

The Problem of Pain

C.S. Lewis

Week One

So that we'll all be on the same reading schedule, in Week One, we'll talk about a chapter from Peter Kreeft's book, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Kreeft is a professor of philosophy at Boston University, and his work is highly influenced by C.S. Lewis. The chapter is called *Ten Easy Answers*.

- The problem of evil is created by the apparent inconsistency among four propositions:
 - God exists
 - God is all-powerful
 - God is all-good
 - Evil exists
- The ten easy answers must deny at least one of these propositions:
 - Denials of God's reality
 1. Atheism (there is no God)
 2. Demythologism (the fairy tale God)
 3. Psychologism (the subjective God)
 - Denials of God's power
 4. Old Paganism (many gods – polytheism)
 5. New Paganism (naturalistic God – scientism)
 6. Dualism (two Gods)
 - Denials of God's goodness
 7. Satanism (the bad God)
 8. Pantheism (the blob God)
 9. Deism (the snob God)
 - 10. Denial of evil
 10. Idealism
- Atheism
 - Simplest, clearest answer – but a cheap answer
 - Cheap on people. The vast majority throughout history believe in a God. To be an atheist is to be a snob.
 - There is one very good argument against God – evil. But there are many more arguments for God. (He cites 20. Go here to see them all: http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20_arguments-gods-existence.htm)
 - The existence of evil proves the existence of God. If there is no act of creation, and no creator, then the universe has been here always, and there is no first cause. If the universe has been evolving for an infinite time, then it should already be perfect by now. Also, spiritual evil could not evolve from mindless matter. Moral evil can only come from moral agents, souls. And where did they come from? They can't come from blind matter.

- If there is no God, no infinite goodness, where did we get the idea of evil? If the universe is so bad, how did we come to see it as activity of a wise, good creator?
- It is a lot easier to live as an atheist than to die as one. The most powerful form of atheism on earth, communism, explains everything but death. Atheism robs death of meaning, and if death has no meaning, how can life?
- Atheism cheapens the world, us, and life. Compare atheist fiction with theistic fiction. In Greek drama, in the Bible, in Shakespeare, people are great because they breathe the air of the absolute. In Faulkner, Sartre, Camus, Beckett, etc., people are full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.
- The supreme refutation of the atheist is not present, but future, when he meets God face to face where he expected to meet nothingness. It's the cheapest answer ever invented because it refuses the only thing that has infinite value.
- Demythologism
 - Atheism for cowards and scholars.
 - The demythologizer identifies the supernatural with the mythic. He says Bible stories are true as fairy tales are true.
 - As we die, we don't just need a tale of "Easter faith." We need a God who conquered death. We need him when we want to do something shady and wonder how absolute morality really is. And we need him when we see sin is real and we can't save ourselves.
- Psychologism
 - "Truth for me" replaces truth. God is a god we make up for ourselves.
 - Leaves this question unanswered: Is this God the one who really exists?
 - This God can't have created us, because we created him.
 - If there is a God within, there is also a devil within. The real devil is no match for the real God, but the devil within is often a match for the God within. We need something bigger than a God we create.
- Old Paganism – Polytheism
 - A denial of God's power, but it's not narcissistic
 - If God is not all-powerful, then evil and suffering came when God wasn't looking.
 - Paganism is popular because it has gods, and its many, weak, bribable gods seem to account for the diverse, half-good-half-evil, morally imperfect world we see.
 - Did not survive in most of the world. We cannot believe in the shenanigans of Zeus et. al. once we learn to philosophize. Paganism died when philosophy was born; Christianity can withstand philosophy and the asking of questions.
- New Paganism – Scientism
 - Scientism (not science) is a philosophy. It holds that whatever science cannot detect does not exist, so scientism acknowledges only nature and the laws of nature.
 - Old Paganism cut God into thousands of pieces. New Paganism flattens him out and reduce him to nature.
 - Rabbi Harold Kushner (Why Bad Things Happen to Good People) falls into this category. His God is some vague, undefined force within nature and subject to its laws.

- If you believe scientism, you can be scientifically fashionable, still have a God of some sort to believe in, and even preserve God's goodness. (As in, "The world is a beautiful place so we see a beautiful God.")
- Scientism does not pass the death test. A naturalistic God cannot solve the problem of death.
- Dualism – Two Gods
 - There are two gods, one good and one evil. Neither has all the power, and that's why goodness doesn't triumph over evil.
 - But the notion of a wholly evil God falls apart when you push it a little. To be bad, he must exist and have intelligence and will, which are in themselves good. So he must be getting them from the Good Power. Evil is a parasite, not an original thing.
 - The powers that enable evil to carry on are given it by goodness. There can be an absolute good, but there can't be an absolute evil. Evil needs good as a parasite needs its host.
- Satanism – the Bad God
 - Maintains that evil is so powerful because Satan is in charge and we should worship him.
 - But an infinite evil would leave no room for any good, and you couldn't account for all the goodness in the world. (If God is, why is there evil? But if God is not, why is there good?)
 - If you join Satan's side, you share Satan's destiny, which is to suffer hell eternally.
- Pantheism – the Blob God
 - God is simply everything in general and nothing in particular.
 - It did not create; it is not a person or a will; nothing is forbidden, everything is divine.
 - The solution to evil? It's part of the blob. Hitler is God as well as Christ.
 - It has snob appeal as well. "If you were enlightened, you would understand."
 - It's unlivable. You can't pray to, love, worship or trust the Blob.
- Deism – the Snob God
 - Pantheism denies God's transcendence; deism denies God's immanence.
 - Deism denies God's goodness by saying he is neither good nor evil – at least to us – because he is not "to us" at all. He is indifferent.
 - Says that God is in his heaven, and that's why all is not right with the world. He's an absentee landlord who lets his building become a slum. May be just, but not merciful.
- Idealism – the Denial of Evil
 - Buddhism and Christian Science are examples. They deny the reality of evil.
 - After all, you can't see evil. A murder or a mugging is a physical event, but the evil of the act (like the goodness of an act of love) can't be seen. Conclusion is that goodness and evil are mere subjective feelings, not real qualities.
 - But we do have a conscience, and it can see evil.
 - And physical suffering and death confirm obvious, external evil

Next week: Read the Preface and Chapters One and Two of *The Problem of Pain*