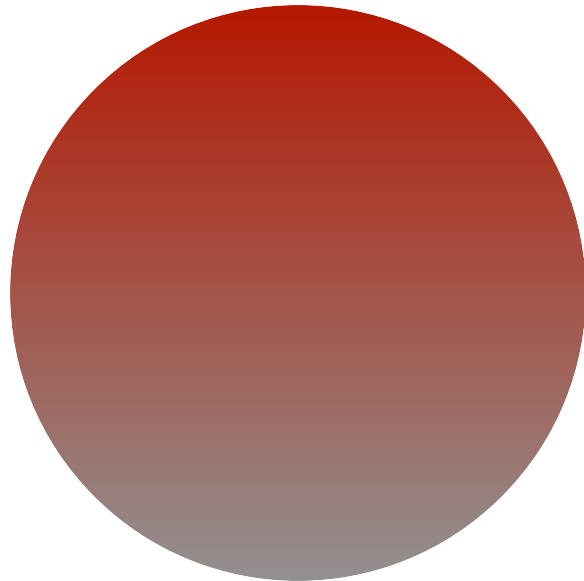


# A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Why You Can't Believe in a God  
Who Allows Bad Things to Happen to Good People

by Ron Talarico



## A. Introduction

This book argues that the overwhelming cause of the super-grand majority of destructive acts and situations experienced by human beings throughout history has been and still currently is humanity itself rather than any deity or other factor. After using the Internet to locate a considerable quantity and variety of easily accessible and public data in order to examine a sampling of those destructive acts and situations in human history, and after comparing the accessed information across multiple web sites, it would seem irrational not to conclude that we very humans are and have always been our own worst enemy; that we alone have inflicted and continue to inflict the most robust, cruel, and imaginative damage against each other and ourselves.

We.

Not any God. Not nature. Not the universe. Not life. Not happenstance. Not other.

We.

To those who will surely say that an overabundance of examples has been presented herein, including too much detail, I respond that the examples and the detail given are:

- (1) necessary in order to demonstrate the excessive abundance of destructive acts ideated and executed by human beings against human beings throughout recorded history;
- (2) necessary in order to demonstrate the high frequency and egregious destructiveness of those acts;
- (3) necessary because it is indispensable that we squarely face such truths about ourselves not only toward the end of abandoning as myth the old argument that blames a cruel God for our own cruelly destructive acts, but also and *more importantly* toward the end of understanding and admitting, at last, that we have all the required power (if not the will) to end the myth;
- (4) necessary in order to debunk one of the most common reasons we hear of as to why a person can't believe in God or decides not to. Despite that it is a reason whose basis in fact appears negligible upon close examination – negligible certainly when compared with the cruelty of the human species toward its own members; and
- (5) necessary because the subject matter treated herein is likely one of the most difficult and painful for us to study, for it not only requires a serious examination and confrontation of our minds, hearts, and souls in order to determine the causes and extent of our own destructiveness as human beings, but requires also an equally serious decision regarding what we will choose to *do* about what we discover in the process.

Let us not be deceived into thinking that we can simply discard as exaggerations the examples given below, for those examples not only are neither exaggerations nor an exhaustive listing, but, as implied above, they are quite easy to verify by simple use of Internet searches alone. Those who dare to try it for themselves will have their fill! Our search for additional examples is only as unlimited as we have the patience to pursue and the stomach to endure.

