

## **The Blame Game: Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Religious Context**

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The coronavirus disease outbreak, COVID-19, has turned into a global health epidemic, and has had a significant effect on how we view our Earth and our everyday lives. Where outbreaks, plagues, or illnesses occur, who is to blame in all of this is questioned. Some religious people prefer to point their fingers to a variety of groups. Many concerns and hypotheses have emerged. The blame game began with the advent of the outbreak of coronavirus disease. While scientists and medical experts have already given solid evidence about what caused this outbreak, it is still interesting to take into account the arguments put forward by some people to blame groups of people and forces of nature. In this paper, I will analyze the problem of evil and its connection with certain groups that have been blamed for the cause of COVID-19. Some pointed their fingers at the LGBTQIA+ community, nature, and themselves for the coronavirus outbreak, and that is what my paper is going to explore.

### **The Problem of Evil**

For centuries, the problem of evil has been a prominent field of debate in theological and philosophical studies. Before understanding the arguments put forward by many in this paper, it is necessary to start on the basis on which many of them base their claims. In this case, many have classified the COVID-19 pandemic as an evil, and this is why we need to know what researchers have concluded in recent studies to see what the problem of evil is and how it is related to many of the claims put forward. William Leonard Rowe, who was a professor of philosophy at Purdue University, employed in his studies the foundation for the problem of evil. In chapter

seven of his study *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, he identifies in the beginning:

The existence of evil in the world has been felt for centuries to be a problem for theism. It seems difficult to believe that a world with such a vast amount of evil as our world contains could be the creation of, and under the sovereign control of, a supremely good, omnipotent, omniscient being. The problem has confronted the human intellect for centuries and every major theologian has attempted to offer a solution to it.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe notes that the problem of evil has been a subject of theology that has been discussed and that many have offered solutions to the logical problem of evil. These solutions may also be referred to as defenses against the evil problem. The logical form of the problem of evil means that there are contradictions that exist in theism. The two points of emphasis are as follows:

1. God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good.
2. Evil Exists.

These two statements are inconsistent because they contradict each other.<sup>2</sup> As stated, many have proposed solutions to the problem, such as the "free will" defense championed by Donal O'Mathuna. O'Mathuna is a Senior Professor of Ethics, Decision-Making & Evidence at the School of Nursing & Human Sciences at Dublin City University,

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<sup>1</sup> Rowe, William L. *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*. Belmont, CA: Thomson. Wadsworth, 2007, p. 112

<sup>2</sup> Rowe, William. p. 113

Ireland, and Chair of the Academy of Fellows at the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity in Chicago. In his recent study *Christian Theology and Disasters: Where is God in All This?*, he reports that the free will defense is the strongest solution the problem of evil, and how it coincides with other natural disasters that happened in Christian theology in his study.

Many have argued that this pandemic is God's judgment, but O'Mathúna and others say it goes against the first statement in the logical problem of evil, and the object to blame is "free will defense." He argues that "God was justified in creating a world in which humans have real moral freedom... [and] if God intervened every time we could be hurt, much pain and suffering could be avoided, but our free will would be an illusion."<sup>3</sup> He argues that God has allowed free will to exist because there would be no freedom in not allowing it. So, the disasters and the horrible things that happen are not God's judgment, but the result of the free will defense. God was given the trade-off between a world of free will and evil, or a world without evil, but without freedom. In Christian theology, "God is personal and seeks loving relationships with humans,"<sup>4</sup> so God chose a world of free will and evil.

O'Mathúna notes that other disasters have occurred in the Christian Bible, but that was also the result of God's decision to allow free will in the world to not restrict people's freedom. However, many have refrained from accepting this as the reason for the COVID-19 pandemic but have decided that this is God's judgment. The overall structure of the following section of this essay will outline some of the claims made by those who believe that this is God's judgment and wrath.

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<sup>3</sup> O'Mathúna, Dónal P., Vilius Dranseika, and Bert Gordijn. *Disasters: Core Concepts and Ethical Theories*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. p. 32

<sup>4</sup> O'Mathúna, Dónal P. p.33

## God's Judgment?

The following part of this paper goes on to describe in more detail the claims made by religious individuals and others to blame the COVID-19 pandemic for something other than the free will defense. Some religious conservative figures have adopted the argument that members of the LGBTQIA+ community are to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic. More notably, Rabbi Meir Mazuz and Pastor Steven Andrew have been at the forefront of this claim. Rabbi Mazuz said that Pride is, “a parade against nature, and when someone goes against nature, the one who created nature takes revenge on him.” He further argued that nations are who support LGBT+ equality are the only nations being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. That this is why “Arab countries that don’t have this evil inclination.”<sup>5</sup> The World Health Organization currently reports that there are cases of COVID-19 in nations where they support this “evil inclination” and that individuals ought to refrain from using such rhetoric. Also, many people from the Anti-Defamation League have pushed back on Rabbi Mazuz’s comments, stating, “We harshly condemn his statements and urge him to apologize.” Furthermore, Pastor Steven Andrew has said that, “God’s love shows it is urgent to repent, because the Bible teaches homosexuals lose their souls and God destroys LGBT societies. Obeying God protects the USA from diseases, such as the coronavirus.” These arguments put forward by both religious figures are not original and O'Mathúna argues that they are not valid. When diseases and natural events occur, there is always a finger pointing to those

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<sup>5</sup> Marr, Rhuaridh. “Religious Conservatives Are Blaming Gay People for Coronavirus.” *Metro Weekly*, March 24, 2020. <https://www.metroweekly.com/2020/03/religious-conservatives-are-blaming-gay-people-for-coronavirus/>.

of the LGBT community. Why is it? It is because homosexuality and transsexuality are often condemned by religious conservatives, so it is a natural instinct to blame them for the wrath of God on the unnatural. O'Mathúna warns us not to condemn a specific community, as it goes against God being an omnipotent, omniscient, and inherently good being.

