

Suffering not seen as proof of only God

Radney's ideas of God challenged by writer's application of logic.

As I read Derek Radney's article ("Good and evil proof of God," Oct. 23) I came to the realization that our differing viewpoints come from an innately different way of approaching the topic of religion. Derek takes the God of the

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Bible as a given and works everything out from and around that idea. On the other hand I take myself as a given. I take reason and logic to be the best possible chance I, in my hopelessly limited understanding, can have. It is ultimate, it is cognition and it is what separates us from lower creatures.

In Derek's article he asserts that it is because of suffering that God must exist. He says that there is suffering, we don't understand how there could be so much suffering, therefore God, who is inherently out of our understanding, exists.

This argument is at best as flawed as the one Derek discredits at the beginning of his article. He says we could not distinguish between "good" and "evil" unless God, or more accurately the Christian idea of God, exists.

One of many possible explanations for how we came to understand good and evil could be evolutionarily based. Over the course of human history, as we developed and banded into tribes for survival, those actions such as helpfulness, love, charity, etc., served to better the tribe and therefore increase the individual value of that group member.

Those actions such as stealing, killing, etc., were detrimental to the welfare of the group, and those who perpetrated such acts were summarily driven out where they quickly succumbed to the hostile natural environment as they had no tribal help or protection. Thereby, we learned that those actions we classify as "good" allowed us to remain in the group and increase our chance for survival, and those actions we classify as "evil" caused group members to be ostracized and greatly decreased their chance for survival.

This is one of many possible theories for how a notion of good and evil came to exist in the featherless bipeds known as human beings.

Derek says it is because of the fact that we don't understand suffering

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that it points us to a being beyond our comprehension. This is a standard Christian argument for everything that seems to contradict the sort of a God who involves himself in human affairs. Everything that seems to be incongruent with their idea of God is summarily discredited with the standard retort that it is beyond our understanding. So every logical contradiction of the Christian God can be and is dismissed in this way, which makes it very difficult to evaluate the concept logically.

Finally, we note Derek's lack of understanding of other religions, possibly shedding light on how he is able to be so confident in his own beliefs.

He neglects to mention that there are religions in which it is the lack of a God that gives suffering an ability to at least be partially understood. In Buddhism, for example, it is our attachment, our ignorance and our notion of self which causes suffering. The idea of what we deserve, what we want, the knowledge that suffering results from the attachments we have to others and the attachments we have to our personal self—this is the root of suffering; only by understanding this can we stop it, according to Buddhism. This is one religion in which suffering is explained, though not through the idea of a God.

Also interesting to note is that the conflict between suffering and God only presents a problem if one assumes God must be involved in the day to day affairs of his creations.

A simple and logical way to circumvent the entire problem of suffering is to change the fundamental conception of what "God" is.

One possible way to think about it is that God is akin to a watchmaker; a being that puts things in motion, based on the laws and principals stemming from "him," and then observes in order to dole out appropriate rewards and punishments in the afterlife — this philosophical approach is known as Deism.

Ultimately, we see that suffering does not exclude the concept of a God, but it does certainly present a problem for the Christian personification of God.

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Where are all the good classes?

Classes that seem only logical somehow skipped this semester.

I'm sure that it hasn't happened just to me, but it has probably happened to all of us at one point or another. It's time to start thinking about our spring schedules and they've failed to include a class from years past that you wanted to take!

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That's right. How am I supposed to work my way through this college experience if I can't take origami as my art divisional? It's painful to think that even though the school is raising my tuition (and yours too, I've heard), they still don't offer the classes that I'm interested in. Still not following me? Let me give you a few examples.

Paper Shredding — I've heard that the business school is pretty darn good. I, however, fail to see such a simple course for majors. How are you going to land that job with a random multi-national corporation if you don't know how to shred confidential documents? Moreover, you'd think that a school moved to this city on tobacco money would offer an entire major in this!

Losing Wars — No, not offered out of the Military Science department,

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but rather the French department! What better way to learn everything that doesn't work in military strategy than from people who haven't won a major military engagement in almost a hundred years! Could there be a better opportunity to write that paper about the Maginot Line that you've been dying to write?

Atheism — Ever wondered what was out there and hoped that there wasn't anything? So have so many others around you. Yet there isn't a course on atheism offered in the religion department! How am I supposed to understand the universe that I live in if I am not given proper arguments to discount every current theory out there?