Furthermore, it is not honest to point the finger only at others when it comes to destructive actions against other individuals, or to consider the destructiveness of such actions mainly on the basis of how large scale, repulsive, or far reaching they may be. For most if not all of us, in our own unique ways, perform destructive acts at many times in our lives, and many among us do so frequently. Perhaps we act thus only to the extent that we feel safe, or with the confidence that we will not be found out, or that we are acting within legal (distinct from moral) laws, or acting without grossly crossing beyond cultural norms, and so on. But something as simple as knowingly talking down to one's kids or discouraging them or diminishing their self-esteem is a destructive act that can have a negative effect on them for life. Sharing with others a confidence that you have promised to keep to yourself, or that you know better than to

share, can be a destructive act. Slandering a friend or colleague by deliberately sharing information about them that you know is false or misleading, or you know *may* be, is a destructive act. Examples of smaller scale destruction abound in life and can destroy silently, insidiously, and permanently no matter how minor they may seem. For more on the subject, check out your local and national news stories on likely any and every day of the week and virtually all day long.

One cannot say logically, credibly, or with evidence that the destructive acts caused by natural disasters (hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc.), or, more importantly, caused by ourselves (murder, theft, cheating, lying, deceiving, war, domestic violence, sex abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, child abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, jealousy, drug trafficking, bullying, revenge, lust, slander, greed, human trafficking, envy, child slavery, sloth, rape, etc.) – one cannot say logically, credibly, or with evidence that God wills these things into existence, wants these things to continue, or forces us to commit them against each other.

And, exclusive of natural disasters, if we humans are the ones ideating, perpetrating, and perpetuating these evils against one another – which will be demonstrated in the remainder of this writing – why would we turn around and ask why God does not stop them? The fact is that the ability to stop these destructive actions lies within our own complete power. No God caused or causes them; *we* did and do.

Whether regarding the imagination that goes into the cruelty, or the successful implementation of that cruelty, it is not difficult to conclude that God might well take lessons from *us* concerning cruelty since it appears that we are far and away this planet's master teachers of it, and its most accomplished and undeniable champions.

While it may be tempting to blame God for the cruelty in the world, doing so is more than anything else a distraction away from holding ourselves accountable for our own choices and actions. Blaming God is a way to escape taking a long, hard, honest look inside ourselves and our society. It is a cowardly, easy, empty excuse for continuing the violence that since the beginning of human existence we have brought against each other; brought against the “fairy tale of all fairy tales” that is our uniquely special planet Earth; and indeed, as a result, brought against the entire created universe. And all with the most incredible ingenuity, tirelessness, and brutal force!

This document is not an attempt to defend God, for if God does exist he or she surely can take care of self. Rather it is an attempt to help us face and acknowledge squarely the primary cause of evil and destruction in the world: *homo sapiens*.

If we were to tally on one balance sheet all the bad things that happen to people which are provably caused by us, wholly or in part, and on a second balance sheet those bad things that we believe are caused or willed by God, the content of the latter sheet, by comparison with the former, would surely be basically insignificant.

The remainder of the document is an effort to present reasonable evidence that challenges and substantially refutes the idea that it is primarily God rather than human beings who allows bad things to happen to people.

## **B. Evidence**

Appearing below are three types of destruction that I believe are the most significant to discuss. The listings within each type are in complete random order. They are a selected sampling from among a virtually infinite number of possibilities and so are by no means exhaustive. The research was done using Wikipedia and a large variety of other free and readily available online links and resources. Thus, if desired, the reader should be able to easily verify and establish independently the veracity of any listing.

### *B.1. Destruction caused by human beings and our choices*

The statistics reported here are approximate because invariably they differed from source to source. The figures selected are *the very lowest* of each range located, and the plus signs following them have been used to remind the reader of this. Precise and universally agreed upon figures regarding destruction by human beings do not appear to be obtainable, nor is this level of precision and agreement important for the purpose of this writing as stated in the introduction.

It merits stressing that where death figures are stated they regard the dead only and do not include those incalculable many other individual human beings who have been seriously injured and otherwise negatively affected for life: an eye or arm or leg missing; permanent emotional damage; severed or damaged spinal cord and resulting paralysis; brain damage; Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and other trauma; psychological illnesses, the separation for unbearably long periods or for life of mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, brothers, sisters, friends; suicide; acting out against others; geographical displacement or relocation away from all that was once familiar; loss of homes, livelihoods, ways of life and – of equal importance – loss of hope and self-esteem themselves.

