Hinduism, Philosophy, and the Mind

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Austin Egbert:

Greetings, and welcome to Mind Matters News. This week our guest host, Michael Egnor, sits down with the founder of Theology Unleashed, Arjuna Gallagher, to discuss a number of topics from a Hindu perspective, including the nature of free will, the origins of the universe, and modern issues facing social ethics. Enjoy.

Michael Egnor:

Welcome to Mind Matters News, this is Mike Egnor. I have the privilege today to have as my guest my friend, Arjuna Gallagher. Mr. Gallagher is from New Zealand, and he is a Hindu, and he has a YouTube channel called Theology Unleashed, which is a wonderful channel that I listen to a lot, and I encourage our listeners to check it out. He discusses in a very profound way many topics in theology, in science, in culture, and he's had some great guests. He's had David Bentley Hart, Graham Oppy, Mark Tan, Mark Solms, who's a neuroscientist, Matt Dillahunty, who's an atheist. James Fodor, a philosopher, Steven Barr, who's a Christian philosopher. Aron Ra is an atheist, and I've had the privilege of being on Arjuna's Theology Unleashed YouTube channel as well, it's a great channel.

In addition Arjuna has done a wonderful documentary entitled, "The Persecuted Saints You've Never Heard Of." It's an intriguing story about a monastery of orthodox monks who were persecuted because of a theological position that they took. When I started listening to it I couldn't stop listening to it, it's a fantastic documentary, please check it out on Arjuna's channel. So, welcome Arjuna, thank you for joining us.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, thank you for having me, it's great to be here.

Michael Egnor:

I don't know a lot about Hinduism, and I would suspect that many of our listeners don't know a lot either. So, what is Hinduism?

Arjuna Gallagher:

The word Hinduism is often misused as if it described one religion, but really it's a category of religions. I was recently listening to Dr. Howard Resnick, who was on a Muslim interfaith dialogue podcast, and he explained that comparing Islam to Hinduism, it's a category mistake. The accurate comparison would be the Abrahamic traditions to Hinduism. I was on their podcast a few weeks earlier and they were saying, "Oh, the problem with Hinduism is every village you go to, everyone has a different belief." It's like, "Well, Hinduism for a lot of people is an ethnicity." They grow up in this culture, there's foods, it includes the ritual aspects of the religion. But if you actually look inside what is taught in these traditions, you have a diverse set of belief systems taught in different traditions.

And a lot of them will be very specific about what they believe. So, I'm a member of a tradition called within the tradition the Brahma Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya, and that's a chain extending back, at

least claimed by the tradition, all the way back to the beginning of the creation of this universe, that's the claim that's made. But we have recent appearances of prophets and incarnations of God all the way back to 500 years ago.

Michael Egnor:

If you were to describe central themes that are held by most, if not all Hindus, what might they be?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, so you do get a lot of diversity. But the things that are common are an acceptance of the Vedas as authoritative. So, the Vedas are just the Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharvaveda, and there's also the Puranas and Itihasas and so on. And the beliefs would be cyclical time, so all Hindus are going to believe that time didn't have a beginning, it doesn't have an end. There's periodic creation and destruction, so everything's always existed but sometimes it appears and sometimes it doesn't, it disappears or it's destroyed. Some of them are going to believe that there's an eternal spiritual world which is never destroyed, it doesn't have a day or a night so to speak. Although, it has no day or night in the sense of destruction or annihilation, I mean. I'm not a super expert scholar in differences within the various Hindu traditions.

Michael Egnor:

Sure, okay. Do you believe that God is personal?

Arjuna Gallagher:

This is a big debate which has gone on within Hindu traditions for thousands and thousands of years, the personalism and impersonalism debate. The followers of Adi Shankaracharya, they take a more impersonal view, and it's very much like Buddhism. Whereas the Vaishnavas, they have a very personal view of God, and that's what I'm a follower of.

Michael Egnor:

If God is not personal, I do know that Hinduism generally involves a notion of karma, and a notion of reincarnation, and a notion that people are sort of compensated for their good or bad behavior in future lives. If God isn't personal, how are their lives judged, how does good and evil come out of an understanding of God as being impersonal?

Arjuna Gallagher:

That's a good question, and that's an argument you could offer against impersonal views. They kind of have a mechanistic idea that karma is just a material mechanism that goes on all on its own, but of course there's problems with that. Because to execute karma, you need to be tuned into incredibly subtle nuances of a person's nuances and intentions, and it's hard to think how something that lacked personal features could be that tuned into personal qualities.

Michael Egnor:

Indeed. What does Hare Krishna mean? I hear it a lot.

Arjuna Gallagher:

We're called and we call ourselves Hare Krishnas because that's part of the mantra we chant, "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare." These are names of God, and the idea is that by associating with God's name we become purified because God is all-pure, and when we associate with God we become pure, so we chant these names all the time. The names are quite unique because they're an evocative, in Sanskrit you have more grammar, it's more flexible. So the evocative is how you call out directly to someone, other mantras are more offering respects from a distance. But, this is a direct call to the divine.

Michael Egnor:

The sense that I have of Hinduism, and I think that a lot of our listeners will have as well, is that there certainly is a pantheon of gods, there's a lot of different gods. Generally speaking, or even in the view of Hinduism that you ascribe to, what role do those gods play? Is it really pantheistic, or is there one overall God and these other deities are beneath that God?

Arjuna Gallagher:

There's many Hindus who will believe something that's rather pantheistic, or some think that all these different demigods are equal, and you can worship any one of them and get the same result. And the result is that it's just something that you can temporarily fix your mind on until you're advanced enough to fix your mind on that personal absolute, which is beyond all these forms. So this is not the Hare Krishna view, or no Vaishnavas subscribe to that view. The Vaishnava view is that God's a person, and His name, form, pastimes are all fully divine. So when we meditate on those things, we're advanced. As for the demigods on the Vaishnava view, they are something like archangels perhaps, or... I'm not a super expert on the Christian theology on that aspect.

But they are like engineers which oversee the functions of the material universe, so there's even a demigod controlling the weather. So everything in the material universe is conducted by a person, they're powerful personalities and they're jiva souls, which means they're just like you or me, and we could become a demigod in a future birth.

Michael Egnor:

Okay. Are they worthy of worship in the Hindu faith?

Arjuna Gallagher:

In the Hindu faith, the Vaishnava traditions at least... Yeah, no, in Hinduism more broadly the word puja is used, and the world puja will be used for saying something like, "You should honor your mother and father." So there's not this hard distinction, or of... I mean, it's more a philosophical understanding. So offering respect you can do to anyone, but it's the philosophical view with which you do that with which is strict. So if I worship my guru thinking he's God, that's wrong. But if I worship my guru understanding he's a servant of God, and he's helping me come closer to God then that's fine. And then we also worship God, but yeah, it's not this hard distinction of the kind of honor you get from one or the others. It's more about the philosophical understanding that's stressed.