Dropping Things on People's Heads — Imagine how useful it would be to learn the art of dropping objects from high-rise buildings and actually hitting people with them! The possibilities are virtually endless — think about how you could impress your co-workers at the multi-national corporation that you will no doubt be working for after graduation with this real-world skill! The physics department would

attain new heights of prestige with this class. It would also give this university the opportunity to give honorary doctorates to the stars of Looney Toons!

Glass Ceiling — and you thought that RAD would be the only "women-only" class ever offered here. Why not require all incoming freshman females to take this class and clue them into the harsh reality that it will take them one-third longer than their male counterparts to pay off those student loans of theirs. We could even make this useful for students hoping to work out of the business school or get women's studies major or minor. Wouldn't want them to feel left behind and all.

Ignoring Social Reality — Straight out of the sociology department we have the class that nobody attending this university should pass up. Want to get ahead in the world and not feel bad about it? If you answered yes, you need a healthy dose of "ignoring social reality." Feel bad about the fact that you drive an SUV while your roommate can barely afford gas-money to drive home? Silly fool, it's because he doesn't work as hard as you and clearly you are a better person for it! You need to be able to remove reality from your perception and get back on track!

If this university is trying to offer us the best liberal arts education in the South, it is doing a rather poor job by failing to offer these simple, yet effective classes.

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There is more to loving America than flying a flag

Mistaking love of the flag for patriotism discounts some.

For many of us, the American flag is a powerful symbol of our country. We see the flag and are filled with pride and patriotism at the might and glory of our nation. And our

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flag stands for a great many wonderful things. This simple piece of fabric can represent the ideals of liberty, equality, basic human rights, and democracy.

It can represent them. However, we must never forget that the flag is just that: a flag, a piece of fabric. The *Old Gold and Black* contained a column calling for more flags on campus a couple of weeks ago ("Flags don't fly

on campus," Oct. 23). The columnist implied that flag-waving is patriotic, that patriotism is inherently good, and that anyone who dared question our country or not wave a flag is un-American and inherently bad. I could not more strongly disagree.

What is patriotism? The dictionary definition is "love and devotion to one's country," a phrase that will surely make any red-blooded American smile with pride.

Unfortunately, somewhere in our history, and particularly in recent years, the idea of patriotism has been perverted. Patriotism now means "the willingness to stand with one's country, regardless of the morality of its actions."

Anyone who has paid the slightest amount of attention to current events has noticed it. Question the war on Iraq? You're un-American. Question the war on terrorism? You're a terrorist yourself. Question the competency of our president? You don't deserve to live in our country.

Flag-waving is just a particularly

insidious manifestation of this trend. Although flags can represent the ideals behind America, they also represent support for the current government, and the current administration. But flags, and their ideological cousin, patriotism, don't make a convincing argument for the government's actions.

insidious manifestation of this trend. Although flags can represent the ideals behind America, they also represent support for the current government, and the current administration. But flags, and their ideological cousin, patriotism, don't make a convincing argument for the government's actions. Instead, they provide blind, unwavering support. People are

encouraged to fall into line, simply because it's good to be patriotic. Conversely, anybody who refuses to do so is easily dismissed as wrong, with a minimum of actual thought or rational judgment. Sure, a person might dedicate enormous amounts of time to improving our country through political activism.

Sure, a person might be far more educated on domestic and world affairs than the average citizen. Sure, a person might believe in the basic, founding ideals of this nation with every ounce of conviction they possess. But because that same person has not attached a U.S. flag to his car, we do not consider him to be a true American.

Flag-waving, and our modern notion of patriotism, encourages intellectual laziness. They let us simply say, "America is good, and anything else is bad!"

But America, like everything else, is composed of goods and evils; whites, blacks, and shades of gray. The ideal of our nation is beautiful and worthy of respect and love but the nation itself

is imperfect and often fails to meet the ideal.

As thinking Americans, it is our duty to find our own beliefs, decide for ourselves what we want the country to be and work to promote our decision. Your own decision might support the government, or oppose it.

But make sure it is truly *your* decision. Don't always follow the flags, because they can be led astray. And don't deride others when they choose not to hang a flag. If your beliefs are well-founded, you don't need the oversimplification that patriotism provides.

So next time you see a flag blowing in the wind, stifle that swell of pride for a moment, and think. Think about what it stands for, both good and bad. Think of how to right the wrongs that it represents.

By understanding and working to improve our country, rather than simply believing in it, we can create a world that we can truly take pride in.

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