- Stalin's Soviet Ukraine genocide/man-made famine, 1932-33: 1,800,000+ dead
- Greek genocide against Christian Ottoman Greeks, 1914-22: 450,000+ dead
- Cambodian genocide, 1975-79: 1,700,000+ dead
- Rwandan genocide, 1994: 500,000+ dead
- Armenian genocide, 1915-22: 800,000+ dead
- Iraq war led by the US, 2003-2016 (ongoing to date): 200,000+ dead
- World War I, 1914-18 : 17 million+ dead (20 million+ wounded)
- World War II (arguably the greatest catastrophe by human beings against human beings in the history of the human race), 1939-45 : 60,000,000+ dead
- Bosnian genocide, 1992-95: 96,000+ dead
- Duterte Philippine killings of known and suspected drug dealers/users, 2016 (ongoing to date): 5,000+ dead
- organized crime, white-collar crime, financial crimes, political crimes, war crimes – all together involving assault, murder, money laundering, embezzlement, counterfeiting, tax evasion, fraud, copyright and intellectual property infringement, etc. All of these have a negative impact on the lives, attitudes, and hopes of innocent individuals and groups
- arms trafficking and sales of nuclear materials to rogue-states
- identity theft, computer viruses, worms, ransomware, spyware, adware, spam, malvertising, botnets, not to mention direct cyber warfare that has the potential even to disable components of a country's major infrastructure and democratic systems
- fake news and other types of lies and deliberate misinformation
- the many colonial empires in modern times (Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, British, Russian, Ottoman, Austrian, American, Japanese, Italian, Belgian, etc.) and the resulting subjugation, displacement, slavery, and murder of peoples who were already legitimately living in the conquered lands. These were empires born mainly to satisfy greed for natural resources, material goods, foreign corporate interests, cheap labor, and lust for power.
- oppressive authoritarian regimes specifically supported by the US: for example in Nicaragua (the Contras), Egypt (Mubarak), Uzbekistan (Karimov), Democratic Republic of Congo (Mubutu), South Africa (apartheid), Philippines (Marcos), Panama (Noriega), Chile (Pinochet), Brazil (Médici)
- oppressive authoritarian regimes generally, in which exist various combinations of absence of free elections; of elections that are rigged or won by means of violence or force; of repression; of unconstrained power; of those who are in power not being accountable to the people; of enforcement of public conformity; of a tightly controlled military for the purpose of controlling political opponents; of prevention or hindering of intellectual freedom, demonstrations and other public acts of disagreeing with those in power; of little or no influence over decisions by the governing power; of non-existent or weak independent judicial systems. Some examples of these regimes are North Korea, Syria, Cuba, China, Yemen, Russia, Ethiopia, Laos, Bahrain, Tajikistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Libya, Central

