

So What About...?- Part 4: The Problem of Evil and Suffering

I. ME

- A. Welcome/Online
- B. So What About Cards... continue conversation
- C. We follow where the evidence leads not where we hope it leads
 1. Looking at clues and reasons for believing.
 2. The evidence seems to be stacking in favor of this actually being something worthwhile.
- 3. The Problem of God- Mark Clark**

II. WE

A. We all have a belief system

1. How you answer- Why there is nothing instead of something.
2. Why you do what you do and why you don't do what you don't do (even though sometimes you still do it... next week)
3. It's what guides your life and how you make sense of your life.

B. Every belief system has to answer the question of evil and suffering.

1. It's really THE big question.
2. Why is there evil and suffering and what do we do about it?
3. It's a question every belief system has to answer... you can't just ignore it.
4. What's your answer?
5. Each of us must wrestle with it and see if our belief system can stand up to the challenge.

C. Even so... It is a huge problem many people have with Xianity.

1. Scottish philosopher **David Hume** asked in the 18th century, **"Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able to but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Why then is there evil?"**
2. Fair question... and objection that has been around for 1000's of years.

D. But that question has faulty reasoning behind it... **Timothy Keller-** **"Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one."**

1. **"If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know."**

E. But it's not just an academic or philosophical question is it?

1. **The question of evil and suffering is intensely personal.**
2. We have all experienced evil and suffering and it's a question we have all asked in some way.

F. One of my earliest memories is sitting at a funeral for my 9 year old friend who was hit while walking home from school by a drunk driver... if he had lived he would be my brother-in-law today.

1. I've been with families when they are in the first days of unexpectedly losing loved ones...

G. Philosophy and deep logical arguments don't really do much in those times.

- H. So I want to do something a bit different.
- I. Look at how some major belief systems answers the problem of evil and suffering and then we'll look at how Xianity handles it.
1. A bit of respectful comparing and contrasting... not bashing and belittling.
 2. Do my best to be true to the major themes of their teachings.
- J. **Advisory- Not everyone acts consistently with their belief system.**
1. Just b/c this is the overall idea for that belief system doesn't mean everyone who ascribes to it follows it to a T

III. GOD (Notes will be online)

A. Buddhism

1. Suffering is the result of attachment
 - a. Being attached to this world
 - b. Objects, people, your body.
2. You transcend suffering through detachment
 - a. Kill desire and you no longer long for anything
 - b. If you can successfully kill desire and detach from this world then you experience nirvana... release from the cycle of rebirth and a complete release of desires, suffering, and a sense of self.
3. If you are suffering you are too attached to your self.

B. Islam

1. Suffering is caused by Allah
2. It is either a consequence for sin or a test for the faithful.
3. You overcome suffering by submission to Allah.

C. Hinduism

1. Evil and Suffering are the result of karma.
 2. You're getting what you deserve based on your actions in previous lives.
 3. If you help someone who is suffering you are interfering with their karma
 4. All suffering is deserved and there is no point in changing it... no point in trying to make people's lives better.
 5. One of the major reasons the majority of benevolent work in India is done by Christian groups.
 6. **Mark's story of India**... poor, sick people looking for money. Told not to help.. if you relive their suffering they will have to live this suffering again in the next life.
 7. **Mark Clark- "The religious idea of karma justifies and even legitimizes suffering in this world... At best it's a form of denial, and at worst it helps continue the vicious cycle."**
 8. Not everyone acts consistently with their belief system... but this is what it teaches.
- D. **New Age (Spirituality)** "Not religious... but I'm spiritual)
1. Very eclectic.. encompassing many different ideas
 2. Pantheism- all is one and all is god
 3. Practices meditation, praying, and positive thinking.
 4. "The universe is telling me..."
 5. "I'm sending positive thoughts/energy your way"
 6. Goal is to reach a greater state of enlightenment and illumination
 7. **Evil and suffering don't exist**... they are an illusion that you allow yourself to believe.
 8. **Example**- Don't say the 'C' word to a cancer patient... it'll give the negative idea power.
 9. Positive thinking can defeat negative reality.

E. Naturalism (Evolutionary Theory)

1. Good and evil are categories we have as a result of evolutionary processes developed in our brain circuitry over hundreds of thousands of years.
2. These categories are based on what was best for society and what helped us survive in a harsh environment.
3. Meaning- good and evil are artifacts of what our ancestors were forced to believe to survive.
4. There is no such thing as good and evil... we have just adapted to think there is.
5. **1st problem**- As we mentioned a few weeks ago... this logic doesn't actually work b/c it can be applied to this theory as well... maybe we only believe evolutionary theory is correct b/c that way of thinking helped us survive. It's not necessary true.
6. **2nd problem**- Many of our moral values directly oppose those we would have developed to simply survive.
 - a. The strong/rich *should* be allowed to exert their power over the weak... they are the fittest
 - b. Yet genocide and the rich exploiting the poor are things that disgust us to our core.

