
The Problem of Animal Suffering

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“The pain of the animal world is the most serious of all objections to the Christian concept of God.”

—Bishop Charles Gore (1853–1932)

This chapter concerns sentient, nonhuman animals, all of them, both domesticated and those in the wild. Typically, the animal kingdom, in its most loosely stated definition, includes every living thing in distinction from the plant kingdom. In this world, they suffer, sometimes horribly, because of the law of the jungle, as well as at the hands of human beings. For an all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing god to have created the egregiously horrific and unnecessary predatory relationship among his creatures requires a rejection of god and his religion. My argument is that the amount of massive ubiquitous horrendous animal suffering in the world cannot be reconciled with god and is one of the strongest reasons to reject him/her/it.¹ The great nineteenth-century agnostic Robert G. Ingersoll vividly, succinctly, and powerfully described the problem in these words:

Would an infinitely wise, good and powerful God, intending to produce man, commence with the lowest possible forms of life; with the simplest organism that can be imagined, and during immeasurable periods of time, slowly and almost imperceptibly improve upon the rude beginning, until man was evolved? Would countless ages thus be wasted in the production of awkward forms, afterwards abandoned? Who can appreciate the mercy of so making the world that all animals devour animals; so that every mouth is a slaughter house, and every stomach a tomb?

What would we think of a father, who should give a farm to his children, and before giving them possession should plant upon it thousands of deadly shrubs and vines; should stock it with ferocious beasts, and poisonous reptiles; should take pains to put a few swamps in the neighborhood to breed malaria; should so arrange matters, that the

¹ I have written extensively on this problem in *Why I Became an Atheist; The Christian Delusion; God or Godless; and Christianity is Not Great*.