- African Republic, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, South Sudan; past regimes in Franco's Spain, Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy
- Assyrian genocide (extermination of Assyrian population by the Ottoman Empire), 1915-23: 275,000+ dead
  - Dzungar genocide, 1755-1758 (extermination of the Buddhist Dzungar people by the Chinese dynasty): 480,000+ dead
  - Extensive sexual abuse of children in the Roman Catholic Church involving thousands of victims over a period of decades, including cover-ups and failures of Church hierarchy in dealing effectively with the problem
  - Holocaust by Nazi Germany, 1939-45: approximately 17 million dead, among which Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Romani, Spanish Republicans, people with disabilities, people of Asian and African descent, gays and lesbians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, others, *and* 6,000,000 Jews (total of 23 million people)
  - Holodomor man-made famine by Soviets against Ukrainians, 1932-33: 4,000,000+ dead
  - Bangladesh genocide, 1971: 300,000+ dead, and 200,000+ Bangladeshi women raped
  - Syrian Civil War, 2011- March 2018 (ongoing): 350,000+dead; 6,000,000+ internally displaced; 5,000,000+ refugees to other countries
  - Mongol Empire conquests (Genghis Khan & others), 1206-1368: 30,000,000+ dead
  - "Comfort Women" from Korea, China, Philippines, & other countries forced into prostitution/sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II: 200,000+ women & girls
  - Darfur genocide, 2003-2017: 200,000+ dead and 2,700,000+ displaced
  - Zulu Kingdom exterminations, 1810-28: 1,000,000+ dead
  - Congo Free State atrocities (Belgian colony), 1885-1908: 3,000,000+ dead
  - Indonesian Genocide, 1965-66: 500,000+ dead
  - Thirty Years War in Europe, 1618-1648: 7,000,000+ dead
  - Spanish colonization of the Americas, 400+ years: 8,000,000+ dead
  - Roman Catholic Inquisitions, 13th-19th centuries: 8,000+ dead not including countless tortured
  - American Civil War, 1861-65: 785,000+ dead
  - Kidnapping of Blacks from Africa for slavery in America and the New World, 15th-19th centuries: 10,000,000+ kidnapped
  - U.S. Indian Removal Act, 1830-42, resulting in forced expulsions of Native Americans from their homelands to the western part of the country: 59,000+ moved
  - current (2017) significant U.S. discrimination against Native Americans & Blacks in housing, education, incarceration, employment
  - German Empire genocide in Namibia of Herero, Nama, and San people, 1904-07: 60,000+ dead
  - Native Americans either killed in conflict with U.S forces or who died from various diseases brought to the New World by Europeans and their domesticated animals: 10,000,000+
  - segregation and prejudice (past and ongoing) and its negative effects against Blacks in the U.S. in spite of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation freeing Blacks, in spite of the 1870 15th Amendment to the Constitution giving Blacks the vote, and in spite of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to overcome legal barriers for Blacks at the state and local levels
  - discrimination and cruelty against all manner of those who are not like us: Catholics vs Protestants, Sunnis vs Shias, Jews vs Palestinians, whites vs non-whites, Northerners vs Southerners (in the US, in Europe, in Italy), Buddhists vs Rohingyas, Tutsis vs Hutus, men vs women, Indians vs Pakistani, white supremacists vs people of color, Christians vs Muslims, Republicans vs Democrats, fundamentalists vs mainstream Christians, political liberals vs political conservatives, LGBT vs straight, people with non-visible disabilities vs people with visible disabilities, etc. (the list is virtually endless)
  - environmental pollution, including from automobile and airplane exhaust, power plants, coal production, metal refineries, industrial boilers, petroleum oil refineries that produce our gasoline, diesel oil, kerosene, heating oils, lubricating oils, etc.
  - human trafficking in the form of sex slavery, child slavery, forced labor, and commercial sexual exploitation – all in all 20,000,000+ children & adult victims globally – not to mention the destruction and trauma involved in all of this, including violence, torture, brainwashing, rape, physical assault, depression, self-hatred, self-destructive behaviors, self-mutilation, Sexually Transmitted Diseases,

