

GOD, THE PUNISHER?

God has to punish sin or he is unfair. Forgiving is seen as a different matter for the person has reformed and needs a second chance. And this second chance becomes another second chance and so on on and to absurdity. No sane or fair God can give a person a second chance every day of the week for the same sin! Repenting and forgiving are meant to be painful processes so in a sense they are punishment too. That aside if we punished every sin we would only end up making people hide their sins. Punishing somebody for swearing and taking God's name in vain seems too harsh which is why it will probably only result in the person cursing God inside and internalising their sin more. Resentment against the punisher will arise. But these consequences have absolutely nothing to do with proving that it is wrong to punish everything if possible. It is like arguing that maths should be made easier for most students fail their exams. You are left with a new bad consequence: telling people that their disobedience will be rewarded and that you are blaming punishment for the bad consequences which in fact are not really consequences but just the result of people refusing to take their just deserts. The argument is bizarre in the light of the fact that God will punish all unforgiven sin - and in a sense even the forgiven - for he is perfect justice. How deeply do believers really love God and how much do they really want him to be fair?

As God is wholly integrated and perfect and has no flaws then his love depends on justice which makes it off-putting for us. The love is about attitude not practice.

THE CENTRALITY OF PUNISHMENT TO CHRISTIANITY

Augustine speaking for the Catholic Church centuries ago stated that we were all somehow present in Adam when he sinned so we all committed the first sin with him. Sin is bringing disorder into God's creation so it caused natural evils such as earthquakes and disease. For Augustine all evil is either sin or the punishment for sin. Page 95 of the Philosophy of Religion for A Level, OCR Edition (Anne Jordan, Neil Lockyer and Edwin Tate, Nelson Thornes Ltd, 1999).

Christianity and many other theistic religions believe in a punishing God. If God does not punish rebellion then he is rewarding it. To be really good and to uphold the integrity and seriousness of morality and good, God has to punish. Punishment is not the same as vengefulness which is wanting to hurt a person because you feel like it and not because it is thought to be the right thing to do. God does not think that punishment is good but that it is a necessary evil.

CAN A GOOD GOD PUNISH?

Religion says that God did not choose to be good but is just good by nature. So God is good but not voluntarily good. It is odd how religion says morality is about voluntarily doing good and morality only comes from God when God cannot even be a moral God in that sense himself. Anyway it is clear that God has no right to punish or let you be punished if he can stop it. Could a judge get the right to sentence you from his being programmed to do so? Thus this God cannot ground morality for morality is about punishing passively with disapproval and actively by expressing that disapproval with some penalty. Moreover there is no reason to think he can punish never mind have the right to. He can exclude you but that is not punishment.

Those who believe in God do not think that it is God's aim to keep us from suffering. They deny he wants us to suffer. But they have to admit that he can punish and maybe does want us to suffer. If it is not his purpose to prevent our suffering then how can it be his purpose to prevent our punishment? Being punished fairly is better than suffering for nothing.

They say that if God does not punish us for rebelling against him then we owe him our thanks for how he gave us this gift of mercy. But that is not mercy but condoning and we are thanking him for that? Maybe it is not mercy for his plan does not provide for us getting the punishment that we have asked for.

And what if thanking him is premature? The doctrine of delayed punishment is about how God withholds his punishing hand to give you time to repent.

PUNISH ITSELF?

If God does not punish it is said that he does not need to for evil punishes itself. Let us unpack this. Suppose you gouge out your own eye in an act of hate. You will suffer great loss after. If that is punishment, then it does not fit the crime. God not punishing does not mean he is unjust but means he is still a punishing God. A jail with nobody in it is still about punishment. A judge with nobody to exact retribution on is still retributive.

MERCY

Jesus spoke of God as merciful. He told us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Mercy is cancelling a bit or all of a person's debt of punishment. It is incompatible with retribution for when retribution is for manifesting disapproval, mercy is evil for saying that the crime doesn't matter as much as it should. Mercy is making dirt of the victims of crime if retribution is right and is about vindicating the victims.

Mercy is incompatible with the deterrence theory of punishment because it is against doing what is needed to deter.

Mercy is against any theory that sees punishment as a necessary evil. Mercy infers that punishment is unnecessary and hence wrong so when you are being merciful you are mocking and insulting the rest and more or less telling them that they should be punished though it is not right.

