

Essay

Transhumanists, God, and the Problem of Evil

Brent Allsop

ABSTRACT

Powerful Good beings(i.e. Gods) can be defined to be both able and willing to overcome evils like death and suffering. Any such beings are by definition incompatible with the existence of such evil. If one believes such beings exists while there is still evil they are faced with the "problem of evil" making such beliefs problematic. Hence the only logical view of a transhumanist seems to be atheism - or that such powerful beings don't yet exist, while there is still evil. People that believe such powerful beings already exist must have some kind of attempted theodicy where they justify and accept such evil in some way. In contrast, a transhumanist atheists can hope that death and suffering is about to be overcome, and that we, as such beings, are about to emerge.

Key Words: transhumanist, atheist, problem of evil, God

1. Introduction

Many of the words in traditional religions of the world like faith, hope, good, evil and of course God are often nebulous or not well defined. Ask any 10 people what any of these words mean and you'll likely get 12 or more definitions. So for the purposes of this discussions I'd like to make some very general definitions of what I mean when I say God, Evil, and so on.

There are lots of things that many would argue do and do not fall under the term "evil". But for my purposes here I'd like to focus on at least death and suffering. I'm not talking about things like death of single cell animals, plants and such. I'm only talking about death of sentient or conscious beings that suffer. As long as we don't yet know what consciousness is, we don't know how to separate the conscious from the purely mechanical and unconscious. But in general somewhere between single cell plants and humans you can say things on one side are sentient and conscious while on the other, they are not and are merely mechanical and mindless. The death I am primarily concerned with here, is death of those that are sentient and able to suffer.

Some may not like to refer to such things as evil, considering evil to be something else entirely but I think most would agree that death and suffering are terrible things and something that would be nice to get rid of. So if you don't like me to define evil to be simply death and suffering simply replace all usages of the term "evil" here with "terrible things including death and suffering". There is surely more too evil than this but this is what I am interested in talking about in this discussion.

Similarly, "suffering" can mean lots of things. But for the purposes of this discussion I'd like to focus on at least the kind of suffering one undergoes when one is physically tortured to death or something. An example would be the kind of pain endured by people suffering terrible cancer just before they die. Much of this kind of suffering has already been eliminated via the use of anesthesia and other pain killing drugs. If we need not suffer the kinds of suffering eliminated by anesthesia, why did God not give humanity anesthesia long ago? Because of this type of thinking many theists initially argued against the use of anesthesia, thinking that God intended for us to suffer such and that anesthesia therefore violated Gods will. There may be some kinds of suffering very powerful beings cannot get rid of but I think they can get rid of much more than we can now get rid of. We still suffer a lot in comparison to what people will suffer in say 100

Correspondence: Brent Allsop, Canonizer
<http://canonizer.com> E-mail: brent.allsop@canonizer.com
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years from now. This difference is what I am talking about here. This includes “suffering” death or non-existence.

As far as the term God, goes, I’d like to consider a subset of attributes so as to be able to be as inclusive as possible when I say God. I think everyone would agree that any God is very powerful. Indeed many people say God is “all powerful”. For the purposes of this discussion I’d like to include any being that has the ability to overcome evil (or death and suffering) to be God. So of course the “all powerful” type of God would be included as a being that is able to overcome death and suffering.

Another type of being that would be included would be any interplanetary traveling Extra Terrestrial. Surely if beings are able to travel to our planet from someplace outside the solar system they would also be immortal and have the ability to help others become such.

When one considers the term “transhuman” one of the primary attributes of such transhumanism is in fact to be immortal. So, transhumanists seek, and indeed believe they might be able to become such..

2. Attributes of God

Most, but not all, people believe God to be good. By good I would include any being that suffers when it sees another sentient being suffer or die and has a desire to prevent or eliminate such where possible. A few people might not consider God to have such attributes. I would consider any such God to be not good or even terrible. Some people claim to have “faith” or “hope” that God exists. But if your God is terrible or lacks these attributes accepting that such a terrible being exists is not “faith” or “hope” but accepting in despair. I think Faith and Hope, by definition, can only be for something good, not for something terrible like this. As a transhumanist I value such and if I lack any such attributes would seek to have them in ever increasing ways.

