There is always a lot of suffering going on around us, if not in our neighborhood then certainly in our country, not to mention our world. Now more then ever. And more obviously than ever. But the “ever” itself is really very bad, when you think of the millions being slaughtered in civil war and unrest, driven from their homes, starving, dying of curable disease for want of medicine or from lack of clean water, etc. etc. etc.

But it’s on our minds right now more than ever, between a worldwide pandemic and a national recognition of deeply rooted and massive racial violence and injustice. Suffering is always there, but now it is all we are talking about.

I was browsing through old posts on the blog and came across this one I wrote eight years ago. As some of you know, one of my books, God’s Problem, deals with the problem of why there is suffering. In it I examine what different biblical authors have to say about it to show that they represent many different views, some of them at odds with one another. I also evaluate the views to some extent and, most controversially, as it turns out, explain why the problem itself and the inadequate answers to it (not just in the Bible but generally) eventually is what led me to lose my faith.

After my book came out I had a number of public debates on the topic. In this post (slightly edited and updated) I discuss an intriguing argument that my opponents frequently used those debates,

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In two of my debates, one with the “Messianic-Jewish Apologist” Michael Brown (whom I had never heard of before, but who was a remarkably good debater) and with the conservative Christian Dinesh D’Souza (whom I had heard of before, loud and clear, and who is also a remarkably good debater), I have been confronted with a point that, in both instances, my opponents thought was a decisive strike against me. My views of suffering are not shared by the people who, unlike me, actually suffer.

It’s an interesting point. To explain it, and my response to it, I need to say a few words about the context of these debates. The topic of my debates on the problem of suffering is never whether or not there is suffering. Luckily. Everyone (at least everyone I debate, and most everyone who listens to the debates) agrees that there is suffering. The question at stake is whether it makes sense to believe in God given the nature and extent of suffering in the world.

In these debates I never ...

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