

Answer to Job

Posted on March 15, 2015 by Scott Alexander



(with apologies to [Jung](#))

Job asked: “God, why do bad things happen to good people? Why would You, who are perfect, create a universe filled with so much that is evil?”

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, saying “WHAT KIND OF UNIVERSE WOULD YOU PREFER ME TO HAVE CREATED?”

Job said “A universe that was perfectly just and full of happiness, of course.”

“OH,” said God. “YES, I CREATED ONE OF THOSE. IT’S EXACTLY AS NICE AS YOU WOULD EXPECT.”

Job facepalmed. “But then why would You also create *this* universe?”

Answered God: “DON’T YOU LIKE EXISTING?”

“Yes,” said Job, “but all else being equal, I’d rather be in the perfectly just and happy universe.”

“OH, DON’T WORRY,” said God. “THERE’S A VERSION OF YOU IN THAT UNIVERSE TOO. HE SAYS HI.”

“Okay,” said Job, very carefully. “I can see I’m going to have to phrase my questions more specifically. Why didn’t You also make *this* universe perfectly just and happy?”

“BECAUSE YOU CAN’T HAVE TWO IDENTICAL INDIVIDUALS. IF YOU HAVE A COMPUTATIONAL THEORY OF IDENTITY, THEN TWO PEOPLE WHOSE EXPERIENCE IS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT SATURATED BY BLISS ARE JUST ONE PERSON. IF I MADE THIS UNIVERSE EXACTLY LIKE THE HAPPY AND JUST UNIVERSE, THEN THERE WOULD ONLY BE THE POPULATION OF THE HAPPY AND JUST UNIVERSE, WHICH WOULD BE LESS GOOD THAN HAVING THE POPULATION OF THE HAPPY AND JUST UNIVERSE PLUS THE POPULATION OF ONE EXTRA UNIVERSE THAT IS AT LEAST SOMEWHAT HAPPY.”

“Hmmmmm. But couldn’t You have have made this universe like the happy and just universe except for one tiny detail? Like in that universe, the sun is a sphere, but in our universe, the sun is a cube? Then you would have individuals who experienced a spherical sun, and other individuals who experienced a cubic sun, which would be enough to differentiate them.”

“I DID THAT TOO. I HAVE CREATED ALL POSSIBLE PERMUTATIONS OF THE HAPPY AND JUST UNIVERSE AND ITS POPULACE.”

“All of them? That would be... a lot of universes.”

“NOT AS MANY AS YOU THINK.” said God. “IN THE END IT TURNED OUT TO BE ONLY ABOUT $10^{(10^{(10^{(10^{984})})})}$. AFTER THAT I RAN OUT OF POSSIBLE PERMUTATIONS OF UNIVERSES THAT COULD REASONABLY BE DESCRIBED AS PERFECTLY HAPPY AND JUST. SO I STARTED CREATING ONES INCLUDING SMALL AMOUNTS OF EVIL.”

“Small amounts! But the universe has...”

“I WAS NOT REFERRING TO YOUR UNIVERSE. I EXHAUSTED THOSE, AND THEN I STARTED CREATING ONES INCLUDING IMMENSE AMOUNTS OF EVIL.”

“Oh.” Then: “What, exactly, is Your endgame here?”

“I AM OMNIBENEVOLENT. I WANT TO CREATE AS MUCH HAPPINESS AND JOY AS POSSIBLE. THIS REQUIRES INSTANTIATING ALL POSSIBLE BEINGS WHOSE TOTAL LIFETIME HAPPINESS IS GREATER THAN THEIR TOTAL LIFETIME SUFFERING.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“YOUR LIFE CONTAINS MUCH PAIN, BUT MORE HAPPINESS. BOTH YOU AND I WOULD PREFER THAT A BEING WITH YOUR EXACT LIFE HISTORY EXIST. IN ORDER TO MAKE IT EXIST, IT WAS NECESSARY TO CREATE THE SORT OF UNIVERSE IN WHICH YOU COULD EXIST. THAT IS A UNIVERSE CONTAINING EVIL. I HAVE ALSO CREATED ALL

HAPPIER AND MORE VIRTUOUS VERSIONS OF YOU. HOWEVER, IT IS ETHICALLY CORRECT THAT AFTER CREATING THEM, I CREATE YOU AS WELL.”