Michael Egnor:

I see. Yeah, in the Christian view, or at least from the Thomistic view, which I think is pretty mainstream, angels are separated intelligences, they're souls without bodies. And obviously there can be good angels and bad angels, you know, demons. Are any members of the pantheon in the Hindu faith demonic, as opposed to angelic?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, there are demons, and they're always fighting with the demigods, and there's a tug-of-war back and forth. And you could ask a problem of evil question about that, and one answer that's given is that the purpose is for the demigods, they can forget about God. But when there's trouble, then they're reminded and they go take shelter of God, so the demons serve that purpose.

Michael Egnor:

I'm sure you've heard of the Euthyphro Dilemma, it was posed by Plato. It's a dilemma that, is something good because God wills it, or does God will it because it is good? How does Hinduism look at the origin of good and evil? Is the origin of good and evil something that just exists independently of God, for those Hindus who believe in a personal God? Or is good and evil a command of God?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, so we don't have the same dichotomy of good and evil that you find in Christianity. What is discussed in the tradition is, people becoming conditioned by the modes and material and actually covered by the modes and material nature, and bad qualities overcoming the heart. And then with the idea of karma you don't get an idea of evil so much, because everything that happens serves a higher purpose. So an analogy that's given is to the jail system, so sure, it's not good that there's a jail with prisoners in it. But the fact is that prisoners exist, it's that criminals exist. And because criminals exist it's a good thing that the jail system exists, because let's hypothetically say the jail system's actually doing a good job at keeping criminals off the streets and reforming them, that's a great thing.

So everything in the material world serves the purpose of elevating conditioned souls from their conditioned state, giving them a chance to try to express their selfish desires, become frustrated and ultimately turn back to God.

Michael Egnor:

The issue of reincarnation often comes up in discussions of Hinduism. What are your beliefs in reincarnation, and what do you understand to be the sort of general belief of most Hindus?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, so reincarnation would be another one that almost all Hindus, if not all of them would ascribe to. You'll get differences of course with the impersonalist, who thinks that we don't have separate souls, that they'll think maybe something's going from lifetime to lifetime, but eventually an illusion will be dispelled, and you'll realize that you're one with everything, and you don't have a separate identity. The Vaishnava view, which Hare Krishna is one form of Vaishnavism, is very much personal, that the soul has always existed, will always exist, and can transmigrate among any number of forms, and this human form of life is a special opportunity to turn back to God.

Michael Egnor:

One of the criticisms of reincarnation is that it tends to, or it seems that it might encourage a sort of callousness, a sort of sense that if a person is in the particular life he's in, and he's in a bad state, he's had a lot of problems, he's suffering, that it's because of what he's done in prior lives and he kind of deserves it. Is that an accurate way of looking at reincarnation, and ethics, and Hinduism?

Arjuna Gallagher:

That's a common objection Christians will give to using reincarnation to solve the problem of evil. The trouble with it is it's a misunderstanding of a few things. One is this idea of personal responsibility that the idea of karma and reincarnation brings, it's supposed to be personal responsibility, not blaming other people. So what I mean by that is there's a difference of how we view ourselves in light of particular philosophical points, and how we view other people in light of other philosophical points. A common example of that is how the guru sees himself is very different from how the disciple sees himself. If the guru sees himself the way the disciple does, then he's not a qualified guru, the guru's supposed to be humble.

So, similarly with this karma thing, the common argument will be given that... Well, it actually has happened I believe, that a Hindu has seen a starving child and thought, "This child is starving because it's their karma. If I feed them then I'll be depriving them of their karma, so I'd better not feed them. They have this karma, and it's there to teach them certain lessons, and I'd better not get involved." What this misunderstands is that, how I view what happens to me is karma, so I see things that... That what happens in my life is meant to teach me lessons, and you're probably well aware that in psychology makes people incredibly resilient, and improves the quality of their lives immensely when they take personal responsibility rather than victimizing themselves, and blaming others, and externalizing all their problems.

But then how I should view other people is based on dharma, and so dharma... One way we can translate the word is duty, another way we can translate the word is religious principles. So, there's certain principles or duties that govern the way I act in the world. So I have children, so I have a duty to look after the children, and everyone has a duty when they see a starving child to feed the child. There's certain duties that are based on my position in society, and there's certain duties that are universal. So a police officer has a different duty with regard to a criminal than a doctor, a doctor's supposed to treat everybody regardless of their criminal status, whereas a police officer is supposed to discriminate.

Michael Egnor:

And we spoke about this a little bit earlier, but certainly in the variants of Hinduism that don't believe in a personal god, it's awfully hard to see where duties could come from. It certainly is evident where you could get a duty if the creator is personal, because that would be the creator's will that you do that. But if there is no will and no person at the core of existence, then how could one properly be said to have a duty rather than just a desire? Where could duties come from without a personal God?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, that's an interesting question. Unfortunately there's not a lot of Hindus which have got into the realm of philosophy of religion, so it would be interesting to see how they would answer that. Like they might want to say they just exist necessarily, like we say, "God is necessarily..." Being they might want to say, "These duties are necessary."

Michael Egnor:

I know some of your YouTube videos have dealt with some of the testimony that people have given, where they can recall prior lives. How does that work, and how credible do you believe that is?

Arjuna Gallagher:

With the evidence for reincarnation, in any particular case you could doubt it. I mean, the skepticism can go too far where it's like, "This person is giving evidence for something that I don't think could be true because of whatever prior assumptions about worldview. And if you just ignore all the pieces of

evidence that are given which contradict your worldview, then your worldview is not responsive to evidence, but rather it's something you use to filter the evidence in order to make sure your worldviews never contradict it. But where the real credibility comes in this evidence is when you pile a lot of it together and you start to see patterns. So, if the cause of the evidence that comes in the form of children who spontaneously report memories of past lives, if it's not caused by them remembering past lives then we wouldn't expect the data to follow certain patterns, which would be predicted by past life remembrances being the cause.

Michael Egnor:

Sure. And in some ways I see a bit of an analogy to near-death experiences, that you can write off quite a few of them perhaps as the effects of medications, or of delusion, or of deception, or something of that sort. But there maybe a core of them that seem to be veridical, that they have to give some credence to. A question would arise is, how does one know if knowledge of prior lives is genuine as opposed to, for example demonic, if there are evil intelligences out there? Because that's been raised with near death experiences, even the ones that seem real, how do we know where they came from?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, I've debated this before and one Christian was giving the argument that the memories were planted by a demon. But in philosophy there's this problem called Last Thursdayism, which is, we can't prove that all of my memories of everything prior to last Thursday are actually real, so the argument is called Last Thursdayism for obvious reasons. But if you want to say, "These children's memories of existing in a previous birth were planted by a demon," then you're opening yourself up to the problem of Last Thursdayism. You kind of need to give some amount of credence to memories in order to have a coherent worldview, which includes last year existing. And as far as veridical aspects, so many of the cases there's no veridical aspect.