So these would be the two primary attributes required to be what I am talking about when I say God, namely, immortality and the ability to help others achieve such and a desire or will to do so. Sure there is much more than

this, but for our purposes here, this is what I am talking about when I say God.

One of the more significant milestones in transhumanist progression will be when the first person is able to become immortal. Another significant milestone beyond this would be when there is no more undesirable death whatsoever – and everyone can be immortal. Things like death, isolation, and physical suffering are the evils that I would consider to be the most troubling to any transhumanist.

3. Godhood

When one looks at nature, evolution, survival of the fittest, the food chain and so on, death is obviously big part. I would consider nature’s evolutionary, survival of the fittest method of progress to be “immoral” because it is so full of death and suffering. But when no God yet exists, it is the only kind of progress possible and hence better than nothing. I think transhumanists recognize this troubling part of our past and have a hope that such evil can be overcome; that we can replace nature; uplift all sentient animals to be Gods like ourselves; and all progress together bearing yet more God like children of very diverse kinds, while no sentient or conscious being ever again suffers death.

At first thought it might seem troubling to eliminate the nature that has existed here on earth for so long. In today’s society there are obviously many that would object to any such drastic earth changing activities. But as we progress, and it becomes more and more possible for us to overcome more and more death, the choices will finally become obvious. I think we will find ways to do all anyone really wants to do without the death and suffering. We will look back at those that initially feared overcoming death for all as very primitive and short sighted indeed. Everyone will recognize that the ultimate goal of nature is to finally develop beings that can overcome death and suffering, so that a much more “moral” and intentional growth towards the infinite by all will be possible.

Once death and suffering is overcome, and such evils are eliminated for all who desire it, finally will transhumanists have achieved what I would call Godhood. Of course, there is an

infinite amount of progress, milestones, and things to accomplish beyond this level but once we are immortal and there is no more undesirable suffering of death on earth we would finally be Gods and much more capable of accomplishing and moving towards such.

Let's say after we've achieved this level of Godhood we are exploring further and further into deep space and finally discover another planet teeming with life. Suppose that the most advanced life forms on this planet have achieved a level of intelligence similar to that, which was on earth when Homo sapiens first appeared. There is obvious use of tools, forms of communication including complex languages and primitive forms of writing and so on. There are even some forms of belief systems and worship, similar to primitive religions on earth.

In our society, one might ask: "What should we do?" Do we 'interfere' and help them out or do we come up with some sort of non-interference prime directive and just observe them without letting on that we, with our immortal powers, are around? Perhaps we secretly land there and hide amongst the trees. Perhaps we accidentally make a noise or something causing them to come to investigate. When we see them coming we flee. Despite our immortal powers and abilities to navigate interplanetary space we end up bungling around and in our haste accidentally leave one of us behind? I'm being facetious of course and referring to Steven Spielberg's E.T. story. But why is it that every story with any powerful beings in any culture or religion invariably chooses the powerful beings hide answer to this question? Why must there always be some kind of non-interfering "prime directive" or something? Are there any stories that anyone knows of where the powerful beings make the other choice? There certainly aren't any popular ones that I know of.

At least in Carl Sagan's Contact story they don't hide. But then, when they do find us they apparently aren't concerned at all with the death and suffering we are still experiencing here on earth. After the initial contact they leave us all alone to struggle with our problems, including the fact that some believe the aliens do not even exist. The supper beings obviously recognize how important the star character

Eleanor Arroway's father is to her and how much she must miss him. But in their conversation she never hints that she has any interest whatsoever at overcoming the cause of his demise for him or anyone not yet dead. And in return the aliens never offer any such information. What is up with that? What is up with all such stories both in and out of religion containing powerful beings?

Just once I'd like to see a story where the powerful beings rush in as fast as possible with their emergency vehicles, sirens a blazing, heading to the hospitals or anywhere where people or sentient animals are dieing first, to save and keep as many as possible from dieing. If life has any importance at all, and if we truly want to overcome death, shouldn't this be the obvious first choice? In any initial conversation with any superior being shouldn't this be our first and foremost concern?

