

TOPICAL STUDIES

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN AND SUFFERING



SUMMARY: One of the most **effective criticisms** which atheists have against God is the problem of pain and suffering. It can be eloquently stated that if your God is a loving God, how can so many children suffer so much? The desire for no suffering is a reflection of human wisdom. That we have pain and suffering shows the wisdom of God.

One of the most **effective criticisms** which atheists have against God is the problem of pain and suffering. It can be eloquently stated that if your God is a loving God, how can so many children suffer so much? It is easy for us to sympathize with that statement knowing a small child who has suffered greatly, an outstanding Christian died early of cancer, and that 150,000 innocent people died of the recent Tsunami. Why does God cause a Tsunami for so many people to die? Why do children get cancer?

In considering in general the “problem of pain and suffering,” it can best be understood by considering the opposite. When a person says that there is a problem with God and pain & suffering, they are saying that in their personal wisdom we would be better off without pain & suffering. That is a statement of human wisdom. Consider some of the impacts of applying the implied human wisdom which would allow no suffering:

1. **NO PAIN:** If someone put their hand in a fire, they would burn their hand up because they would not feel any pain to notify them to move their hand. But then their hand would be charred, so they would suffer the inconvenience of having a damaged hand. As they would not be able to suffer, their hand by implication could not be charred as that would be a form of suffering. This must mean that their hand (and the rest of them) must be fireproof. Taken to the extreme you would be able to put your hand in a fire at any time as it wouldn't hurt you.
2. **NEVER HUNGRY:** No one would ever be hungry, even if they did not work. Logically then no one would work for food because it of necessity would automatically be supplied. Maybe as an alternative you just wouldn't feel the suffering of being hungry. No, that couldn't be because if you did that you would become sick from lack of nutrition. Maybe we need a feeling of hungry and full to regulate our eating habits.
3. **NEVER LOSE:** If anyone played a game, someone would be a winner and someone a loser. One would not be able to suffer being a loser, so games would need to be eliminated. Maybe we could have football games which always ended in a tie. How would that be? We would all be like some of the elementary school programs where there are no losers. Everyone is a winner, or in other words no one is a winner.
4. **DON'T DIE:** No one could die, because that would cause sorrow on the part of those remaining behind, so every person who was ever born would still be here. Keep in mind that they would still be well fed, because not being fed would be suffering.
5. **BEAUTY:** Some people suffer because someone else is better looking, stronger, faster or younger than they are. The human logic of no suffering would mean that everyone would look the same, make the same salary, be equally tall, and be equally fast. An interesting point to this is that everyone has to be the same amount of beautiful we

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would all have to be women, and identical looking women at that. If we were all women, we would be extinct.

If you used human wisdom you would make everyone 21 years old, equally beautiful, never win at anything, never have to work, never able to achieve. Imagine that you go out and play football every day of your life (which never stops) and you always tie, and you know you are going to tie. You try hard and you tie, even if the other team barely shows up. You cannot feel the joy of winning, because someone else would have to feel the sorrow of losing.

I would like to suggest to you that you would consider that many of these types of “pains & sufferings” are appropriate. To put it more pointedly, **you would agree with God that many of these “pains & sufferings” are appropriate.**

This means that effectively that you agree with God’s concept of pain and suffering, you **just don’t agree with the extent of God’s pain and suffering.** I don’t either. If I were God, little children would not suffer so much. Extreme pain for us wouldn’t be so extreme.

Maybe it is possible that if we agree that our statements that pain & suffering are not a proof that God does not exist, but rather **reflect the wisdom of God**; we can also concede that **the extent of the pain and suffering is controlled by a person wiser than us.**

Incidentally, God didn’t cause the Tsunami. The molten rock center of the earth called the magma has currents. It is presumed to be the cause of continental drift. As continents drift apart separating the east coast of the Americas from Europe and Africa, they by definition come closer together on the other side of the world. As the subsea land masses compress on each other, something has to give. Sooner or later a part of the subsea land mass will subduct under the other part of the land mass with a great force to relieve the stress of the compressing land masses. God has put the forces of nature into action, and things happen. If you live at low levels in an area subject to Tsunamis, you are in harm’s way.

If we live in this life we are by nature exposed to some danger because that is the way it is. The richest, poorest, tallest, shortest, men, women and any other group of people are going to die and are subject to suffering, sickness, and pain at any time. One reason may well be so that we will know that we cannot control everything because we are not in control.

REASONABLENESS OF DYING YOUNG?

Is it fair for some of us to live to be 100 years old, and others to die at 20? Doesn’t seem fair does it, in our human wisdom? We can see the wisdom of it if we look at the alternative. Consider no one dies at 20, or at any premature age. This would mean that everyone would die at an appropriate age, e.g. 95 years old. That would mean that you could not die at 20 years old. You could jump off a tall building and not get hurt. You could get shot and not get hurt. You could go to war and shoot at each other, and no one dies. That human wisdom does not work. We may humanly prefer that no one dies young, but to keep the world in reasonable balance, anyone must be able to die at any time. Maybe God didn’t do such a bad job in designing our world after all.

It may be easier to understand this if we step back and look at what is happening. God created us to be born into a world and live for up to 120 years. (Gen 6:3) After this life we

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will face judgment day and then we will spend eternity in Heaven or Hell. We will be judged on what we did in the years we have, irrespective of how long they are. If we die at 20 and are not saved, we might have been saved later. If we die at 20 and are saved, we might have been lost later. It is not reasonable to be judged by what might have been, we will be judged by what we actually do.