There's one researcher, her last name's Bowman, her work has been on healing these children. So she'll do psychology techniques, which she'll tell the parents to talk as if this is real. So, "You were run over by a bus, that was a different life, that was a different body, now you're in this life and that's not happening now." And by talking to the children in this way, by explaining that the memories are real, but they're not there anymore and now they're here, they were able to release this trauma and stop having a phobia of buses in this example. So there's an immense benefit in treating it as if it's real, but also the veridical aspect comes in many of the...So yeah, what I was saying is in many of the cases, there's no vertical aspect, you can't go and see if there was a child described that was run over by a bus that perfectly matches the same thing, because they just don't give enough information for a match to be identified. And in many cases a match is identified, and it's often found that these children, new information that wasn't on the internet that only this person knew, or only intimate family members knew. For instance, there was one case where the child located I think buried treasure, one child located a gold coin, one child located in a drain on the property that nobody had noticed before, the previous personality had carved a name.

And they'll also carry over birthmarks which match scars or wounds on the body of the deceased individual, and they'll carry over personality traits. So you're getting three different aspects of things which are carrying over, along with memories which are proved to be accurate for the life of a previous personality. So, there's like a conflagration of evidence.

Michael Egnor:

Yes, it's absolutely fascinating. It's kind of interesting that in Thomistic philosophy, there's been the observation as you pointed out with the Last Thursdayism problem, that is that, how can you prove that there was even a last Thursday? And the reality is I think, if you drill down on it that you're quite right, you actually can't prove the validity of any of your perceptions or any of your concepts, because in order to demonstrate the validity of perceptions or concepts you have to depend on perceptions and concepts. So fundamentally, this kind of radical skepticism is kind of unavoidable. But then again, nobody can live that way, that is that we all believe that last Thursday happened, and that our perceptions and concepts have some basis in reality.

And what that gets down to is that everybody needs to have faith of some sort, you have to believe in something that you can't prove. And I've found this I think to be a very powerful argument against atheism, is that if you believe in theism, in particularly if you believe in a God who is rational and who is reliable, then your faith is grounded, your faith kind of makes sense. But I believe last Thursday happened because God wouldn't let me be deceived like that. Whereas if you're an atheist, you have no-one to appeal to, then you just have this radical faith that last Thursday happened and you can't prove it. So in that sense, faith is the ground for reason, or faith in God is the ground for reason. If you don't believe in a rational God, then you have no reason to believe that you actually know anything.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, that's like the argument from reason. I quite like the way C. S. Lewis put it, I can't remember the exact wording but it was something like thinking about chemicals smashing together in your brain could produce accurate knowledge is like thinking you could disturb the contents of a glass of milk, and get it to splatter on a page, and produce an accurate map of the world. I think I butchered the quote, but you get the idea.

Michael Egnor:

Oh yeah, no no, and that's exactly right. Everybody lives completely on faith, there is no certainty of anything. I actually believe that there's no certainty that we even exist, and that may sound crazy but Descartes said, "Cogito, Ergo Sum," "I think, therefore I am." The problem with that perspective is that that depends on the therefore, that is it depends on logic, it depends on the logical notion that something can't be true and false at the same time. And we don't have any independent reason to think that logic is true, that is that it may very well be that thinking doesn't mean that you exist if logic doesn't work. So, you're still left with this radical skepticism. So we all have faith, there's nothing we can be sure of. But a faith in God is at least a rational faith. So, it brings up an interesting topic.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, that's kind of the argument from reason. I'd want to distance myself from presuppositionalism, but I think the argument from reason is interesting, this idea that God gave us our rational faculties. But the counter-argument would be that evolution produced our rational faculties, and I guess perhaps that could be debated. But, I don't think evolution can explain the existence of all of our rational faculties and our perceptions.

Michael Egnor:

On our last session, we talked a little bit about the evolutionary argument against naturalism, the people who believe in evolution obviously believe in the reliability of their own ability to reason, that is that they believe that they can logically understand themselves, understand nature. But a number of philosophers and theologians, particularly Alvin Plantinga, have put forth an argument that if our mind,

our ability to reason arose strictly through evolutionary means, that we have no reason to trust it, to trust our ability to reason as a way of ascertaining truth, because it evolved as a way to reproduce, a way to maximize the number of our offspring, not as a way to understand truth. So, how do you feel about the evolutionary explanations for the human mind?

Arjuna Gallagher:

One thing I want to say first off is that I think we can know that we have an ability to reason, even if our worldview doesn't explain that. Like, we can have a self-evident understanding that I have an ability to reason as a first principle, even if our worldview doesn't support that. So the argument for God from this, it's called in philosophy the argument from reason, would be that there's a contradiction between a worldview and the ability to reason, not that the atheist is unable to reason or doesn't know that they have an ability to reason. So, that kind of is a rejection of presuppositionalism, some people might be upset by that, but a lot of people will be satisfied. So, Donald Hoffman wrote a book called A Case Against Reality, where he argued that evolution...

He thinks that evolution can explain us being good at math, because there's survival advantages to being able to do math well, I suppose. I don't know if it explains being really good at understanding highly abstract concepts, because you can imagine the mathematician that's pottering around, being the one who comes and gets eaten by the bear because they're not paying enough attention to the outside world, right?

Michael Egnor:

Right. Well, it would seem to me there would be a fairly simple way of testing the hypothesis that evolution was the source of our ability to do math, just by checking the reproductive success of mathematicians as compared to say for example rock stars. I mean, the notion that that sort of esoteric mental activity makes you reproductively successful, that doesn't seem to be too credible if you just look at the average high school dating scene. So, mathematicians are not reproductive superstars, so it's kind of hard to buy that argument.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, the counter-argument might be group selection, that a gene pool which is capable of producing these kinds of intelligences is better at surviving, even if the people with those kinds of intelligences don't have a better reproduction rate.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, yeah, sure, you can make that argument. But then that gets into the whole problem of group selection versus selfish genes, that it was seen to be that at least within the population, that mathematics would be a vanishingly rare thing because everybody else would be reproducing because mathematicians have conferred them benefit. So, you get fewer and fewer mathematicians as the generations go along. But you kind of get into what I think is kind of a crazy Darwinist kind of way of reasoning, that doesn't make too much sense to begin with. So from your perspective on Hinduism, what is the metaphysical structure of reality? That's kind of a big question, but how does metaphysics work?

