

Reply ID: puag

buhogrunon:

Before I respond to the questions and comments you've posted, I'd like to say thank you, not just for reading what I'd written, but also for taking the time to post your own responses. I really enjoyed reading them, just as I've enjoyed responding to them. I may not always have the same opinion as one of my readers, but to me, this is what makes this country so great: the ability to have a difference of opinion, and to not be subjected to imprisonment for having them. Sadly, there are many countries in the world who do not enjoy this luxury, but that's a topic for another post...

In the first paragraph of your response, you asked "[w]hat about those who didn't live through the [natural disaster]? [Am I] trying to argue that it's okay for such things to happen simply for people to prove themselves?" First, my heart goes out to anyone who dies, whether the result of a natural disaster, or an event caused by man. In fact, it's not just the person who died that I feel for, but also for those left behind. Unfortunately, when it comes to the issue of death, we lack the power to do anything to reverse it. We're forced to accept those consequences, regardless of how tragic they may be, or how much we wish we could do something to undo the effects of death. Having said that, no, I am **not** trying to argue that it's "okay for such things to happen simply for people to prove themselves." Instead, I'm arguing that, having happened, having discovered yourself in just such a situation, you (or anyone in such a situation), have an opportunity to do something truly meaningful, something that's going to have a lasting impact on those in need. It's a shame that such events have to take place, but having happened, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't use this as an opportunity to show everyone the ebst that humanity has to offer.

You went on to say that "[are they really heroic if the needed such a huge push before they decided to do good?" It's not so much that they needed a "huge push" to do something good, it's that the term "heroic" is subjective. As such, all sorts of heroic actions are overlooked on a daily basis in favor of things that are more reminiscent of something an action hero would do. For instance, there's a very real possibility that the food you donated to your local food bank kept someone from starving to death, but compare this to someone else running into a burning building to rescue a child. Both of these actions had a tremendous impact on the people involved, but only one will ever be labeled as "heroic," although the person you fed may be every bit as grateful as the parent of the child you just saved. This is because the term "heroism" is subjective at best. In each, the person did the right thing, but it's the circumstances that society chooses to recognize when determining whether a particular action is heroic or not.

As far as the decision to do good itself is concerned, sadly, you're right. There are a lot of people who go through their daily existence without deciding to do something good for someone for nothing more than the fact that it's the right thing to do. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including, but certainly not limited to them being too selfish to care about anyone other than themselves, not believing that their actions matter that much, or lacking the confidence to step up to the plate. Whatever the reason, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're all bad, or that they're beyond redemption. Hopefully, they'll one day see that their decisions has the power to impact people around them, positively and negatively, and change their ways accordingly. This was a lesson that I myself had to learn. Although I made the general effort to do the right thing at the right time, I was far from reaching my full impact, but my time behind bars has given me the opportunity to explore and discover more of my potential. I've learned that, even from within the confines of a prison setting, I have the capacity to not only decide to do good, but also to ensure that the impacts of my actions leave a lasting, positive and meaningful impact far beyond the reaches of these gates.

As far as your hypothetical scenario is concerned, where someone intentionally sets a fire so they can rush in and save the inhabitants, thereby demonstrating what a great person they are, this actually isn't as hypothetical as it might first seem. Plenty of people have done similar things, hoping to be recognized as a hero. Some people have went to the extremes of setting fires, while others have just created fake mugging scenarios so they could chase off the would-be robber, thereby impressing the girl they admired. In each situation, while they may have fooled people into thinking their actions were heroic, the fact that they caused the problem in the first place completely negates anything they may have done afterwards. The fact that my shooter turned around and performed emergency surgery on me to save my life doesn't change the fact that he was the one who shot me in the first place, and the same holds true for the person starting the fire. It all boils down to intent.

And the same holds true for anyone who knew of the plan to start the fire beforehand, but intentionally acted to stop it because they wanted to play the part of the hero. They're just as guilty, and their actions are meaningless. If they truly wanted to be a hero, then they should have acted to **stop** it from happening in the first place. At the same time, this would **not** apply to someone who didn't know anything about it at all, and who simply responded because it was the right thing to do. I suppose that when you get right down to it, it all comes down to intent, nothing more, nothing less.

You then stated that you have no "joy" in knowing that people have to live with their response for the rest of their lives. There are a number of possible explanations for this, maybe even more than one. First, you have a conscience, and as such, you don't want to see anyone suffering needlessly. In other words, you're a compassionate person, even towards those who might not otherwise deserve it. The other explanation is based on something you said immediately afterwards, that "[g]uilt in of (sic) itself without prompting the person feeling it to do something good in response, doesn't serve any purpose

at all." In other words, if that person isn't going to be inspired by their feelings of guilt to change their ways, then suffering from guilt is absolutely meaningless, and while I couldn't agree with you more, I think you may have overlooked something critical here. Suffering from guilt is a sign of a conscience, and I don't know anyone who truly suffers from pangs of remorse who doesn't in turn go out and at least attempt to change their ways. That's just how a conscience works. The more intense those guilty feelings, the more you want to do something about them. It's a system of checks and balances that serve to ensure that there's not too much chaos in the world. The people you have to watch out for are the people who don't feel bad for their actions. These people have no personal incentive to change on their own, let alone to make such changes permanent.