### **Nature's Mandate**

Now moving on to consider another argument that others have made to be the reason for the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have blamed nature or Mother Nature for being the entity to blame for the destruction this virus has caused. According to the United Nation's Environmental Chief, Inger Anderson, "Nature is sending us a message with the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis." He further elaborated that "humanity was placing too many pressures on the natural world with damaging consequences."<sup>6</sup> Damian Carrington, a writer covering this story, points out in his article that scientists have been warning the human population to take care of the climate since 2007. The results of not doing so would include more infectious infections and viruses. He also argues that the human race needs to look closely at the problem of climate change and think about what we have done. Professor Andrew Cunningham, a member of the London Zoological Society, is another person interviewed in this post. Professor Cunningham points out that this is a moment in history where we have been given the opportunity to change. So, we

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<sup>6</sup> Carrington, Damian. "Coronavirus: 'Nature Is Sending Us a Message', Says UN Environment Chief." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, March 25, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief>

have got to take it. However, he is skeptical of change because of people's natural instinct to just forget what happened and move on.

Another piece to this argument includes a video titled *A Letter from the Virus*. This video is told in a first-person point of view, told by the Coronavirus. The Coronavirus points out that the human race has exploited the resources offered by nature to us. That a variety of warnings have been sent to the human race in the form of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and pandemics, but nothing has succeeded. So, nature sent Coronavirus to "pause" the world and to show what harm we have done.<sup>7</sup> This video supports the United Nations Environment Chief's statement that this virus was nature's response to make us focus on the issue of climate change.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by O'Mathúna in his study and those described by Carrington and the film *A Letter from the Virus*. In his research, O'Mathúna argues that nature holds the claim that God permits free will so that human beings may have freedom but suffer, but makes the statement that "increasingly, however, the distinction between natural disasters and manmade (or technological) disasters is becoming less tenable to hold making the free will theodicy more relevant to disasters in general."<sup>8</sup> O'Mathúna believes that the true being to blame in natural disasters is the human race as a whole.

### **Point at the Reflection**

The statement that the entire human race should be blamed, and not a single person or group of people, is made

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<sup>7</sup> Films For Action, April 12, 2020. <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/a-letter-from-the-virus-listen/>.

<sup>8</sup> O'Mathúna, Dónal P., Vilius Dranseika, and Bert Gordijn. *Disasters: Core Concepts and Ethical Theories*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, p. 33

by Parmarth Niketan, a spiritual YouTube content creator, which is the same argument made by O'Mathúna. In her video, she makes it plain that she does not believe that this is the punishment or wrath of God. Instead that the law of nature is to blame because of what we have "planted"<sup>9</sup>— "These seeds we have planted are" abuse, abuse of the earth, abuse of one another"— then that's what grows. This is the same stance that O'Mathúna takes:

Tragedies like an earthquake have natural causes, of course, but their unequal impact is not due to nature; it stems from the things people do with each other, to each other, against each other. The tragedy is largely the work of our own hands. We shape the planet with massive, cruel, and lasting injustice.<sup>10</sup>

It is not the work of God, but our very own. That is the position that a lot of people have assumed, and that is who is at fault in this blame game. Niketan says this is our own fault, because we have not prepared for the coronavirus outbreak. We were too busy making weapons instead of investing the money in seeking a vaccine or research into the virus. The law of nature withstands the free will defense, as it implies that the human race is the one that is to blame for any bad that occurs, and that God has no direct involvement in the disasters that occur. Thus, the nature/definition of God remains unchanged, and we should point the finger to ourselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Is Coronavirus God's Punishment? Youtube. Youtube, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0xrbi-8zQ4>.

<sup>10</sup> O'Mathúna, p. 38

## Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the arguments made by some religious individuals that the coronavirus, COVID-19, was caused by members of the LGBTQIA+ community, by nature, and by ourselves. The most convincing statement was that the COVID-19 pandemic was the product of what humans metaphorically plant into the earth—the degradation of each other and ourselves. In this blame game, academics and advocates point the finger at reflection in the mirror since God is not capable of evil. That is because it goes against the nature of God. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this analysis is that those who use blame strategies are always attempting to promote a specific agenda, whether that is a political or a moral one. This may be in the form of helping to promote climate change initiatives or even restricting the rights of a certain group of people. The present study has gone some way towards improving our understanding of the pandemic of Coronavirus disease in the field of theology, more precisely the problem of evil and the free will defense.

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