyclone in Burma, and the earthquake in China are all very recent examples of entire towns of people being slaughtered by water and debris. They all died not from an abuse of free will, or the failing of a society, but being in the wrong place in the wrong time. Why didn't God stop this from happening? This is the point where I believe every Christian has to say, despairingly, "I don't know." The world is too absurd to be able to explain, and the mysteries of this life are never revealed with ease. If the last two thousand years is anything to go by, it is clear that for whatever reason God does not violate the scientific laws that this world operates around. It is true that if he were to intervene in the physical world the scientific laws we know to exist

would cease to be laws; and the stable and knowable (theoretically speaking) ordering of the universe would disintegrate. What will remain unknown is why this ordering of the universe is not more benevolent in its own right. The 'Old Testament' solution says that God used the disasters as an instrument to punish people, and it is still being advocated by some in the religious sphere. However, isn't that view as malevolent and vicious as the disasters themselves?

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