- alcohol and other substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, loss of hope, suicide, etc.
- sexual abuse; domestic violence; emotional abuse; rape; drug trafficking; global terrorism; mass murders
- 1947 partition of India into Pakistan and India as a result of the end of British colonialism there: 1,000,000+ dead
- September 11 attacks in the U.S., 2001: 2,900+ dead
- atomic bombing in World War II, 1945: of Hiroshima 140,000+ dead and Nagasaki 70,000+ dead
- US war in Afghanistan, 2001-2017 (on-going): 50,000+ dead
- nuclear weapons tests and resulting planetary pollution from 1945 to 2016 by Great Britain, United States, Soviet Union, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea. These were conducted underground, in the oceans, in the atmosphere, and above the atmosphere. Resulting pollution involved worldwide fallout (radioactive materials) into the global ecosystem and related effects including elevated levels of cancer, malformation of children, birth defects, genetic damage, lower immunity to diseases, etc.
- Kosovo War, 1998-99: 13,000+ dead; 1,200,000+ displaced
- corruption in U.S. federal government and of our elected members in Congress due to poorly restricted and even more poorly enforced lobbying and campaign financing laws, and the damage which that corruption creates both to American morals and ethics as a nation and to the American spirit
- killing in China of practitioners of Falun Gong spiritual practice who have been imprisoned in order to harvest their organs for international sale and as cadavers for medical science, 1999 to the present: 10,000+ killed
- man-made famines in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, 2017: 18 million+ human beings starving to death or at risk of same
- failure to clean up in a timely manner the U.S. Hanford Nuclear (plutonium production) Site on the Columbia River despite the threat of earthquakes, sabotage, and materials deterioration, all of which risk the contamination and devastation of life for several million residents of the Pacific Northwest
- Yemen conflict March 2015 to November 2017 (ongoing): 8,670+ dead
- Myanmar ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslim minority, 2017: 6,700+ dead; 615,000+ refugees

Again, the reader is reminded that the figures indicated in Section B.1 are the *lowest* of each range that was researched.

*B.2.a. Destruction caused by disease and illness that results from or is negatively influenced by human activities and our choices*

*Air pollution* from human activities and our choices can and often does cause or negatively influence coronary artery disease, stroke, lung cancer, COPD, asthma, skin and thyroid cancers, birth defects, cognitive disabilities, etc. Human activities, for example, such as factory chimney discharges, vehicular traffic and airplane exhaust, coal mine dust, radioactive waste, nuclear test explosions, bombs. [From US Environmental Protection Agency Web Site, 2/9/2017: "People exposed to toxic air pollutants at sufficient concentrations and durations may have an increased chance of getting cancer or experiencing other serious health effects. These health effects can include damage to the immune system, as well as neurological, reproductive (e.g., reduced fertility), developmental, respiratory and other health problems. In addition to exposure from breathing air toxics, some toxic air pollutants such as mercury can deposit onto soils or surface waters, where they are taken up by plants and ingested by animals and are eventually magnified up through the food chain. Like humans, animals may experience health problems if exposed to sufficient quantities of air toxics over time."]

Since the first nuclear test explosion in 1945, at least eight nations have detonated a total of 2,000+ nuclear test explosions either in the atmosphere resulting in air pollution or in the ocean resulting in water pollution (see next entry).

*Water pollution* from human activities and our choices can and often does cause or negatively influence dysentery, cholera, Hepatitis A, lead poisoning (from both environmentally contaminated water and water conduit containing lead), illness and death in marine life (our food supply), etc. Human

activities, for example, such as oil spills; oil and other discharges from ocean vessels; underwater nuclear detonations; dumping of garbage and commercial chemicals in waterways allowing them to enter the groundwater and other sources of drinking water.

*Noise pollution* from human activities and our choices can and often does cause or negatively influence hearing loss, stress-related disorders, sleep disruption.

*Land & soil pollution* from human activities and our choices can and often does cause or negatively influence breathing problems, skin problems, and cancers. Pollution, for example, from acid rain, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers, deforestation, soil erosion, mining, animal waste, garbage in landfills. All of these either make their way eventually into our groundwater or facilitate it.

*Poor nutrition* and resulting cumulative health risks from consuming prepared convenience foods too frequently and in excessive quantities, almost all of which foods contain some combination of chemical preservatives, chemical stabilizers, chemical food coloring, chemical artificial sweeteners, chemical flavor enhancers all of which can and do cause or negatively influence allergies, hyperactivity, Attention Deficit Syndrome, skin problems. The regularly high or excessive consumption of salt, saturated fat, and sugar in many diets, perhaps most typically in the American diet for example, can lead to increased risks for hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and obesity to name a few.

