

God and Suffering

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“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” **Romans 5:12** and in addition; **Romans 8:19-23**

All good people are appalled by the sufferings of the innocent. When an innocent person is struck by a painful disease, tortured or murdered we naturally feel sadness, helplessness and often rage. Many people claim that such suffering is a proof that God does not exist. Their argument goes like this; If God is all good and all powerful, then such a God would not permit unnecessary suffering, yet we constantly observe unjust suffering. So the conclusion; at least one of these premises about God must be false.

Either God is not all good, He is not all powerful, or He just does not exist. What’s wrong with these arguments?

First, let’s examine what we mean when we say that God would not permit unjust suffering. There are two categories of suffering;

1. Suffering caused by human beings which we can call moral evils.
2. Sufferings caused by nature. For example, earthquakes or cancer.

Free will explains how God could be good and allow moral evil. Because God has given people free will, they are free to behave against God’s will. The fact that they do evil does not prove that God is not good. In addition, if there was no God then there would be no absolute standard of good. Every judgment presupposes to us that there is a standard. Then that’s true of our moral judgements also. What is our standard for judging evil to be evil? The most we could say about evil; if there were no God than we in our subjective tastes did not like it when people did certain things to other people. We would not have a basis for saying an act was bad when we did not like it. So the problem of human evil existing only if God exists.

As for the **Natural suffering**; that appears to be a more difficult question. We see an innocent child suffer from an incurable disease. We complain that we don’t like it. We feel it is wrong. “It is so unfair and this should not happen.” Understandable, but illogical unless you believe in God. For if you do not believe in God, your subjective feelings are the only basis upon which you can object to natural suffering. Yes, we do not like it, but not liking something is evidence of God not existing? Think about it, it is just the opposite. Our judgments of good and evil, natural as well as human presupposes God is the standard. If there is not God the there is no good nor evil. There is just nature doing what it does and if nature is all that is there, then there is absolutely no need to explain why one person suffers and another does not.

Unjust suffering is a problem only because we have a sense of what is just and unjust.. But where does this sense come from? Certainly not from nature. There is certainly nothing just about nature. Nature is only about survival. What in other words does it mean for suffering to be unnecessary or wrong? How is it determined and against what standard? Your private standard means nothing. As does my private standard means nothing. We can talk meaningfully about suffering being unnecessary or wrong only if we have an underlying belief that there is a standard of right and wrong that objectively exists. **And if that standard exists, that means there is a God.**

More over the believer in God has an incomparably easier time than the atheist psychologically as well as logically in dealing with the problem of natural suffering. **If you accept that a good God exists, then it is possible to believe that this God will set these things right. And if not in this world, then in the next.** For the atheist on the other hand; no suffering is ever set right and there is no ultimate justice. The bad win and the good suffer. Earthquakes and cancer kill and it is the end of the story. Literally! And if nature is all there is, then how can a sensitive person remain sane in a world in which tsunamis wipe out whole towns, evil men torture and murder innocent victims and disease attacks people indiscriminately?

The answer is; It is not possible! Is that how you want to live?