

For over a week now I've been dealing with a question concerning my views on suffering. I could go on for days and days, weeks and weeks, about how the problem of suffering is discussed by the writers of the Bible and how I see it from my own perspective. But it's not the most cheerful of subjects and I need/want to move on to other things. I've said enough to make my basic points, I think (if anyone wants more on any specific related topic, just let me know and I can squeeze it in):

- suffering is a real problem for anyone who stands firmly within the Judeo-Christian tradition, where God is understood to be the all-powerful Creator of all there is and Sovereign over what he created, and yet there is horrible suffering going on around us all the time - and has been since time immemorial. How does one explain that?
- The biblical authors have many different ways of explaining it. The prophets have one way, the prose author of Job another way, the author of Job's poetry another way, apocalypticists another way, Ecclesiastes another way, and other authors other ways (I know I haven't covered all this ground here on the blog - but I've covered some of it, and if you want more, you can see my book [God's Problem](#))
- These various views are not only different with one another, they are sometimes very much at odds with one another.
- Most of the explanations are not satisfying for those of us living in the modern world. So what's the answer? Why is there suffering? I have to say that for me and people like me who do not hold to the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of God, there is in fact no problem. There is suffering because people are able to do nasty things when they want, and they often do them, usually because it advances their own purposes; and there is suffering because the universe we live in is a hard and cruel place that doesn't give a rip about us or our needs and sometimes we get in the way of its workings. And so some suffering is caused by humans; some by nature; and God has nothing to do with it. That's pretty much my view in a nutshell.

But that's only part of the story as far as I'm concerned. For me the "problem" of suffering is an interesting intellectual question - the very most important question, I believe, when it comes to religious belief (since if one cannot reconcile the persistence of suffering, intellectually, with the existence of God, then one needs to question the existence of God as a logical next step) - but there is more to suffering than simply an intellectual project of figuring it out. Even more important than "explanations" of suffering are "responses" to suffering.

I'm constantly amazed at how many people in our world don't respond at all, or respond so very little, to the suffering of our fellow humans. I just don't get it. For me, being human means in part responding to those in need. Not helping out those who are suffering is to live the life of dumb animals. Amoebas and worms and aardvarks don't respond to suffering. But humans should. It's part of what it means to be human. And yet so many people don't. For me, that means living life as a sub-human.

Not everyone can respond to suffering in the same way. Not everyone can be a mother Theresa, and not everyone needs to be. But to *some* extent everyone can respond to suffering in a way that is appropriate to them. Some people do give up their entire lives to help those in need. May their tribe increase! Others give up every third Tuesday evening to volunteer at the soup kitchen. Others give a large chunk of their income. Others give a small chunk of their income. Everyone, though, can do *something*. And in my view, everyone should. It's what it means to be human, rather than a worm.

Those who have paid attention to my blog since its inception know that the very reason for its existence - its *raison d'être* - is to raise funds for charities dealing with hunger and homelessness. As much as I'm interested in making my views about the Bible and early Christianity known to the world at large, that's not why I do the blog. If the point of the blog were simply to disseminate my knowledge and opinions, frankly, I wouldn't do it. I *\*absolutely\** wouldn't do it. It's too hard and it takes up way too much of my time. The one and only reason I do it is to raise money for to fight for those who are hungry and homeless.

I do try to throw myself into the blog with gusto and to make it absolutely as good as I can. And I hope people enjoy it. I actually do enjoy it myself, so it's a labor of love. But I have other ways to disseminate my knowledge and views without pounding at the keyboard every day at this rate.

I take some flak from people who don't think they should have to pay to read a blog. I fully understand that concern. But the whole *\*point\** of the blog is to have people pay, since it above all a fund-raising tool. In its first year the blog raised \$37,000. Every penny went to the charities that I have specified on several occasions. This year I'd like to raise a lot more. I'd like to raise more and more every year. And as long as I do, I'll keep going with it, tell death do us part!

I'd like to thank everyone who has seen fit to join the blog. You're doing a world of good by paying to hear me rant on every day about this that or the other things related to Christianity in Antiquity (and related topics). And you can do even more good in two ways:

1. By telling others about the blog and pushing them to join up. We need more members! And people can get a lot out of it. I absolutely think it's worth the money.
2. By making an additional donation to the Bart Ehrman Foundation through the blog site. It's easy to do, tax deductible, and goes to some amazing charities doing fantastic things for those in need.



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[Evaluation of Job's Short Story](#)