

## **God Why did You create ticks and other evil things?**

Isaiah 11:1-10 , Romans 8: 18-23

When we ask "why did God made ticks and other nasty things?" the only way we can really understand the answer to the "ticks and other nasty things" question, is to at least be aware of the differing positions on the matter as given by the two major world views. So let us begin by exploring the answer according to the **Naturalistic world view** – the philosophy of modern science. Then we will contrast it with an answer from the **Christian world view**. And finally **we will look into the Bible** itself to see if there are any hints that either is on the right track.

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First, think about this: **Our entire human experience of life is one of either cooperation or competition with all the other life forms on the planet.**

Every single life form that exists, from the smallest virus to the largest whale, is trying just like us to "**be fruitful and multiply.**" And as we humans reflect on all this "being fruitful and multiplying" we tend to label to our competitors in this process as "bad" and our cooperators as "good." We also see where some life forms have failed at this task and thus become extinct: such as dinosaurs and Dodo Birds. While others seem only too successful at the task even to the point of perhaps one day driving us from the scene: flu viruses, cock roaches, and starlings might be in this class. So what sense can we make out of this mess of cooperation or competition in all of life's attempts at being fruitful and multiplying?

Naturalism, which holds that everything in the universe happens according to natural laws without any divine interference, tends to emphasize the competitive nature of life better known as the "**survival of the fittest.**"

They would say that all of life in its various forms – from the smallest virus to the largest whale is simply competing with all the rest to be the most successful life form in its slot within the food chain. And whatever any life form can do to get ahead at this task it will do. Thus every possible earthly niche, every imaginable food source, every conceivable way of being fruitful and multiplying will be explored and dominated by some life form without any consideration for the needs of others.

So, the "circle of life," as some would romantically phrase it, is actually little more than a revolving supper buffet and the meek will inherit nothing.

- As a cold virus floats from nose to nose all it wants to do is be fruitful and multiply, planting as many colonies of its own kind as possible. It cares not whether any host is unaware of or sickened by its presence.

- As a tree reaches towards the sunlight, it is in competition with the kudzu that is using its own wooden branches against it to overgrow the tree and steal all the sunlight for itself. When the kudzu wins, the tree loses.
- And ticks, like mosquitoes, like lamprey eels, vampire bats, and various intestinal worms have all learned the knack of getting their supper directly from another's bloodstream. That they might also pass along to their new host a deadly disease acquired from a previous host is of no concern to them; should their current food ticket die they will simply find another.

This is the way of things, Naturalism will tell you. All of life is in a competition to survive; a sort of environmental "musical chairs" those that do it better can stay in the game, those that fail must leave the floor, and so all life forms will evolve through time as new competitors try their strength against the current victors.

And Naturalism will also be quick to tell you that since there is no guiding purpose, no driving force, behind all this competing and evolving, that it is quite artificial for us humans to assign labels of goodness or badness to the various competitors, because goodness or badness is completely relative to the species asking the question.

Thus Naturalism's answer is that mosquitoes, ticks, and other nasty things are just life forms that have successfully evolved to dominate their particular niche in the planetary food cycle; they are successful competitors, nothing more.

And though we humans think that we are on the top of the heap, as all stock traders warn you: *past success is no guarantee of future performance*. In our turn, as individuals and possibly also as a species, we humans will one day contribute all that we have gained on to some other species (probably grass, bugs, and worms) in the great buffet of life as the unknowing, uncaring, universe moves on.

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But wait a minute you say. I don't just see competition; I also see cooperation. I see symbiotic relationships between all different kinds of life forms with each being benefited by the presence of the other; how does that happen in a competitive world? Does that not indicate some designing purpose behind life?

- Otherwise how could Pilot fish evolve to safely swim into shark's mouths cleaning out parasites' and food scraps from between their teeth – sort of living dental floss.
- And how could flowers and bees evolve, exchanging honey for pollination services, so that both species could be more fruitful and multiplying. Where would the flowers be without the bees? And where would the bees be without the flowers?
- Even my own body, I am now told, is actually a thriving community of thousands of helpful mutually interdependent little critters such as mitochondria, beneficial viruses, and bacteria that help me to process food, transfer energy, and even to

fight off other more harmful life forms that would sicken me. And as science is only now coming to learn, I disturb these beneficial critters at great risk to my own existence. Indeed Time Magazine, recently suggested that there are almost as many other life forms living in me than is actually me. And if you could somehow instantly make all the "me parts" disappear that my profile would briefly remain, momentarily visible, until all these other life forms fell out of the air.