It is my feeling that the answer to this help or hide question should be so obvious it should be considered a stupid question. It is my feeling that as a society, especially a transhumanist society, we should scoff at such silly stories that choose the wrong answer to this help or hide question. Are you listening to all your Gods and powerful ETs that exist in all the world's religions and belief systems? My grandparents have died, my parents and some other loved ones are dieing. Most of us are suffering. Screw your prime directive, or whatever reason you think you must continue hiding from us and please come down and give us a hand in our efforts to overcome death and suffering and to climb out of this primitive hell hole!

As you probably know, the ultimate point I'm driving at with all this is that evils like death and suffering are incompatible with the existence of such powerful good beings. Once you have God, by definition, evils like death and suffering no longer exist. Or, where they do exist, the top priority is to overcome them and they only exist for as short of a time as is possible. And likewise, if there is still evil, by definition, there is not yet any kind of a very powerful and good being or God that knows about it.

4. "Argument from Evil"

This is a problem religions that believe in powerful good beings have been struggling with forever. It is of course: "The problem of Evil." (See Adams, Inwagen, Larrimore.) I think David Hume said it best when he quoted the 3rd century BC Greek philosopher Epicurus: "Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"

The "argument from evil" is arguably the strongest argument against the existence of a good and powerful God. Religious philosophers use the term "theodicy" or "defense" to refer to an argument that makes an attempt to explain such a paradox or to "justify" the existence of God and Evil. Free agency or will plays a big part in many theodicies For example: "St. Augustine's Free Will Theodicy" (See Gilson) But isn't it much more sane and rational to believe that if we were truly free we would all choose to live longer lives with much less pain and suffering? We all freely choose all this evil, death and suffering? Yea right – that makes a lot of sense.

Another common theme in some theodicies is the idea that we have to go through this kind of suffering to become a Good God. We must be "forged" and "tempered" in this fiery furnace of suffering to produce great empathetic, strong, and steel like character. Will we not become great if we are able to overcome death and suffering with so little to work with, one might argue? Wouldn't we be less if some God came down and helped us out? I sure don't think so. Apparently, according to these types of theodicies, the person who suffers through, and overcomes the most in this life is the person that grows and becomes the greatest. This is simply another twisted "the more evil there is the better things are" argument. Given that, if you take the person that has grown the most by suffering the most in this life before we overcome death – how will this compare to the children we bear when there is no more death? Take all the people that have died during the last 100 years. Sort them according to how much "growth through suffering" they have achieved. As a transhumanist I believe that future parents will be so capable, that their children will grow hundreds and thousands of times more than this

in a few hours or minutes without any death or isolation.

Another real scary theodicy idea is that this earth and its suffering and supposed free will, is a "test". You take all the people that have suffered and died on earth. You judge them all. You can effectively line them all up in a line according to how they performed on this test. The best are at the head of the line and the further down the line you go, the worse people did at this "test of mortality". Ultimately you make one or more cuts in this long line and segregate them at those points for the rest of eternity. The ones at the head of the line go to heaven or better places to collect their "eternal reward". They then spend an eternity looking down on their brothers and sisters in "lesser kingdoms" or even suffering in eternal "hellfire" and "damnation". Yea right, as if the good ones can be happy without their loved ones, or even worse while watching them for an eternity in lesser kingdoms or in hell!

There are blatant examples of such ideas in Mormon scriptures, for example. In the Book of Mormon there are two characters named Alma and Amulek. Alma and Amulek are leaders of God's good people. They are bound by bad people and are forced to watch as these bad people throw the good people of God, alive, into furnaces of fire. Amulek asks Alma why they can't call down the power of God to stop such a terrible thing. Alma's reply is contained in Alma chapter 14 verse 11: "11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day."

Can rational people really "hope" this is really the purpose of suffering, and that there is really a God full of such "wrath"? Must a powerful good God "suffer" all this "blood of the innocent", "crying mightily" and so on? Can it be considered "faith" to believe that some of our loved ones are deserving of such "wrath" of God

or must be separated from some in lower kingdoms or even in hell? I don't think so. As a transhumanist, I hope that all might be deserving of being in the best heaven. As long as there are people not in this heaven it simply means there is more work to do. I see no reason to give up hope that some day, some way, we might discover and achieve some way to accomplish just that. In other words, I think a hope for universal salvation fits in nicely with transhumanist thinking. We just don't know for sure if such will be possible or not. As long as there is a chance, there can still be "hope" and we can keep on trying right?