*Insufficient physical exercise* and its negative impacts on one's health. Insufficient physical exercise is a key risk factor in the development or exacerbation of many chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, obesity, blood clots, osteoporosis, cognitive dysfunction, depression and anxiety, falls and bone fractures, colon and breast cancers, physical pain generally, higher mortality rate, etc.)

*Extended levels of emotional and psychological stress* can have negative impacts on one's mood and personality and contribute to depression, anxiety, cognitive problems, personality changes, behavioral problems, difficulty completing daily activities, difficulty developing and maintaining rewarding interpersonal relationships, difficulty holding a job, etc.

*Insufficient sleep* can lead to increased risk of occupational and medical errors, bad moods, lack of focus, diabetes, irritability, disruption to the immune system, risk of injury or accidents at home, work, or on the road.

*Insufficient physical health insurance*, or insurance that is too expensive to afford for what is needed, can and does leave hundreds of millions of people worldwide vulnerable to increased numbers of illnesses and severity of those illnesses, increased unhappiness, loss of hope, and greater risk of death.

*Insufficient mental health insurance*, or insurance that is too expensive to afford for what is needed, can and does impact negatively on crime, violence, mass shootings, addictions (drug, alcohol, food, gambling, sex, work, etc.), mental illnesses, despair, loss of contributions to society.

*Insufficient affordable, comprehensive, and effective treatment for alcoholism, illicit drug use, opioid addiction, and abuse of licit drugs*, can and does lead to loss of jobs and income, loss of homes, deterioration and/or loss of family life, erosion of human relationships, seriously poor life-choices and critical thinking skills, and unmerited incarceration of many people.

*B.2.b. Disease and other destructive physical conditions that as far as we know do not result from human activities and our choices*

This could change, as it has through time, as our knowledge continues to grow. Perhaps these situations are caused by God one could argue. Perhaps instead they are, as with the human species too, simply a natural part of evolution and the free and unrestrained development of the universe. At this time, it appears that we do not know.

Examples are:

- genetic diseases like cystic fibrosis, Down syndrome, hemophilia, Huntington's disease, muscular dystrophy, sickle cell anemia
- non-genetic diseases like congenital heart defects and spina bifida
- diphtheria, mumps, measles, rubella, chickenpox, and polio – but these are all preventable today by known vaccines, if we choose to use them
- malaria (largely preventable however) and cerebral palsy (partly preventable)
- mental illnesses that do not result from human activities and our choices but from genetics and abnormal balance of neurotransmitters. However, what are normally genetics-based mental illnesses can be *triggered* by human-caused psychological and/or environmental factors (see examples in B.2.c below).

*B.2.c. Mental illnesses, however, can also be caused or triggered by psychological trauma resulting from human activities and our choices*

For example: physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; parental neglect, low self-esteem, excessive stress, abuse of alcohol and other chemically addictive substances, family dysfunction, traumatic divorce of parents, abusive foster care, being bullied, and one's belief that one is unloved, unloveable, unwelcome, or irrelevant.

*B.2.d. Cumulative negative consequences*

To be considered in all of this is also the serious and sobering question of what negative consequences occur when more than one of the problematic situations presented in B.2.a through B.2.c above are experienced by the same individual, or when that individual experiences the cumulative effect of these situations over time, including over an entire lifetime.

*B.3. Natural Disasters*

The Earth's natural processes frequently result in destructive events in nature. As far as we know, and as far as science can take us currently, these destructive events are the result of a universe that appears to be free and unencumbered to develop and evolve as such happens. The more science learns about these natural phenomena, the better our understanding will become.

One product of this free development is the formation over time of the inestimable beauty, grandeur, and uniqueness that is our planet Earth, for which we are grateful and without which we would not be as happy. Yet another product of this development is destruction, sometimes catastrophic, with which, it appears, we must learn to live until such time as our knowledge and resulting capacities to deal effectively with it might catch up with our experiences.