“But why couldn’t I have been one of those other versions instead!”

“IN THE MOST PERFECTLY HAPPY AND JUST UNIVERSE, THERE IS NO SPACE, FOR SPACE TAKES THE FORM OF SEPARATION FROM THINGS YOU DESIRE. THERE IS NO TIME, FOR TIME MEANS CHANGE AND DECAY, YET THERE MUST BE NO CHANGE FROM ITS MAXIMALLY BLISSFUL STATE. THE BEINGS WHO INHABIT THIS UNIVERSE ARE WITHOUT BODIES, AND DO NOT HUNGER OR THIRST OR LABOR OR LUST. THEY [SIT UPON LOTUS THRONES](#) AND CONTEMPLATE THE PERFECTION OF ALL THINGS. IF I WERE TO UNCREATE ALL WORLDS SAVE THAT ONE, WOULD IT MEAN MAKING YOU HAPPIER? OR WOULD IT MEAN KILLING YOU, WHILE FAR AWAY IN A DIFFERENT UNIVERSE INCORPOREAL BEINGS SAT ON THEIR LOTUS THRONES REGARDLESS?”

“I don’t know! Is one of the beings in that universe in some sense *me*?”

“THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE COSMIC UNEMPLOYMENT RATE.”

“Huh?”

“I MEAN, THERE IS NO MEANINGFUL ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF HOW MANY UNIVERSES HAVE A JOB. SORRY. THAT WILL BE

FUNNY IN ABOUT THREE THOUSAND YEARS.”

“Let me try a different angle, then. Right now in our universe there are lots of people whose lives aren’t worth living. If You gave them the choice, they would have chosen never to have been born at all. What about them?”

“A JOB WHO IS AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH PEOPLE IS A DIFFERENT JOB THAN A JOB WHO IS NOT. AS LONG AS THESE PEOPLE MAKE UP A MINORITY OF THE POPULATION, THE EXISTENCE OF YOUR UNIVERSE, IN ADDITION TO A UNIVERSE WITHOUT SUCH PEOPLE, IS A NET ASSET.”

“But that’s monstrous! Couldn’t You just, I don’t know, have created a universe that looks like it has such people, but actually they’re just p-zombies, animated bodies without any real consciousness or suffering?”

“ ... ”

“Wait, *did* You do that?”

“I AM GOING TO PULL THE ‘THINGS MAN WAS NOT MEANT TO KNOW’ CARD HERE. THERE ARE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO THE APPROACH YOU MENTION. THE ADVANTAGES ARE AS YOU HAVE SAID. THE DISADVANTAGE IS THAT IT TURNS CHARITY TOWARDS SUCH PEOPLE INTO A LIE, AND MYSELF AS GOD INTO A DECEIEVER. I WILL ALLOW YOU TO FORM YOUR OWN OPINION ABOUT WHICH COURSE IS MORE ETHICAL. BUT IT IS NOT REL-

EVANT TO THEODICY, SINCE WHICHEVER COURSE YOU DECIDE IS MORALLY SUPERIOR, YOU HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT I DID NOT IN FACT TAKE SUCH A COURSE.”

“Actually, I do have some evidence. Before all of this happened to me I was very happy. But [in the past couple years](#) I’ve gone bankrupt, lost my entire family, and gotten a bad case of boils. I’m pretty sure at this point I would prefer that I never have been born. Since I know I myself am conscious, I am actually in a pretty good position to accuse You of cruelty.”

“HMMMMMMMM...” said God, and the whirlwind disappeared.

Then the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before, and healed his illnesses, and gave him many beautiful children, so it was said that God had blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.

EDIT: [According to comments](#), this was [scooped](#) by a Christian philosopher five years ago. Sigh.

The Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, saying "MISTAKES WERE MADE."

— [Scott Alexander \(@slatestarcodex\)](#), March 13, 2015

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, saying "IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE ME AT MY WORST, YOU DON'T DESERVE

ME AT MY BEST."

— [Scott Alexander \(@slatestarcodex\), March 10, 2015](#)

The Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, saying "I KNOW YOU'RE UPSET BUT THAT'S DIFFERENT FROM STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION" (h/t [@simulacrums](#))

— [Scott Alexander \(@slatestarcodex\), March 13, 2015](#)