

Is it reasonable to thank God for protection from some natural harm if He is responsible for causing the harm?

Haoxuan Li

The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing

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Abstract

Throughout history, various cultures have invoked divine intervention to seek protection from natural disasters, while simultaneously attributing these calamities to divine will. This paradox raises the question: is it reasonable to thank God for protection from natural harm if He is responsible for causing it? This paper examines the theological, philo-sophical, and moral implications of divine responsibility for natural disasters. By analyzing scriptural evidence and philosophical arguments, this study explores whether it is justifiable to express gratitude to God for protection from natural harm. The findings indicate that human responsibility, the role of suffering, and the limitations of human understanding of divine actions challenge the assumption that God should be blamed for natural disasters. Instead, the paper argues that thanking God in such situations has both theo-logical and psychological significance.

Keywords

Divine responsibility; natural disasters; suffering; the-odicy; human accountability, faith, gratitude

1. Introduction

Seven thousand years ago, when the floods of the Nile washed over farmlands, the ancient Egyptians recited prayers and performed rituals to appease the river god Ha (Oestigaard, 2018). Three thousand years ago, when the land of Athens crumbled, the Athenians sacrificed livestock to appease Poseidon (Hughes, 2012). A thousand years ago, sailors of the Song Dynasty prayed to Mazu for protection during storms (Davis, 2001). Across cultures, survival from natural disasters has reinforced faith in divine beings. In the Abrahamic tradition, God is often regarded as all-powerful and all-good, yet His sovereignty over nature raises questions about divine justice.

This paper examines whether it is reasonable to thank God for protection from natural harm if He is considered responsible for causing it. The discussion begins by analyzing divine omnipotence and responsibility, followed by an exploration of human accountability and the moral value of suffering. The paper concludes by evaluating the psychological

benefits of faith in divine protection.

2. Divine Omnipotence and Responsibility

The Bible affirms God's omnipotence: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1). Scripture also asserts divine sovereignty over natural events: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7). If God is omnipotent, He must have control over natural disasters. However, the question remains: does this mean He is directly responsible for them?

To determine responsibility, it is crucial to distinguish between direct and indirect causation. The Book of Job portrays God permitting Satan's actions rather than directly inflicting harm (Job 1:12). Similarly, disasters can be seen as tests rather than mere punishments (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Job's response to his suffering—"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 1:21)—suggests that divine causation does not necessarily imply divine malice. Thus, the assumption that God is the direct cause of natural harm oversimplifies the theological complexity of divine agency.

3. Human Responsibility for Natural Harm

God established natural laws governing the universe: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Humanity was granted dominion over nature, yet this dominion came with moral obligations (Leviticus 25:1-5; Deuteronomy 22:6-7; Proverbs 12:10). Violations of divine order through industrialization, deforestation, and environmental degradation have contributed to climate change and ecological disasters (Mudakkar et al., 2013; Rehman et al., 2023). Should God be blamed for natural disasters when human actions exacerbate them?

Many modern disasters are anthropogenic. Forest fires often result from human negligence, nuclear pollution stems from government policies, and pandemics arise from inadequate hygiene (Mohamed, 2007). Despite these failures, God continues to offer protection, demonstrating divine mercy rather than cruelty.

4. The Purpose of Suffering

If God is omnibenevolent, why does He permit suffering? One assumption underlying divine blame is that suffering is inherently bad. However, suffering can serve as a test of faith, as seen in Job's story. Despite losing his family and wealth, Job remained faithful and was ultimately rewarded with greater prosperity and wisdom (Job 42:5-6). Without suffering, moral and spiritual growth would be stunted.

Moreover, Christian eschatology suggests that suffering is temporary: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Aquinas (2014) and Augustine (2015) argue that suffering has a higher divine purpose beyond human comprehension. Consequently, natural disasters should not

be interpreted solely as divine punishment but as part of a larger, unknowable plan.

5. Psychological and Emotional Benefits of Thanking God

Beyond theological arguments, expressing gratitude to God during crises has psychological benefits. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the ability to manage stress through cognitive and behavioral strategies. Faith in divine protection fosters resilience, reducing anxiety and facilitating rational decision-making. The belief that God provides protection, even in adversity, offers comfort and hope (Kendall, 2011).

Neurologically, gratitude towards God reduces amygdala hyperactivity, enhancing prefrontal cortex function, which is essential for problem-solving (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Spiritually, thanking God provides a sense of purpose amidst suffering, reinforcing a constructive approach to adversity.

Conclusion

The assumption that God is directly responsible for natural disasters is flawed. While scripture affirms divine omnipotence, it does not necessarily imply that God actively inflicts harm. Instead, natural laws, human actions, and the purpose of suffering must be considered. Humanity bears significant responsibility for environmental degradation and disasters. Furthermore, suffering can serve as a test of faith and a means of moral growth. Finally, thanking God has profound psychological benefits, offering resilience and comfort in times of crisis. Thus, rather than questioning the reasonableness of thanking God, this paper argues that gratitude towards Him is both rational and meaningful.

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