

## AGAINST THE NOTION THAT GOD LETS US SUFFER SO THAT WE AND OTHERS CAN LEARN VIRTUE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE

I call that the discipline defence. It denies that God is about making us happy but affirms he is about making us good and he may let suffering happen to us if it helps us grow.

In *Evil and the God of Love* by Hick you see how Irenaeus had taught the view that God allowed suffering for the sake of discipline and had made Adam and Eve imperfect so that they could sin and grow through it and rejected the traditional view taught in the gospels that they were made perfect and fell from it making us biased towards sin meaning that discipline would be of little use.

As the volume *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* observes, the discipline defence tells us that if we are to help others to become better people that is making us put the focus on ourselves (page 130). We only help people for our own growth in virtue. This would be a vile and evil and mercenary stance to take. It would be like going to visit a hospital and finding cancer patients and saying, "O thank God, here are some people here for me to help". It leads to people being treated not as persons but as instruments where the spiritual advantages matter not the person (page 131). This book opposes the discipline defence. It says that the explanation for God allowing evil is that evil is not a thing but a falling short of good. But if God can be good then and let a cancer patient suffer you cannot justify him by saying, "God didn't do anything to that person – the person just has the absence of health or has fallen short of health. The cancer isn't real". You are still left with the question of how God couldn't improve that person's health. And the only hope you have got is to say that God wants to help people through the cancer not to cure it for he could give us the cure but to grow by dealing with the cancer. So we are left back with the discipline defence again. The volume forces us back to it though it doesn't want to.

If suffering is for virtue and virtue is for happiness then suffering is only worthwhile if it makes you able to do more good than you suffered. Then why do people suffer and then die of it and why are so many lying in bed ill and unable to get up and do good for others?

### IT DEFEATS ITSELF

You cannot say that you are hurt so that somebody may help you and be purified by helping you for that might be the devil trying to mislead you and prevent you trying to grow stronger. The suffering must be at least partly for yourself when it can be and when you can grow because of it. It is safest to hold that it is meant entirely for you for, after all, it hurts you more than it hurts others. When you are most sure that you exist it follows that you have to assume that the suffering is all your own fault. It would not be right to hold that it is even partly for others when you are not as sure that they exist. Still, the theory will make others crippled with guilt.

Many of us have never done anything big for others. God hasn't given us the chance. When little good deeds are enough before the Lord for even one then they are enough for all so the answer fails to account for serious and extreme suffering. It is a callous answer to the problem of evil for this reason. The discipline defence is saying people should suffer when it is apparent that they should not.

If there is no virtue without suffering then the more suffering the better and cruelty is the true kindness. It is absurd to believe in a God who won't torment us to the extreme because he wants us to become ruins of our former selves.

If God enables us to inflict pain on others then it is so that they might be changed into better people by it. And then cruelty is really kindness for it is nurturing virtue in the victims. It is a favour. The theory is a recipe for a huge bloodbath and shows that humanitarian morality and God are incompatible. It also shows that religion can justify any brutal morality. If its morality is good for us it must be a hoax.

Religion says that suffering has intrinsic potential to heal the soul even if people won't reform for they are resisting its power. It has to say this for we are rarely as happy as we could be. There is a bit of pain all the time. Even neutrality brings the pain of not being happier. This encourages cruelty.

If love is sacrifice then compassion and patience are not love and are evil for they make making things better easier.

## SUFFERING IS NECESSARILY USELESS

Most suffering is caused by human beings directly. The rest is virtually down to indirect results of what evil people do. Consider climate change. You cannot claim that God uses suffering to help us without saying human nature is doing us a favour.

If God had fewer people in the world we would be happier so God does not want us to be happy and has put us here to do our penance. He could prevent the population of the world going above a thousand people. And he would have other worlds the same way. He is certainly far more to blame than us for any evil we do when he has made sure that there are enough of people in the world to make it hell for millions. Belief in God often thrives on a hard heart.

It is no comfort to tell anyone that their suffering was given to enhance virtue for there is no way of being sure the suffering was worth these results. Suffering always brings out impatience if not in yourself then in others. How can suffering bring you to God when it makes you impatient with him as well? Suffering is the experience of useless existence and meaningless pain. It is necessarily impatient. This fact proves that the atheist conviction that suffering disproves God is true. Those who disagree are just simply being hard hearted. Those who do not recognise the horror of suffering are able to believe in God.

## ITS NOT COMFORTING BUT JUDGING

Some think it is comforting to feel that suffering is discipline from God. The comfort that the discipline defence seeks to offer is unkind because it implies that God wants all who suffer to know they are going to be okay and not to despair so anybody that does despair has none to blame but themselves for not responding to the divine inspirations. That is yet another example of how believers in God count themselves worthy to judge other people. People should not be judged because of God for we can sense people and we cannot sense God.

## THE DISCIPLINE FROM GOD DOES NOT HELP AND MAKES YOU EVEN WORSE

Here is a quick refutation of the defence, “The more able to do good or virtuous I become the worse it is for me to sin for the less excuse I have and I am desecrating the work done in me so the sin is worse. I sin all the time. Even when I am perfectly good I would refuse to suffer for a thousand years to save a soul from Hell so I sin in my subconscious. So discipline increases sin instead of eradicating it. The discipline is an act of divine hatred towards me in a sense.”

Some say that the reason many think that the discipline defence is no good do not realise that no matter how perfect you are you could always be more perfect so discipline will always be needed so seemingly holy and perfect people should suffer in order to improve. People like George Schesinger have used this argument to try to solve the problem of evil. He argues that the power to improve will not and cannot be totally fulfilled. But with morality you only need to do right for the right reasons. A good person who saves a life out of love cannot perform a more perfect act for love just requires that they do all they can. It is quality not quantity that counts. The quantity only counts if you can increase it but if you cannot there is no harm done regarding the will and morality. You are perfect as you are if you want and will to be good and you cannot improve anymore not because you are bad but because your faculties are limited.

Humility is the sum of all virtues. Any vice you have, pride causes it so it is all down to incorrect thinking. When your motive in helping the sick is not to help them but to please God what is the point in them being sick unless God is getting his revenge? If you choose to make a small sacrifice in loving God and cannot make any greater God will understand so he should make things in such a way that nobody will need anything too big. You will still be able to choose him and his love.

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