You went on to state that "[p]erhaps God shouldn't have created a world where such things could happen in the first place[.]" If you're the kind of person who believes in the Bible, then He did. It's called Heaven. Unfortunately, Heaven operates like a good nightclub. There are standards one must achieve to get their foot in the door, and bouncers to keep the riffraff from sneaking in. Many believe that our life on this Earth is nothing but a test, designed to separate the good from the bad. Whatever the reason, God created a place that operates on certain scientific principles, yet knowing these principles, we continue to do some of the most idiotic things imaginable, and then question God why they happened.

For example, even though we know full well that certain areas get hurricanes each and every single year, as a society, we not only chose to build in those hurricane prone areas, but we also had the audacity to build our cities below sea level. As this wasn't enough, we then went on to neglect our sea walls and levies. Was it God's fault a hurricane all but wiped New Orleans off the face of the map? Or was it man's fault for building in a place he knew to be prone to hurricanes?

To be fair though, not all natural disasters are able to be avoided. Some, like earthquakes, can happen anywhere, at anytime, while others, like Hurricane Sandy, can be so large, that they affect even areas that were previously thought to be immune from them. I'm not what you would call a Christian (nor a Catholic or a Muslim), but even I don't think that God **intentionally** caused the natural disaster to happen. It's a simple matter of science, and I have to believe that there's some greater reason for everything happening, even if I don't know what that reason is. I believe this because, when I look around, I see the circle of life in nature working together in perfect harmony. Natural disasters are a part of this harmony, even if they're disruptive and destructive to our daily existence, lethal even. However, at the same time, human beings are the only species on this planet who only have natural disasters to contend with. Animals not only have to contend with the elements, natural disasters, etc., but they also have to contend with a plethora of predators.

There is, however, some merit to the point you were trying to make. If God truly is that powerful, capable of creating such beauty and perfection, then why did he create such a difficult environment to live in? The only response I can come up with to that is that He did, and that at one time, we were living in it, but thanks to Adam and Eve, we lost our right to live there. If there is a God, then perhaps He'll one day have mercy on us and give us the chance to live in perfect harmony again. Until that time, I intend to do whatever's within my power to make the most out of my environment, whether it's living in the free world, or behind bars.

You say that it shows "a lot more character to do good when there's no real pressure to do so - when they take it upon themselves to do and help someone, rather than being pushed into it by circumstances." This statement overlooks the fact that there's more than one kind of pressure. The pressure you referred to in that sentence implies that those around you want you to do the right thing, and as far as that concerns, you're right. It shows more character to do good without that pressure. However, there are other kinds of pressure as well, such as people pressuring you to do the wrong thing. That's when you demonstrate your true character. When everyone around you is trying to convince you to drink or do drugs, and yet you still refrain despite what they think, that's character. When the bad guys want the codes for the nuclear missile so they can launch it, and they threaten to torture and kill you and your only child unless you provide them, and you refuse, that's character under pressure, the kind of character you'll never know whether or not you possess unless and until that situation happens. Hopefully, we never find ourselves in such a predicament, but if we do, the right choice is often the hardest choice of all.

A natural disaster doesn't "force" someone to do the right thing. There are all sorts of stories about people who did exactly the opposite. There are stories of people being sexually assaulted at the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina, people looting stores, even people pretending to have lost their homes when they weren't anywhere around. A natural disaster doesn't "force" anyone to do anything. It just provides them with the means and the opportunity to let their true colors shine through.

You responded to two of my examples, the grandmother lifting a car off her grandchild and the addict quitting cold-turkey. You're right: the grandmother was overcome with a sudden surge of adrenaline, giving her super-human strength. Easily explained by science, and the addict didn't wake up one morning and decide to quit cold-turkey. He did so, only after much internal debate and struggle, after having seen the true consequences of his actions and deciding that this wasn't something he could live with any longer, which was exactly my point. A lot of times, people give credit to a Higher Power when their Higher Power had nothing to do with what happened. Instead, it was something these people had inside of them all along, a hidden reserve that they simply needed to tap into.

Now take the example you gave of someone jumping out of a plane, and their parachute not opening up. Do you really mean to tell me that you've never seen or heard of someone doing this, and living to tell the tale? I recall one story about someone in the military who jumped out of his plane, only to have the wind take him up, and then drop him, only to take him back up again, only to drop him yet again. Over and over this happened, until he finally fell to the ground. I recently seen another example of a guy, who jumped out of a plane, and his chute failed to open before he hit the ground. Amazingly, both of these people lived, but these are but two examples of many, many such examples. Was this an "Act of God?" An Angel of Mercy? I have no idea, there are simply some things that can't be explained, and until I hear such an explanation, like you, I'll be asking questions in an attempt to better understand.

As far as God visiting places where He knows there will be problems, or sending His Angels to do so, if something like that happened, and supernatural powers were used to stop someone from doing something right or wrong, then wouldn't this kind of defeat the entire concept behind exercising free will? I'm not saying that things like murder, rape or robbery are right, but for whatever reason, God gave man the power to exercise free will, which would be absolutely meaningless if He stepped in, or had someone step in on His behalf, to stop us from exercising it when it contradicted His will.

Again, I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to post your replies. I found them intellectually stimulating, a rarity in here, I assure you. Should you have anything else you'd like to share, by all means, please don't hesitate. As always, you can do so by posting online, and the kind and helpful people at Between the Bars will download, print and snail-mail them to me, or you can write to me directly, at the address listed below. Either way, I truly look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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