Arjuna Gallagher:

The Sanskrit word, tattva, is the closest you've come to ontological category. It's a demonstrative pronoun, it's from the demonstrative pronoun tat, which means that. So, that when you convert it to a

philosophical term comes to mean things that actually exist, so it's categories of existence. And as that goes, you've got three broad categories as you get most descriptions, which is God, the world and the living entities. But then with the material creation, it gets a bit more complex. I haven't studied it for a while, but there's something like the mahabhutas, and there's like 25 elements, one of them includes God, then there's various other stages, and you get down to 10 senses plus the mind. So, the mind is counted as a sense.

And then the material energy is composed of five elements, earth, ether, the standard five. And those five elements each have different qualities. And you go from subtle to more growth, so ether is the first element. And then you get air, and fire's next, water and then earth, and each contain progressively more qualities. And there's one idea you do get, which you don't find in Christianity so much I think, is this idea of subtle and gross. So, there's more subtle energy, there's like the subtle body and the gross body, and the subtle body is carried from lifetime to lifetime. That includes impressions, so if you suffer trauma or whatever other experiences you have that leave a deep impression on the soul, they're carried until the next lifetime.

So as anyone who's been around children is aware, they're a diverse collection of personalities that can't be explained by the differences in environments. I've got two kids, and they're both completely different from one another. And this is explained by them carrying over impressions from past lives in the subtle body, and then the gross body is something produced as a result of that. And there's the material universe, which is composed of matter, and there's the spiritual world, which is composed of sat-chit-ananda, which is eternity, knowledge and bliss. So I'd say that the qualities of the living entity, the jiva, the jivatma, is sat-chit-ananda, just as God is sat-chit-ananda. So we're one in quality with God, but different in quantity. We're a tiny spark of the divine, whereas God is the infinite absolute divine.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, David Bentley Hart wrote a wonderful book on that particular topic, The Experience of God, I think. And he divided the book into those three topics, and pointed out that although there are a lot of differences between individual face, they all seem to identify those three things as being central to existence, and to be characteristics in God in one way or another.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, it's called The Experience of God, Being Consciousness and Bliss.

Michael Egnor:

Right.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, I highly recommend that book, it's really good.

Michael Egnor:

And you had a chance to interview David Bentley Hart on Theology Unleashed, right?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, I've had him on twice, once it was just me interviewing him along with a fellow Christian. And yeah, it was really interesting, he was a good sport.

Michael Egnor:

He's a fascinating guy, and he's a magnificent writer. I mean, he's a beautiful writer. He did a wonderful book on the problem of evil related to the East Asian tsunami back about 15 years ago, called The Doors of the Sea, was the title of it. That was a beautiful reflection on the nature of evil and theodicy, it was very interesting stuff.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I haven't read that one, I'll have to check it out.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, as I recall his basic argument was, we do not understand why evil occurs, that God is completely good, that there is nothing evil in God. We don't understand why evil occurs, and it's better for us that we don't, meaning that it's a topic that is simply beyond us, and that our job is to try to help out as much as we can, and to love God, and not to blame Him for evil. I found it a very thoughtful way of looking at it.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, sometimes you'll see people who've gone through immense suffering come to a realization that they gained some immense wisdom, which they attribute to having gone through that suffering. And they come to some understanding that the suffering was necessary, and the wisdom they got from it is so valuable that they wouldn't trade it for not having suffered that suffering. But of course, oftentimes we're not on that plateau of having come to that realization, we're having to employ a kind of skeptical theism where we have this assumption that God is all good, and there's a higher purpose for all of us, but we're not able to see the reasons for it.

Michael Egnor:

There's an analogy that I find very helpful in thinking about this, I have four kids and when they were babies, if you put them down to nap time before they wanted to go to take a nap they would scream bloody murder, they would be very upset that they had to take a nap. So they'd be standing in their cribs screaming, and yeah. And from the baby's perspective, this was like the worst thing that ever happened. But obviously taking a nap is a good thing for them, but they were just too immature, they were too young to really understand it. But I understood it as the parent, and the gulf between me and God, between me and the ultimate reality, is infinitely greater than the gulf between a parent and a child.

So no matter how terrible something may seem in my life, it's kind of like I'm that infant standing in the crib screaming. And I can't even really begin to understand why God lets this happen, but it doesn't mean that it's in the grand scheme of things not explainable in a way consistent with God's goodness. It just means that I can't even begin to understand it myself, but that's my problem. The other thing is that I've always considered the problem of evil to be a very powerful argument for the existence of God. Atheists tend to use the problem of evil as an argument against the existence of God. However, if you acknowledge that evil exists, then you acknowledge that a moral law exists independently of opinion.

Because when people say that things are evil, they don't just mean that something has happened that they disagree with, it means that they think it's objectively wrong, that there is something evil about a child dying of cancer, or a tsunami killing thousands of people. But if there is something objectively evil about that, then there has to be a source for that objective moral law by which you judge it to be evil, and that source can only be God. So I think the problem of evil actually presupposes God's existence, if

God didn't exist we wouldn't see evil as a problem, we would just have things that we agreed with and disagreed with, but we wouldn't ascribe any moral importance to it.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Well the atheists can give it as an internal critique and say, "You guys believe God's all good, you believe in objective moral values such as that these things are wrong. And yet these things are going on, God's all powerful, therefore He could stop it, and He's not, so He can't be all good." That scenario you meant they can offer, but often when these people say these things they genuinely believe that it is objectively wrong for these things to happen. And if they do hold to a kind of objective morality, then the argument flies. I've heard William Lain Craig describe it, and I think he was talking about this specific argument, often there's two premises to the argument from objective morality to God's existence.

And he's had one conversation where he was experiencing that when you talked about the first premise the person would reject that premise and rely on a second premise, and when you talked about the second premise the person would accept that premise and reject the other one. So in this case it would be, "Oh, objective moral values don't exist, I'm just offering an internal critique." And then when you go over to talking about objective moral values existing they're like, "Oh, I do think objective moral values exist, I'm just rejecting the other bit."

Michael Egnor:

Right, right, right, exactly, exactly.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Another point on the problem of evil is, in the Hindu traditions it never really came up, and I've often puzzled over that. And I finally, I think it was Dr. Harold Resnick explained to me that it didn't come up because there was this bedrock idea of personal responsibility thanks to karma and reincarnation. So, the question didn't really come up as a serious philosophical question, it was other things were related and it was just a bedrock assumption that we had personal responsibility. And Christianity, I would argue, doesn't have the same thing to fall back on, because... Well, the real thing that Christianity doesn't have, which we have with karma and reincarnation, is the ability to explain why this person and not that person, why me rather than someone else.