Perhaps God can't punish or has to show mercy if the person has repented for he wants that person to get on with being good? But that means he wants to punish but can't. A being that can't be merciful freely is not really merciful at all but only acts it.

God is one of the retributionists. Still, he delays when a person needs punishment. To delay punishment is to reward sin especially when the person can evade being administered retribution by repentance. Would God have to delay in order to do something to stop the sin happening? But God cannot cause us to do anything in the future (we would be perfect now if he could) for we take each day as it comes so he cannot put off what is right over something that may never happen. You don't steal your grandmother's purse in case you will be poor in the distant future.

If God is merciful then God is evil. If God wants us do good to our enemies like Jesus commanded, then the same is the case. Since we do not suffer for our "sins" as soon as we do them, God does not exist.

RETRIBUTION GOOD OR BAD?

Once I would have naively argued: "Retribution is simply glorified hatred because it ignores the good the criminal has done to focus on the bad. There is no rational justification for visiting retribution on a doctor who saved millions of lives for committing one murder. There is no difference between retribution and revenge. The Church likes to say there is to pretend that it loves its enemies to promote her false façade."

But punishment is refusing to degrade a person by letting them away with their crime while revenge is punishing a person to degrade them assuming retribution is not revenge.

"Perhaps God cannot punish for it is turning a cold and ungrateful eye to the person's good deeds?" If so then all punishing is immoral. God enables people to suffer terribly, therefore if God exists God is evil for to be able to hurt that badly means he wants to punish. Perhaps God can't win and just punishes for the sake of doing something? Then why does he not do the least hurtful thing which is forgetting about punishment?

If God harms a deserving person to change him then that is punishment because even though he has to do it he must mean it to be what the person deserves. If he does not mean it like that then he wills that the person be rewarded for his or her sin. So by hurting he is not punishing but taking revenge.

GOD CANNOT EVADE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR DECISIONS

Suppose you believe in God and free will and therefore that persons are responsible for the evil they do. They suffer. You will accept that it is possible that God is punishing them. If you don't believe in God you will believe that these people do not deserve what they get and are not being punished. So if you believe in God you are surer that they may be getting punished. Thus belief in God lessens your sympathy for them. Belief in God is bad news.

If God lets us mess up that does not give him the right to punish us. It makes it wrong for him to punish. Police cannot let somebody commit a crime and then say they have the right to get him punished. Even if they were right to let him do it, there is still no right to punish.

God and you are the only two people who know if you are in a state of sin. God knows but does that mean he should know? Or that we should want him to? If he should know then that must be so that he can punish us. It is not going to do him any good or harm to know. If God does not need to know, then if we want him to know then it is because we want to see people punished.

Christians teach that when you are in a state of sin, you are also in a state of hatred towards God. They teach that hatred

punishes itself so they are callously saying that any bad or harm that befalls you as a result or seeming result of your hate is self-inflicted. To say such a nasty judgemental thing is punishing itself. They say God says it and tells them to say it!

We conclude that free will coming from God ruins the teaching that punishment is okay and it cannot ever be just when coming from a God who should take a look at himself!

BE PUNISHED FOR MAKING POOR GOD PUNISH!

To say punishment is right is to say that if you, say, steal you must not just suffer for that but for forcing such a wonderful loving God to decree that you should be punished and to force him to punish you through the laws of men. Punishment may be right but it is also a necessary evil. So to do wrong and call for retribution is two different punishable things. Whether you think God actively punishes or just connects bad results to sins so that you will suffer (passive punishment) you are to be accused of making God punish.

FINALLY

Sin is not purely about self-damage for it makes no sense to punish somebody merely for hurting themselves. It would be vindictive to. Justice would be better than that nonsense.

If a person repents of doing evil and is punished by the law you can feel compassion for that person and support him. You can be against the punishment in that case. If you are not you will see it as something unavoidable and sad. But if you think the person has asked for terrible things to happen you cannot have any compassion at all. Punishment then is less vindicate than the view that God just schedules evil and its bad results to come together.

Belief in a God is anti-human. The doctrine of God has sinister implications which can please the dark side of human nature and encourage punitive violence and war. To preach the dogma is asking for trouble for the risk is unnecessary and ever-present.

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