

Atheism's Best Arguments?: Robin Collins

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Transcript - Short

Robin Collins:

Theists have typically divided the answers to two types, what they call a defense and what they call a theodicy. A defense simply tries to say, despite the evil in the world and the horrendous quality of it, it doesn't offer good reasons to discount the existence of God. And the typical thing a defender says, is that we, just because we can't find an explanation for these evil, doesn't mean there isn't one. We wouldn't expect to be able to find all the explanations because God is...

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Because God is so far above us.

Robin Collins:

So far above us, such an infinite being. He's bound to have reasons for allowing evil that we couldn't even probe. On the other...

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Sounds like a retreat or a defeatist attitude.

Robin Collins:

It sounds like a retreat but I think from a formal level it isn't, but I think it would be a retreat if you couldn't find any explanations that worked at all. So, what I think is some explanations do work, there is what they call theodicies, which are reasons humans have tried to discern for why God allows evil. And my big picture on that is some of the... each of the theodicies, you could think of a big circle, and all the evils in the world are in the circle, like the free will theodicy explains this section of the circle, maybe the soul building theodicy explains some of these evils, and what, a new theodicy that I've come up with, which I call the connection building theodicy, might explain others. But I see a value in us connecting with each other, helping each other out. So, let's suppose you're suffering terribly. And I'm there sharing in your suffering, helping you during that time of suffering. Then there's a valuable connection formed between us, and assuming, as theists do, that we're going to live forever, that connection is always going to be there. It's always going to be the case that I was there when you were suffering. The value of this connection, if it's at all intrinsically valuable, its value keeps accumulating forever, and I would say its value outweighs the value of that evil.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Your point is that with all the different kinds of evil, you really need a series of different theodicies or explanations to deal with certain sectors. Because there's no one explanation that can cover them all.

Robin Collins:

Right, and you wouldn't expect that. I mean, when I do things, usually I have multiple reasons for doing that. And I'm only a human being of limited mind. How much more would we expect of God, who would have a manifold set of reasons for doing whatever God is doing, creating this universe for instance.