

When I talk about how the problem of suffering has made me question the existence of a loving God in control of the world, I sometimes get asked “What *happened* to you?” The assumption seems to be that the only reason a person would question the existence of God is if something terrible had occurred that didn’t make sense in light of their beliefs.

I’ve always thought this was a very curious way to think about it, as if the only reason a person would think there was a problem is if they themselves had undergone some horrendous kind of suffering.

The fact is that I’ve never experienced suffering in extremis. I’ve never had leprosy, never starved, never had multiple family members die in a senseless accident, never ... never had any really excruciating suffering that stands out as unusual. Just the standard fare for middle-class Americans: death of loved ones, shattered relationships, hard times, divorce, and so on. Nothing that would be completely inexplicable if there were a God in charge of my world.

That’s not why I came to question the existence of God. It has always been, instead, the suffering of others. When I explain that to people, I often will get one of two responses. The first is never meant to be heartless, I think, but in the long run, in my opinion, it actually is. It’s when someone doesn’t understand: Well if nothing has ever happened to YOU, then why would you have a problem with it? This response seems to me to suggest that we should simply ignore the terrible suffering of others as having no relevance for ourselves. WE are the only ones that matter. If nothing happens to US, then there is no problem.

I’ve never felt that way. I’m very glad, of course, that I’ve had such a good life. But I consciously have to fight myself not to ...

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