Because with previous lifetimes, I can actually have a responsibility that's genuine, not just it's just the fear, will of the divine that some people fall here and some people fall there, and we've just got to learn and grow from whatever we're given.

Michael Egnor:

Right. Yes, but the difficulty with ascribing responsibility based on prior lifetimes is that it very much presupposes a moral lawgiver, which certainly requires a personal God. I mean, I don't see any credible mechanistic way how moral problems in previous lives could be punished in future lives, or rewarded in future lives without a personal God. So, I'm not sure that Hinduism necessarily solves that problem, it just removes it one generation.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, yeah. You still do need God. I was doing a comparison between the Hare Krishna views and the Christian views, there's plenty of views you could argue against using the moral argument that are... Or

the karma and reincarnation point can't be explained by plenty of other Hindu views, which lack a personal God.

Michael Egnor:

Sure, sure. Certainly with a modern debate between the new atheists and Christians, there was a tremendous debate about the existence and reality of free will. And what is the perspective on free will in the Hindu belief?

Arjuna Gallagher:

There might be Hindus that reject the existence of free will, it's not a question I really ponder. In the Vaishnava traditions, free will is accepted as bedrock, and not questioned at all. I don't know if it's something that was debated much in the tradition, probably not. So yeah, we're free agents. I mean, I said there's five factors of actions, so we're not 100% free. I can't remember the list of five actions in [inaudible 00:40:14], one of them is the living entity, one of them's karma, one of them is God, one of them is the modes of material nature, which is actually another part of metaphysics we could get into. So the modes and material nature are ignorance, passion and goodness, ignorance is suffering now and suffering later, like a drug addiction.

The person's taking the drug, they think it's happiness but actually it's suffering. You know, getting drunk at a party or something. And then they suffer the next day too with the hangover. Happiness and the mode of passion is chasing goals and happiness, and the mode of goodness is... Well, one way it's described is it's happiness later, whereas we do some benefit for now later. But it sounds similar to passion when you do that, but the mode of goodness one is more peaceful and conducted. As for free will, we associate with the modes and material nature by listening to certain things, hanging out with certain people, and that creates a certain attitude in us. We get covered by a particular combination of the modes and material nature, and then those drive our behavior.

So, people who are on alcohol are more likely to commit violence. This is caused by becoming more in the mode of ignorance. So we have free will to... One analogy for it is certain choices we make limit our free will, so if I choose to get on an airplane, maybe I don't have that choice right now. But, normal times you can choose to get on an airplane. But once you're on the airplane your choices are restricted, you can't just get off the airplane in the middle of a flight. There's certain things you can do while on the airplane, so you still have free will there. And another aspect we can talk about with free will is how it's described, and it plays out as what we really do is desiring, accepting, rejecting. "I want this, I don't want that."

And then all of the actions are said to be carried out by the modes and material nature, so I will for my arm to move, but it's not actually me that moves the arm. I wouldn't have the foggiest clue how to execute all the neural actions that are required for the arm to move, all I can do is desire that it happened.

Michael Egnor:

We wanted to talk a little bit about creation, and the universe, and how do Hindus understand all of creation? Is the universe eternal, is it created at a moment in the past?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, so one unique and defining feature of Hinduism is definitely the idea of eternity with cyclical creation and destruction. I mentioned that in an earlier segment. With regard to the Big Bang, so there's this idea, explanation of how creation happens, which you find in the Bhagavatam, and it's pretty

intricate. You have Mahavishnu, who's a form of God, lying down on the causal ocean, and exhaling and inhaling. And with every exhale, all of the universes come out of his body, and with every inhale they all come back into all of the pores of his body. And these are correlated with the creations and destructions of the material universe, so this would be something like all the way back to the Big Bang, and then all the way up to the Big Crunch, if we were to make the assumption that what science is looking at when it stares into space, and when they hypothesize about the Big Bang and the expanding universe, that maybe it's all going to contract again into a Big Crunch.

If we were to make the assumption that that's talking about what the Bhagavatam's talking about, then those would map onto one another. And then you get further creation from that, it gets quite fantastic from there. There's a Lord Rama governing, I don't know how much I should get into the explanation of how the cosmos exists.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. Are these taken generally to be metaphorical, or is there a belief that these are substantially real, these explanations?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, there's a belief that this is actually how things are going on. And if someone wanted to say, "This is too fantastic, I can't believe you actually believe this," then my reply would be, "There's actually only one fantastic claim, which is the existence of God. Once you've assumed that God exists, you have a being full of the potencies that are capable of producing all of this. That the real fantastic worldview is atheism, where every step is a miracle.

Michael Egnor:

Right. Yeah, I mean, I don't ascribe to Hindu theology, I'm a pretty sort of mainstream Catholic. But the really crazy stuff is atheism, I don't think any theist is really crazy, meaning that just the existence of anything in itself is a miracle, is a remarkable, astonishing thing. But I'm open to all kinds of ideas, except the idea that there is no God, which I think is crazy. So, there's been a lot of obviously advances in cosmology, and in basic physics over the past century, particularly for example in quantum mechanics and general relativity. Is there anything in Hindu theology that reflects on those advances, or relates to them? As an example, Werner Heisenberg, who's a physicist who was very important in the development of quantum mechanics, commented that the phenomenon in quantum mechanics of collapse of the quantum waveform, that is that quantum systems exist in multiple states of potentiality and with measurement or observation coalesce into a single actuality, really is a reflection of Aristotle's understanding of change, of potency.

And that Aristotelian metaphysical perspective was embraced by Thomas Aquinas, so it's really kind of part of the Catholic or Christian way of looking at metaphysics. And is there anything that you can think of in modern physics that has a parallel in Hindu metaphysics or Hindu theology?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, the best person to have on for this discussion would be [inaudible 00:46:32], I'll see if he can come on your podcast some time, because he's really good at this kind of thing. Because I look at this kind of stuff, and I'm not always looking back to the tradition to see where it's found there. With regard to quantum physics, my favorite explanation of that is that it's like the pixels in a video game don't render until you actually move the screen there, or maybe it renders a little bit ahead of time so that it can predict where you're going to move and not have any lag. So similarly with quantum physics, if you're

not looking at a particle it hasn't selected a state, this is done in computer processing and video games to save on computational power, and perhaps something similar goes on with the universe.

Of course we would put the observer in every living entity, not just in humans, so that changes things somewhat. But I guess some living entities aren't actually affected by the change in state of certain quantum functions, so the wave state might not change until the human looks at it in many cases. I'm not sure where you'd find that in the metaphysics of the tradition, I mean we have this idea of the material energy, that God is the largest and the smallest, so He's both containing the universe and inside of every atom in the universe. And everything's going on by the Sanskrit word Shakti, by God's powers and energies. So with that, miracles and all sorts of things are possible. But with that, matter is also...