One could choose to believe that God controls these events and could stop them if his or her desire were such. But, apparently because God does not control *us*, which we appreciate and likely insist upon and demand, leaving us free to choose as we will and what we will, it would seem reasonable enough to assume that God has done the same with the universe, its development, and its characteristics, including its destructiveness at times.

We are not, however, completely innocent victims or powerless when it comes to preventing natural disasters.



Some of our role, well documented, in contributing to the natural disasters that result from or are exacerbated by global warming and climate change may not seem really much of a choice at this point in human existence, especially given our dependence on energy and transportation, and given the current state of progress, or lack thereof, regarding alternative energy sources. Practically incalculable is the current role of fossil fuels – coal, oil, and natural gas – in the production of the energy and fuel that drive our world’s current everyday wants and needs, including in the manufacturing of plastics, steel, and iron, for cars, trucks, trailers, airplanes, satellites and space exploration, trains, ships, pleasure boats, equipment and tools of every type including medical; construction projects, military development, furniture, toys, electronics, clothing, road surfacing, storage, recreation, and untold numbers of other everyday material goods.

However, other aspects of our contributory role in natural disasters *are* a choice. For example, our frequent resistance to honestly and squarely define and address the difference between *what we want* and *what we need*; our reluctance to take a hard and serious look at the “elephants” that live in the rooms of our personal choices; our very frequent, irresponsible, and unnecessarily excessive acquisition, use, and discarding of the world’s goods, much of whose production has contributed to the pollution and destruction of our environment. Our greed appears to be incessant, as does our refusal to admit that we can live without many of the goods and services that we use, *and still be happy*. And still be happy! Perhaps even investing more time in pursuing the non-material depths of the meaning of our humanity. The culture of mass consumerism and waste that surrounds – indeed bombards – us holds a stranglehold grip on us that many have come to think little about seriously, or are entirely unaware of altogether, thanks to a successfully ideated and managed profit-driven capitalist system of consumption that has too often skillfully duped us regarding what it is that we really need.

The temptations inherent in the strategies and tactics of mass consumerism are powerfully alluring, almost beyond belief. They very often cater to some of our deepest insecurities and fears: doubts about our physical appearance, our status, our self-image and self-esteem, and whether we really are a legitimate and valued part of the society and groups around us. And the temptations are powerfully alluring not only for the affluent in our society and the world, but also for the world’s poor *if and when* they might have the financial opportunities that would make massive consumerism possible for them. The greed for more is universal and classless.

These temptations, however, are by no means impossible to resist. Many of the goods that we buy, use (or not), and then discard are our choices to buy in the first place. And how long we use them is also a choice, as is whether we make good faith efforts to have them repaired for our continued use, whether we replace them unnecessarily, whether we recycle them (which is not a justification for having them in the first place), or whether we offer them for use by others. The more goods we produce the more of our resources we burden; the more goods we throw away the more of the environment we burden; and both actions negatively impact the planet and humanity alike. If we are gut-level honest, I suspect we will admit that most of our choices regarding goods, services, energy, etc. actually regard wants, not needs.

Although natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, sea rises, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, avalanches, and desertification can happen on their own without human cause, they also can be and are significantly and negatively influenced by us humans and many of our choices, often resulting in upsetting the Earth’s natural balance regarding the carbon cycle.