To which naturalism replies – you've answered your own question. Symbiosis is just a form of team competition; two together are always better than one in any competition. These critters only help you as much as it helps themselves. And if helping you stopped helping them then they wouldn't bother hanging around for long. Richard Dawkins even wrote a book on the topic of such self-serving altruistic symbiosis. It's titled The Selfish Gene.

So that is Naturalism's best answer: we live a purposeless existence composed of time plus chance plus natural selection. Regardless of our own opinion of our species, we are actually of no more value to the universe than the strains of cancer we so viciously battle – and to the victor, the fittest most adaptable life form, always go all the spoils.

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Next, how might the Christian world view respond to this question of ticks and other nasty things?

We do see both the competitive and the cooperative nature of life and we can't help but put a value judgment on the various forms. We think of the aggressors, the weeds, and the parasites as bad; but the peaceful, the symbiotes, the cooperatives as good.

- Thus we label ticks as bad, but tick eating cattle egrets as good;
- staff virus is bad but penicillin mold is good.
- Wolves are bad but we are good

And while we also like our porterhouse steaks, we still wonder if all of life could not be more cooperative and non-competitive; thus to apply Rodney King's famous saying on a planetary scale – "why can't we all just get along?"

And, in faith, we turn to the designer God, whom we sense with our spiritual being and we ask how and why did such bad things as ticks and mosquitoes come into our world – and when will they leave?

The short answer is that all such parasites and aggressors grew out of a system that was originally designed to be completely cooperative but was transformed, and turned competitive, with the fall of Adam and Eve. Because humanity, God's planetary caretakers chose to rebel against the creator in the spiritual realm, this rebellion also

poisoned the physical realm – because it is impossible to separate the two realms – the entire creation under their charge became cursed and also entered into rebellion:

So now thorns, thistles, and kudzu grow where there had never been such before. And ticks and mosquitoes which might have spent their days peacefully feeding on fruit shifted over to feeding on flesh. And lions and humans gave up their vegetarian ways for more carnivorous pursuits.

And all this competitive living can only be undone when the planet is fully restored to its original spiritual and physical condition: with cooperation to survive once again triumphing over competition.

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Rev. Salley, don't you think that's a very heavy – even farfetched charge to lay on the human race; that by our rebellion against God, somehow we are responsible for the transformation of ticks and tigers and other such bad things?

What proof can you offer in support of this wild claim?

Well the first argument that there must be a better way of life for all of life is that we human's suspect, we sense, we yearn for that better way. Philosophers tell us that because we can conceive of this better way of life – that it indeed once existed and one day could again. This is called the ontological argument, and while it is rather loopy and has its critics, it is still a very powerful proof.

We even find the ontological argument in the Bible, where the author of the letter to the Hebrews acknowledges that much of our belief in God relies on an internal faith without any external proof. *for without faith it is impossible to please God, because whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him* (Hebrews 11:6).

And Scripture gives not only this promise but also the other, that the one-time Edenic life for which we yearn, will one day be restored.

Where might we find such clues to God's purpose? Such promises of restoration?

The book of Genesis indicates that as originally created, all animals were once vegetarian. [And God said] *to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.* And it was so (Gen. 1:30).

Interestingly while the planet may have shifted over to carnivorous ways immediately after the fall, apparently humans did not become omnivores until after the flood.

*God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Genesis 9:1-3).*

Then further down our historic road, when the prophet Isaiah predicted a future restoration for God's wandering children, he included the entire planet in the deal:

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-11)*

***for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord***

That line tells us something of which Naturalism could never conceive or admit, and while we Christians know it to be true, neither can we prove it: that the spiritual and physical realms are inseparable, impacting every part of our entire planet. That is why on that day when humanity returns into a right relationship with God so will the entire planet; ***for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.*** Competition will give way once again to cooperation and there will never again be hurt or destruction on God's holy mountain.

For this reason, as the Apostle Paul remarks on his and our personal troubles, he speaks of a better hope for all of life by viewing them on a planetary scale.

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; (Romans 8:18-22)*

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So there you have my best attempt at answering the question of ticks. Now you must choose which answer you will accept.

Either we live in a godless, purposeless, universe where ticks, cancer, and other nasty things have just as much right as we to compete for mastery of the planet (may the fittest life form win!).

Or We live in a Godly directed universe where ticks, along with thorns, thistles, mosquitoes, cancer and a lot of other nasty things all resulted from a spiritual rebellion that is being played out on a physical level. And while we cannot here know whether God specifically designed ticks or if they, with the fall, they simply transformed from other more benign critters, we can know that one day they will be no longer -- as they will serve no purpose in God's new creation.