F. Example of when you take this to its logical conclusion...

1997 story of Melissa Drexler

1. 18 yr old HS Senior. Gave birth to a baby in the bathroom at her high school prom.
2. Cut the umbilical cord, strangled the baby to death, and threw it in the garbage can... then went back on the dance floor with her friends.

MIT Psychologist and Evolutionary Theorist Steven Pinker

"Why they kill their newborns."

November 2, 1997 New York Times

3. He argued that we must understand we are all descended from women who have had to make difficult decisions in a harsh world.
4. And that we inherited our brain circuitry from these ancestors.
5. **"It's hard to maintain that neonaticide is an illness when we learn that it has been practiced and accepted in most cultures throughout history."**
 - a. True
 - b. Exposure- Spartans/Romans
 - c. Xians were known for adopting "exposed" babies. (Orphanages)
6. **"Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, both psychologists, argue that a capacity for neonaticide is built into the biological design of our parental emotions. "**
7. **"Parental investment is a limited resource, and mammalian mothers must "decide" whether to allot it to their newborn or to their current and future offspring."**
8. Saying she was acting perfectly logically to do what she did.
9. **"If a newborn is sickly or if its survival is not promising, they may cut their losses and favor the healthiest in the litter or try again later on."**

10. **Point-** If we are simply products of evolutionary chance, then killing babies for the emotional health of the parents shouldn't bother us... but it does.
11. Where does that come from? It's goes against what should be our natural inclination.
12. So Naturalism-
 - a. Suffering is not good or bad... it's just part of our harsh environment. There is no purpose or reason for it.
 - b. Good and evil are just products of our inherited brain circuitry.
 - c. Meaning- cannot have moral outrage over anything...
 - d. Even people who say good and evil are just inherited artifacts still hold themselves and others to a moral standard.
 - e. Many people don't act consistently with their belief system... and I'm glad... and that's my point.

G. Christianity

1. Actually quite different approach.
2. **Evil and suffering are a result of freedom**
3. Relationships- Love only works if there is freedom.
4. Freedom has a dark side... if you're free to love you're also free to hurt and to break relationships
5. Our free-will allows us to make choices hurt ourselves and others...
6. But to end evil and suffering, Xianity doesn't just say "stop making bad choices..."
7. **Christianity's answer to evil and suffering is** not a philosophy or group of teachings or spiritual program... it's a person, **Jesus**.
8. **Jesus answered suffering by embracing it and dying to end it one day...**

9. Isaiah 53:3-12 (NLT)

H. God became human

1. Experienced all the pain and suffering we experience... yet never used his freedom for evil
 2. Our choices are the cause of evil... so to destroy evil what would he have to destroy? US.
 3. THAT'S why he died.
 4. **Jesus died so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.**
 5. He died so that through him we can be made new... forgiven... washed clean from those choices.
 6. Why does he allow evil and suffering to continue... so that you can be made new and forgiven.
 7. And since He has this much love for you you can be assured that when you are suffering... He is in it with you...
 8. He understands... he's been there...
 9. **Side note-** The word excruciating comes from "Ex-out of" "Cru- cross"
- I. The God of Xianity is not distant or removed from human suffering... he entered into the entire experience and then did something about it.
 1. And can relate to your suffering.
 2. But there is more...
 - J. We all want a reason for our suffering.
 1. Most popular belief systems either say it's pointless (naturalism) or it's your fault (Hinduism/religion) or that it's not actually real.
 2. Xianity is different... Faces it head on. Says that God not only has a reason for it (though we may not ever know it) but that Jesus redeems our suffering.
 3. Turns it into something good.
4. **Romans 8:28**
 5. **Story of Rod Hill**
 6. **Jesus is with us in our suffering and he redeems our suffering.**

IV. YOU

- A. Intro Video
- B. Video
- C. Thank you ladies
- D. Extrapolate

V. WE

- A. What would happen if you allowed God to redeem the suffering and pain you've had in your life?
 - 1. If you invited him into it?

- B. You might not ever know why you have had to go through what you have.
 - 1. But you can know that Jesus is in it with you and will use it for good if you let him

- C. What is your current belief system doing to answer your suffering and pain?
 - 1. Blaming you for it? Telling you it's not real? Telling you it's pointless and there's no reason you should expect better?
 - 2. Every belief system has to answer the question...

- D. The Christian answer is... **The God who embraced suffering longs to embrace you.**

E. Closing Song

- 1. Reflect

- 2. Have you allowed your pain and suffering to push you away from God or run to him?

- 3. Are you willing to invite Jesus into your suffering and let him redeem it?

- 4. Maybe it's time to trust him with your whole life and choose to accept his forgiveness?