Sure, that's something physical following physical laws. But I've heard people argue that simulation hypothesis is supported by the Vaishnava worldview. I'm not sure exactly what quotes they based it on though, but it does seem to make sense because the idea here is that the material universe is meant to deliver sensory experiences to living entities in order to have effects on their consciousness, which ultimately bring them back to God, and help them overcome their selfish desires and so on. So if you see the universe as meant for that purpose, then matter could be explained as rather than being something out there that exists independently of anything else, it's like an algorithm that governs the deliverance of experiences to living entities.

Michael Egnor:

So it sounds like it's kind of an idealism of sorts, what really exists is mental and that the physical is just a state of mind?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, I used to think that idealism meant that things only exist in minds. But after studying it a little bit more, I think that it could be compatible with the way [inaudible 00:48:59] worldview. I mean, the view I had of idealism was that if that was the view, I guess it would be patently absurd because there has to be something out there that we're all both interacting with because we have a shared experience of reality. So, there's got to be something out there. I guess idealism is just saying that the foundation of what's out there is in the mind of God, or something of that sort.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. I was always fascinated by the consilience of Plato's view of forms, that there's a realm in which sort of the ideal representations of things, or the ideal... I'm sorry, that what we're seeing are representations of an ideal actuality that exists in a separate world. And St. Augustine said that that separate world was God's mind, that reality is essentially a thought in God's mind, and that we are thoughts in God's mind. I always thought that was a fascinating way to look at it, but of course being a Thomist my commentary on that would be, it may very well be that reality is a thought in God's mind, but that God is a Thomist. So, that explains why Thomism explains so well.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Right, that does relate to the Hare Krishna view, which is that there's the original, purer, spiritual reality, which has everything you find here but in a purer state. Whereas in the material world where we are, it's the perverted reflection. So any kind of form, or pleasure, or anything you might chase or experience here is a perverted reflection of something that exists in a purer state in the spiritual world.

Michael Egnor:

That seems to be a perspective that a lot of religious faiths have, there's very much an aspect of that in Christianity, that there's kind of an ultimate perfection, which is God, and that His creation is a limited version of that ultimate perfection. From your own perspective, Arjuna, or from the perspective of the Hindu faith, what do you think about the intelligent design movement in science in the Western world?

Arjuna Gallagher:

I think it's awesome, I'm a big fan of the Discovery Institute, and work like Michael Behe, and Steven Myer, and your own work on arguments from the brain for a consciousness not being caused by the brain. This idea that Prabhupada, who's the founder of the Hare Krishna movement in the West, gave an argument which a philosopher called Joe Schmidt told em we could call a construction argument. So, a construction argument that Prabhupada used is that the creator has to have all the qualities of the creation, so the creation can't have any qualities that aren't found in the creator. So an analogy for this would be that the production of a table requires various ingredients, the builder needs to have more knowledge than is required to build the chair.

You can't build a chair or a table, having only the amount required to build the chair. You need to have more knowledge, you need to have more wood because there'll be wasted wood, you need to have a certain amount of tools. And without all those things you can't build the chair, so I guess this is like the argument for sufficient reason. So, this was an argument used in the tradition to argue for a personal God, because I have personal qualities, I have a name, I have a form, and so on. Therefore, God must also have a name, and a form, and so on. He also used this argument against atheists, that we've got all this material world with all these creatures in it, and it has to come from a source.

Prabhupada also used an argument, he called it, "Life comes from life." "These rascal scientists," Prabhupada would use words like that, he'd speak in quite like name-calling ways, "Rascal scientists who are deluding the public." It's not an anti-science thing, obviously if scientists are building bridges and saving lives and all that sort of stuff, that's awesome. But when they want to tell us things like, "Matter explains life," then that's nonsense. And he would challenge them, "Go in your lab, and put some chemicals together, and produce life, and then you can come and tell me that life comes from matter."

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. It seems to me that the better science gets, the more it seems to resemble engineering. So, I'm a big fan of engineering, I like houses that stay up, and bridges that stay up, and things like that. A lot of the theoretical science is absolutely fascinating stuff, but the metaphysical claims made by quite a few scientists, the materialist or atheist claims, I think are badly misguided.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, this reductionist worldview is really good at a lot of things. Like if you get smashed up on the motorway they're really good at putting you back together, because muscular skeletal stuff is really mechanical, and engineering principles, reductionism works well for that kind of thing. But they really fail at looking at the bigger picture, like my wife's a trained naturopath, and we also have a naturopath we go and see. And there's so many things that can go wrong with the body, you go to a doctor and they'd be like, "The test come back fine." And you're like, "Okay," and then you do some research, go to a naturopath, and they'll look into this whole bigger picture of how one thing's causing another thing, look at the organism as a whole, and somehow that gets missed by this reductionist picture.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, yeah, I think the reductionism which so often accompanies materialism is a really impoverished way of looking at things. It's not even internally consistent. We've talked about a lot of stuff, about theology, and metaphysics, and ethics, and science, and I just wanted to get into some sort of cultural, contemporary issues. What's your feeling about cancel culture that's going on now in the Western world?

Arjuna Gallagher:

I think cancel culture is a bit of a worry. I mean, this idea that we should punish somebody for something they put on Twitter 10 years ago is really childish. Also I'm a big fan of Jonathan Haidt, who did... I think it was his co-author went through a period of depression, and then studied cognitive behavioral therapy to get out of it, and then went back to working as a professor. And they came to realize that the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy that teach you how to be resilient, and happy, and successful. They're totally contradicted by this woke culture, that if you were to understand cognitive behavioral therapy, and want to make people unhappy, un-resilient and unsuccessful, then wokeism is basically the philosophy you'd teach people. We can get into that more, or we can just point people to Coddling the American Mind by Jonathan Haidt.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah. I mean, the wokeism, there's so much bad in it, and a major part of the bad is that there's no way in wokeism that anybody gets any happier, or any better. It just leads to more anger, and more fighting, and more losing, and it's just a terrible way to run a culture.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I think what's happened with a lot of these social justice movements is they were fighting genuine problems, and they won those battles. And after winning those battles, they then had to continue to justify their own existence. So they were no longer fighting genuine battles, they were just justifying their own existence and actually creating problems.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, I totally agree. I think the whole social justice thing really is a branch of Marxism, I think of Marxism as sort of a distilled evil. It's what you get when you bring everything evil into one place at one time. How do you feel about a lot of questions of social ethics nowadays, for example abortion, euthanasia, a lot of the life issues? Are there viewpoints in Hinduism that reflect on that, or do you have personal viewpoints on that?