There are other theodicies. Many seem to ignore logic and simply argue that we can "feel" or "experience" God and his goodness so we simply know he must exist in spite of any apparent contradiction. I would think that to a rational transhumanist such irrational arguments would have the least sway. Some simply seem to ignore or be completely unaware of the logical inconsistency in their beliefs.

Ultimately, to a transhumanist, all theodicies are nothing more than a futile attempt to justify, and thereby accept, evil. If there is some God out there hiding from us, then there is no hope. If that were true, for the same reason that these Gods hide from, and refuse to help us, we must similarly refuse to help any other newly evolving beings we find or know about. To me any true God would have perfect empathy for others and equally suffer as they watched from their hiding places as these newly evolving beings suffered and died. Again, believing in such a suffering God can't be faith or hope, but only accepting in despair.

Religions that believe such powerful beings already exist claim to be the ones with "faith" and "hope". But in reality this claim is twisted and completely backwards. Accepting that there are already powerful beings, while there are evils like death and sufferings, is the ultimate in lack of faith and hope. Atheist transhumanists, on the other hand, can have true faith and hope that evil isn't all that necessary or impossible to overcome. Rather than accept and try to justify evil, atheists are the only ones that can faithfully hope to shortly completely overcome evil?

5. Conquering Evil

For some reason, today, in all of society it is almost never stressed or even recognized that our top goals are to overcome evils like death and suffering. This is sharply revealed by the fact that there are no popular stories anywhere in any culture or any scriptures where powerful beings exist which have as their top priority the overcoming of death and suffering. I think the primary reason for all this is our long heritage of believing in supper beings. Our minds have been twisted, with theodicies and beliefs in Gods that don't come down to help us, for so long that we have come to accept death and suffering as inevitable and somehow good and necessary.

I even feel guilty when I claim, as I did above, that we are in a "hell hole". Surely many people will object and claim we should be thankful for what God, nature, our parents, or whatever have given to us. I completely agree with this point of view – life, even the short life we know, is glorious beyond description. We, as transhumanists, owe an ultimate debt to all of our parents for creating us and giving us this glorious world. But no matter how glorious life is now, it is still a "hell hole" compared to the life we will soon be able to give our children which have no more of this kind of death and suffering.

If our search for extra terrestrial intelligence is ever successful before transhumanism becomes much more popular in world culture, the supper aliens will surely be very shocked at our primitive lack of interest in overcoming death and suffering. But thankfully, it is becoming more obvious every day that we are on the verge of overcoming evils like death and suffering. Soon, not even the most ardent and faithless theist will be able to accept the inevitability of overcoming evil – for it will shortly be completely overcome.

I think there is a lot of utility in a lot of traditional religious ideas and notions like good, evil, moral, immoral, faith, hope and so on for transhumanists. Except, that is, for the idea of God. For if there is already God, somewhere out there hiding from us, watching all this evil, then there can be no hope. For even if we become as powerful and good as that God, evil must still exist for the same reason it exists for us. But if there aren't yet any such beings – then we can have true faith and hope that evils like death and suffering aren't all that necessary, and indeed

will shortly be overcome. Instead of trying to twist terrible things into somehow being good or necessary, let us keep the faith and never give up hope or cease at our efforts until evil is completely overcome.

8. Conclusion

In short, powerful Good beings (i.e. Gods) can be defined to be both able and willing to overcome evils like death and suffering. Any such beings are by definition incompatible with the existence of such evil. If one believes such

beings exist while there is still evil they are faced with the "problem of evil" making such beliefs problematic. Hence the only logical view of a transhumanist seems to be atheism - or that such powerful beings don't yet exist, while there is still evil. People that believe such powerful beings already exist must have some kind of attempted theodicy where they justify and accept such evil in some way. In contrast, a transhumanist atheist can hope that death and suffering is about to be overcome, and that we, as such beings, are about to emerge.

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