

Some people have responded to my comments on suffering with the interesting observation that most suffering, in their view, is caused by humans against humans, so that there is no reason to “blame God” for it. That is obviously true of some of the most horrific things that happen in our world: murder, genocide, torture, war, refugee crises, and on and on and on. And one could argue that it is true of even “natural” disasters, such as starvation: there is more than enough food in the world for everyone to be well-fed, so if people are starving, it is **our** fault, a lack of social and political will. No need to doubt that God exists just because we’re too stupid, lazy, or self-centered to deal with any problems that come along.

I have several reactions to this view. The first is that on one level I heartily agree. So many of the unspeakable things that happen to people, destroying their lives, causing unspeakable pain and misery, and often leading to death, are caused by other people, either through intention or negligence. How can we not all agree on that?

Moreover, I resonate with the premise underlying this view, that the reason for such terrible forms of suffering is that as humans we have free agency (to some extent). We can choose to burn down our neighbor’s house, or kidnap his children, or go to war, or hoard all our money when others around us starve, or inflict a genocide, or whatever. In the standard phrasing, we have “free will.” And if we did not have free will, we would not be human. We would be some kind of divinely constructed robots that did whatever we were programmed to do, and I think most of us would agree that in the end, that would not be good. Of course, horrific suffering is not good either, but still, the argument is that it is not the fault of God or nature, but of our own decisions.

Having said that, I also have to say that ...

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