Arjuna Gallagher:

I don't know if I can speak for Hinduism broadly, as I said earlier Hinduism is like a category. It's like saying the Abrahamic traditions, so we wouldn't ask, "What do Native American religions, or what do Abrahamic religions say on this particular social issue?" Even with Hare Krishnas you're going to get a diversity of views. But the general view you would get on abortion, say, is that abortion is murder, and it's not okay. There's one Hare Krishna thinker known as Dr. Harold Resnick, who I've had on my channel a few times. I've listened to him give a talk on it, and I quite like his views, which is that in some extreme cases abortion would be a right, where either due to the mental health of the mother, or due to medical reasons the abortion could be necessary.

So it's not that we should ban all abortion. But the other thing is you could also ask the question of, there's actually... Tulsi Gabbard, she's got a Hare Krishna background, and her views are quite-

Michael Egnor:

Oh, she does? Really? Okay.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Her view is actually a little bit anachronistic from the Hare Krishna tradition, but she gives a good argument for it and I think it's justified, which is if the government can tell you today that you can't have an abortion, then tomorrow it'll be able to tell you that you must have an abortion, and this is not the kind of power we want to give to government. So just because we think something is wrong and shouldn't be done doesn't necessarily mean that the government should go around policing it.

Michael Egnor:

That's true, and that gets to the personally opposed argument in abortion that Mario Cuomo, the former governor of New York said years ago, that he was personally opposed to abortion but he didn't believe that it should be legislated. The problem I have with that is that I could certainly see the personally opposed viewpoint, for example in flavors of ice cream. That is that I'm personally opposed to strawberry ice cream because I don't like it, but I don't think there should be any laws regarding whether you can have strawberry ice cream or not. But abortion is a fundamentally different thing, to be personally opposed to abortion but feel that it should be legal is like being personally opposed to rape but thinking that it should be legal.

That is that there's something intrinsic about abortion that's not just a matter of personal preference, there's another life involved. So if abortion is wrong, it's wrong for everyone. Or if it's not wrong, it's not wrong for anyone.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, I would go to consequentialism here, which would be to ask the question of, if we do have abortion laws are people in general better off? And if we don't have abortion laws, are people worse off? And there might be a certain happy balance somewhere, or maybe it's never a happy balance. But there might be somewhere in the middle where it's sort of better, like in New Zealand recently they brought in really liberal abortion laws which are like, basically up until like two weeks before the baby's born or something disgusting you can do an abortion. I don't know exactly where they draw the line, but a lot of countries will have it up to like 26 days, or a certain number of days from conception, now that they work that out, when conception was roughly based on the size when they do the scan.

And that's obviously less than full, if you've got basically like a fully-formed baby and you're killing that, that's obviously worse. But it could be the case that having blanket no abortion laws actually means that a lot of women go and get dodgy abortions from dodgy clinics, and that might be worse than just having somewhat moderate abortion laws.

Michael Egnor:

Sure. I speak on the abortion issues at my medical school, and it's a rather controversial issue, as you can imagine. What I've come to believe is that the pro-abortion viewpoint depends critically on what I really feel are misrepresentations of the scientific and social facts about abortions. So what I try to do with the medical students is move away from the ethics a little bit, and just talk about the science and the sociology. For example, I think a powerful scientific argument can be made that science, or that life begins at conception, that saying that an embryo is not a new human life just doesn't make any scientific sense. So, life begins when the sperm and the egg meet. And there's no history, or there's no question that historically abortion at least in the United States discriminates racially.

A Black child is three times as likely to be aborted as a white child. Around the world, girls are aborted at a much higher rate than boys are. There's actually a bit of femicide in Asia, of about 100 million girls over the past 50 years, and disabled children are selectively aborted.

Arjuna Gallagher:

That might be turning, though, with the increase of woke culture, and men getting discriminated against, maybe to flip the other way.

Michael Egnor:

It could, but... Maybe, maybe. So what I try to do in discussing abortion is just ask that we stick to the facts, and when the facts are laid out there it's an awfully hard thing to defend. Defending abortion basically presupposes that you don't really understand it, I think. Because if you really understand it, most people would say it's terrible.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I think being honest about these things would really help. Like some abortion clinics, or places that women go when they're pregnant and they don't know what to do, they show them the ultrasound, and show them that they can see the form, and then they think, "Oh, I couldn't kill this." Or just explaining to them the facts about women who have had abortions, often this is the psychological effect it has on them, versus women who don't, been in your situation who haven't had abortions, this is what their lives have looked like, and just give them the facts so they can make up their mind. As opposed to being politically motivated and saying, "We're going to hide all the downsides of abortion, or hide all the downsides of not having an abortion because of our political motivation, and we want to persuade them of a pre-determined viewpoint."

Michael Egnor:

How do you feel about euthanasia, and is there any sense in Hinduism that... Any Hindu perspective on euthanasia?

Arjuna Gallagher:

Euthanasia is rejected, it's even rejected for animals. Like we have a couple cows on our property, we've got 10 acres here, and cow protection is a big thing for Hindu culture, and particularly for Vaishnavas. And you don't kill the cow, even when it gets old. Whereas in the West, when the cow gets to a certain age you just kill it, because it's frail, it's old. And so if you have an old cow up by the road and people see it, they don't see old cows, they'll think that this is animal abuse. But they wouldn't think that about your grandma, they wouldn't think, "Oh, are you keeping this lady still alive? She's so old and fragile, this is grandma abuse." It's just this disconnect on how we look at animals from how we look at people.

But yeah, the understanding of why not to kill them, or why not to commit euthanasia is that we have a certain amount of karma that we need to live out, and if we don't live it out in this life we'll have to take birth again in a similar body so we can fully live out karma. So if someone's suffering from a horrible disease or mental disturbance, there's some reason why that's happening, and there's some lesson they need to learn from that. However, there is some scope for suicide, but it's only in a certain way, and it's only if your body is... Like someone, a Hare Krishna in my [inaudible 01:04:26] had cancer a few years ago, and the cancer was going to kill her, she had months to live and she was suffering.

So she fasted till death, so instead of suffering for a couple months in bed ridden with cancer, she fasted to death, and then it just only took a week. And this is a prescribed method that Vaishnavas can fast till death, and even there's observations of cows doing something similar. That if a cow's really sick and going to die anyway, they'll go and sit in a cold river until they die.

Michael Egnor:

I think even in the Catholic tradition, that in the terminal stages of life, if taking nourishment is uncomfortable or painful and it only serves to prolong the process of dying, I think not taking nourishment is considered an acceptable thing, as I understand Catholic ethics. It's not acceptable in the Catholic effort to try to die with the intent of dying, but if it's to relieve suffering accompanied by receiving nourishment, I think it's considered ethical.