Examples are:

- The human contribution to rising sea levels is related to our burning of fossil fuels and subsequent increases in greenhouse gases. This same human causal factor is having an influence on the frequency and severity of hurricanes and their destructiveness.
- Human activity appears to be responsible for those earthquakes that result from the disposal of wastewater related to hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Fracking is known also to have contaminated groundwater and surface water; to have resulted in the escape of harmful methane gas and other

- pollutants into the atmosphere; to have chemically polluted the soil from the drilling, etc.
- The human contribution to desertification includes our deforestation activities, overgrazing the land, redirecting waterways, and the increased covering of the land with roads, buildings, and megacities.
  - When we eliminate or degrade wetland habitats through urban sprawl, roads, buildings, parking lots, megacities, shopping malls, or industrial pollution, the result can involve a decline in waterfowl numbers; an increase in animal species deformities; an increase in contamination of water by inappropriate agricultural drainage pollutants in stormwater runoff and by leaching from landfills; increased flooding; loss of once productive land, etc. A major negative result is reduced absorption of greenhouse gases due to fewer trees and other similarly acting vegetation.
  - When we produce more greenhouse gases than nature can absorb, some areas that humans inhabit receive more rain than they can cope with while others receive less rain than they need. Both results are problematic for each respective group: potential death, disease, homelessness, loss of economic resources, etc.

### C. Final Remark

As stated at the start of this writing, the primary cause of the super-grand majority of destructive acts and situations experienced by human beings throughout history has been and still is humanity itself rather than any deity or other factor. I believe I have shown this herein to be the case. We have it in our complete power to end the majority of the worst of all destruction on the planet, whether against our fellow human beings or the planet itself. The destruction we cause is the product of our choices gone awry. Choices.

Humankind has always lived in a time and a place of opposites, of polarity, of good/evil, love/hate, sadness/joy, building up/tearing down, male/female, strong/weak, dictatorships/democracies, yes/no, either/or, hot/cold, sickness/wellness, pride/humility, war/peace, cowardice/bravery, truth/lies, disease/health, life/death. Endless the list. The negative components of the pairs of opposites – especially the more destructive ones in the case of this writing – do seem to be an integral part of life and what it means to exist at all. No one escapes life's pains and no one escapes its joys. Life is full of both awful and awe-filled moments. It would seem they come as a pair and are an inseparably integral part of existence, however paradoxical and painful that may be and however desperately we might wish it otherwise.

The struggle between good and evil behavior in our lives (1) is present in the psyches of all of us, (2) is present at the same time within each of us, and (3) is present without end. The inclinations within us to perform actions that affirm, encourage, and sustain life, and to perform actions that erode, diminish, and tear life down – these both exist within us always and simultaneously, and we often turn from one of them to the other within the short span of only a few minutes. Each end of the polarity tugs at us constantly and vies ceaselessly for our attention and action. Which one wins out is basically, in the end, our call. Again, a choice.

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So quite apart from the separate issue of whether or not God exists,  
when you say you can't believe in a God who allows bad things to happen to good people,  
consider that you mistake the actors in all of this:  
It is not a God who allows the majority of bad things in life to happen.  
It is you and I.

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The End

## About the Author

Ron Talarico is a writer based in Portland, Oregon.

Born and raised in Portland, and other than having lived in Italy on three occasions in my twenties and taught in Texas for two years, I have always been satisfied to remain rooted right where I am. Despite the excitement and importance of traveling to places far away and experiencing all manner of new things to learn and do, the journey I most prefer and to which I keep coming back is the one within myself. The endless places of mind and soul that there I find have long upstaged all other contenders for my attention and remained center-stage to my sense of the essential meaning of who I am.

Truth, Beauty, and Today are my greatest encouragements and favorite places to linger. As ideas, they turn me on something crazy. I wish getting to know them better did not require near-equal time trying to escape the barrage of human enticements that would lead me away from them. And though I could never possess these three wonders of inspiration or even be sure I am coming closer to them, yet there they are — Truth, Beauty, Today — omnipresent, indispensable, eternal, irresistible. And if all I ever achieve is knowing I have given my best to the journey to be closer to them, who says I'm not lucky?

Other books by the author available in the Apple Books Bookstore:

*The Mouth Is for Talking*

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Website: [rontalarico.com](http://rontalarico.com)

Email: [talarico.ron@gmail.com](mailto:talarico.ron@gmail.com)