

Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering and Evil?

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I. Introduction

- A. Examples
- B. The teaching of the Bible
 1. The Christian is to oppose evil and have compassion on those who suffer.
 2. God opposes to evil and has compassion on those who suffer.
 3. God created a completely good world, but the world that we live in is far from what God desires. It is a fallen and broken world.
 4. God has been at work in the world, bringing about a solution to the problem of evil and suffering.
- C. The problem:
 - If God is all-powerful he could prevent suffering.
 - If God is all-good he would prevent suffering unless it serves a greater purpose.
 - Much suffering does not seem to serve a greater purpose.
 - Then why does God permit it?
- D. The crucial questions: *Can I trust God in spite of what I do not understand?*
 1. The personal question: *Will I trust God?*
[Note: For the atheist there is no God who will help him through suffering, nor is there any hope beyond suffering and death.]
 2. The philosophical question: *Is it reasonable to trust God?*
- E. To answer the crucial questions, partial explanations are important.

II. Partial Explanations

- A. Creation is good and beautiful.
- B. Our world suffers from the consequences of the Fall. (Genesis 1-3)
- C. Suffering is sometimes [not always] punishment for sin. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 & John 9:1-3)
- D. Pain plays an important role in the biological order by protecting creatures from bodily injury.
- E. We have significant freedom of the will. Much evil and suffering is the result of human choices.
 1. Direct inflicting of suffering
 2. Indirect inflicting of suffering (e.g. poverty, much disease)
- F. The consequences of one's actions go beyond the individual.
- G. God's aim for us
 1. Our relationship with God (A severe mercy, Psalm 107)
 2. Moral and spiritual character development (James 1:2-4)
[Our fallen world is a good place for accomplishing these purposes]
- H. God brings redemption to us through Jesus' suffering
- I. Eternal perspective: fulfillment of justice, the end of suffering

III. The Problem That Yet Remains

- A. The partial explanations do not explain all instances of suffering.
- B. An atheist's argument against the existence of the God of the Bible*
 1. There are instances of intense suffering that do not bring about a better world and which an all-powerful God could have prevented.
 2. An all-good God would prevent any instance of intense suffering if he could and if its prevention would bring about a better world.
Therefore:
 3. God is not all good (if he even exists).

IV. Response

- A. The argument presumes that right and wrong are determined by what has the best result.
The alternative: Right and wrong can be independent of results.
E.g. "The end does not justify the means."
- B. God will not (cannot?) act contrary to His character
 1. God will not do what is evil.
 2. God will not do what is unjust.
- C. A possibility: *Perhaps God does what he does, or allows what he allows, because he always does what is just.*
- D. Justice is important in God's actions.
 1. The Fall: The consequence of sin is death and separation from God.
 2. The Cross: Jesus' death is required for our salvation.
 3. Satan has limited but real power in a fallen world.
 4. Faith has a role in the manifesting of God's power in a fallen world
A speculation (but one consistent with biblical teaching) *When God gave humankind the freedom to do right or wrong, this meant that we would need to live with the consequences of our actions (even if the consequences are terrible).*
- E. Natural "evil"
A biblical thesis: *We live in a world of brokenness and suffering that comes about as a just consequence of the fall.*
- F. A question: Does this mean that God will never intervene to reduce or prevent our suffering?
 1. No, in the Bible and in human experience, God often does spare people from suffering.
 2. But it does imply that when God intervenes, he must have special reasons for it.

V. Final Notes

- A. Star Trek
- B. A boy with terminal cancer
- C. God cares about each person. He offers hope beyond suffering and death.

* Modified from an argument by philosopher William Rowe.