Arjuna Gallagher:

It's funny, I just thought about it, that we've gone from having a more balanced view that, at least in India animals are sacred, you don't just kill them, and people are sacred, but you don't extend their life unnecessarily. But now we want to extend humans' lives as long as possible, to the point of spending millions of dollars keeping them on life support, and the moment an animal shows the first signs of being sick we kill it. Whereas, we've taken our desire to prolong animals' lives and put all of that on humans. I watched a documentary a little while ago in which... The Hare Krishna presenting the documentary, or maybe the documentary itself was asking the question of, "Is all we're doing with a lot of these medical procedures just prolonging the process of dying, or are we actually helping people?"

Because you see some of the ways that these cancers are treated, and some of the cancer treatments are excruciating, and in many cases the person still dies. So there's this idea in the Hare Krishna tradition that death is inevitable, it's going to come sooner or later, so we should die gracefully. And actually the purpose of life is to die in a particular way, and the goal is to... The Sanskrit is [inaudible 01:06:51], to remember God at the time of death, and that gives us a good destination in the next life. So one way it's described is that only God-conscious people can leave gracefully, yeah. Other people who aren't God-conscious, they'll tend to be very upset, and angry, and so on when the time comes for them to die.

Michael Egnor:

My understanding of Catholic medical ethics is that there are two kinds of treatments that patients receive, ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary treatments would be food, and water, and shelter, and clothing, and things like that, and hygiene. And extraordinary would be medications, and ventilators, and operations, and things like that. And that in Catholic medical ethics, it's acceptable to refuse extraordinary means of operations and medications and things if it only serves to prolong the process of dying. But it's not acceptable to refuse ordinary things, such as nourishment, and water, and shelter, and hygiene, and so on. So basically it's okay to take a patient off a ventilator if they have no prospect of survival, and it just prolongs their suffering to be on the ventilator.

But it wouldn't be okay to starve them, or to dehydrate them, or to leave them in their waste or something. Ordinary care is something that every human being has a right to, and it is suicide to refuse ordinary care. However, to refuse extraordinary means is not suicide, and can be quite ethical in the appropriate circumstances.

Arjuna Gallagher:

I would put some medical procedures and drugs in that category too, where the evidential basis for them is really strong, and they have a high success rate.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, sure, yeah, yeah, right, right, right, exactly. If it's just a matter of taking an antibiotic that doesn't have much side effects that would save your life, correct.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Yeah, or some surgeries, just remove something, and the problem goes away, and it's not going to come back, I'm sure you know of some of those that then-

Michael Egnor:

But we face this a lot in patients who have, like for example metastatic disease. If you're full of cancer, you could have operations until you die, you know? You just take out every metastasis, but that doesn't really serve any purpose, it doesn't help anyone, it doesn't make them better, it just puts them through a lot of suffering at the last part of their life.

Arjuna Gallagher:

There's a famous story in our tradition of a great king who, he was cursed to die in seven days by a snake bite. And he was a very powerful king, and he could have overturned the curse, he had a deep connection with God and so on. But he didn't, he just saw it as God's mercy, that he knows exactly... Most people, they have no idea when they're going to die, so we can't prepare our consciousness to think of God at the time, it could come at any moment, so therefore we have to spend our whole lives trying to think of God. But he was really lucky that he knew the moment he was going to die, and instead of getting angry, and thinking, "I'm going to remove all the snakes from the kingdom, I won't be killed by a snake."

Instead of doing anything like that he thought, "This is God's mercy on me, and I'm going to think of God." So he went to the bank of the Ganges, and he heard from a great sage for seven days and seven nights without stopping to eat or drink, and to hear it nonstop while fasting about God, and asked questions, and was coherent the whole time. So, that's obviously like a kind of terminal lucidity thing, of having some lucidity to survive the body falling apart from not eating. And yeah, this was his response, so that is an appropriate response in some cases. That's an underlying attitude we should have, that when the time comes, this is my time and it's meant for me to go.

Michael Egnor:

Well I started out as an atheist, or at least an agnostic, and I really didn't convert to Christianity until about 20 years ago. And part of the reason for my conversion was a friendship I had with a Lutheran pastor at the hospital, and he provided a lot of the counseling there for patients who were dying. And one night during the atheist part of my life, I was in the intensive care unit, the pediatric intensive care unit, and there was a six-year-old who was dying of a brain tumor that I was taking care of. And it was a pretty horrible death, I mean the kid was just... The tumor was just destroying him. And it was like midnight, and this pastor and I were sitting in the nurse's station, just talking about what this child and his family were going through.

And I said to the pastor, I said, "You know, I'd like to believe in God, but I can't understand why God would let something like this happen. I mean, this is a nice little kid, his family's lovely people, and he's just going through hell." And the pastor said, "Well, God never said that life wouldn't be without tragedy, that life wouldn't be without suffering. He just said that when it happens He'll be there with you, that that's when we're close to Him, is when we suffer." Because at least in Christianity, our understanding of God, whose Christ suffered for all of us. So, suffering is redemptive of sorts, despite its

horror. And that stuck with me, just that really changed my understanding of suffering in a very profound way. I felt that when you suffer is when you're closest to God, that changed the way I saw things.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Right, yeah. One thing that could be said is the real tragedy is that we're separate from God, or experiencing separation from God, and the tragedies that happen in life are opportunities to remember God. And if they weren't there, we might just happily go about our lives, and never take shelter of God. So, that would be an even greater tragedy.

Michael Egnor:

Absolutely. When you look at just ordinary human lives, not even considering God, I don't think anybody can make a credible case that a person who lives much of their life without any adversity, who sort of gets everything they want, is a better person for it. That is that while certainly suffering can break a person, my experience has been that some degree of suffering is necessary for maturation and for becoming a decent human being. The offspring of incredibly wealthy parents, who gets everything he wants, and never has any kind of adversity, doesn't usually turn out to be a pretty good human being.

Arjuna Gallagher:

That brings up the question of micro agressions, that somebody did a micro aggression against me, and I'm going to get really angry about that rather than use it to deepen my personality.

Michael Egnor:

Right, right, right, right. It's a kind of arrogance and self-centeredness that's not really healthy.

Arjuna Gallagher:

Well, that's turning the whole thing on its head, it's the idea that things that don't kill us make us stronger, that's anti-fragility. So it's not just that we don't break, it's that we actually become stronger through adversity. And of course there's a limit to that, like when you're raising your kids you let them do somewhat risky things, let them climb trees or whatever. But you don't let them injure themselves in a way that's going to affect them for life.

Michael Egnor:

Right, profound stuff. I thank you Arjuna. My guest has been Arjuna Gallagher, who is the creator of the YouTube channel, Theology Unleashed. He is a Hindu, and this has been a fascinating discussion, and I thank you so much. And please, everybody be sure to go to his channel, and to watch his documentary called, "The Persecuted Saints You've Never Heard Of." Thank you, Arjuna.

Announcer:

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