

Creation is friendly. Nature isn't.

What does the 12.26.04 Indian Ocean Tsunami "mean"?

God spoke creation into being & called it "very good" (Gn.1.31), & (p.94, R.G.Collingwood, THE IDEA OF NATURE, Oxford/45/61) "nature is a book written by God in the language of mathematics" (the view of Galileo, "the true father of modern science"). Nature is commensurable (measurable) reality.

Naturally (i.e., viewed as "nature"), Tsunami '04 "means" that the theoretically measurable pressure built-up between two tectonic plates reached the slippage point, so one was "subducted" & the other rose about two feet, causing Sumatra to move (by satellite-measurement) 18 feet & tsunamis (underwater-produced great waves) to hit the Indian Ocean beaches.

Unlike creation, nature isn't friendly. Neither is it unfriendly. It just does its thing as divinely designed-programmed by "natural law" (a deism occasionally "miraculously" intruded by direct divine action [viz., theism]).

1 Thinking/discourse is elliptical, requiring distance/space between two foci--in a philosophical word, requiring dualism, in the present case the creation/nature dualism. A functional (here, a cognitive) dualism, not ontological (for in reality, the two terms are coterminous, both used to indicate the universe).

The longer-deeper two persons converse, (1) the clearer becomes the identity of each & (2) the more each influences the other. So it has been as through millenia "creation" & "nature" have conversed.

2 "In the seventeenth century there was a huge outbreak of dualisms: e.g. (a) in metaphysics, between body and mind; (b) in cosmology, between nature and God; (c) in epistemology between rationalism and empiricism. These dualisms emerge with Descartes." (C.100) As the father of autonomous individualism, D. unwittingly distanced human consciousness from both God (& thus also creation) & nature (which had become wholly impersonal since Copernicus "destroyed the entire theory of the natural world as an organism" [C.97]); on to Newton's natural "laws" [i.e., regularities], nature on the machine model). In the terms of this Thinksheet's title, creation is, as a "very good" (Gn.1.31) divine work, "friendly" both as life-supporting & as open to divine intervention ("miracle")--but as machine, nature "isn't" friendly, is mechanical-rigid, does it's thing, sometimes with UNfriendly consequences to humanity....

....e.g., the 12.26.04 Indian Ocean tsunami, on which these two 1.4.05 journalists' comments: (1, the Boston Globe's James Carroll) "If the earth itself is the enemy of humanity, where is the friend?" (Though he was ordained as a Catholic priest, his column doesn't mention God as possible friend.) (2, the LATimes' W.Scott Thompson) "The whole world has been brutally reminded of nature's indifference. 'Things' happen, even on Christmas weekend....can anyone ever again blithely assume mankind's ability to tame the larger forces of nature?"

3 For understanding "nature," just two more Collingwood notes: (1, p170) "The cycle of cosmological thought in the modern world, from Descartes and Newton to Whitehead, recapitulates the cycle running from Thales to Aristotle. But this recapitulation is not a mere repetition; it has taken up into itself first the body of Christian theology, and secondly, derived from that theology, the body of modern science, the new physics of the 17th century and the new biology of the 19th"; (2, p175) "Nature, though it is a thing that really exists, is not a thing that exists in itself or in its own right, but a thing which depends for its existence on something else....natural science...depends for its very existence upon some other form of thought which...cannot be reduced to it....What is this other form of thought? I answer, 'History',..[the] consultation and interpretation of records....a 'scientific fact' is a class of historical facts....no one can answer the question what nature is unless he knows what history is. This is a question which Alexander and Whitehead have not asked."

4 "Nature" is IMpersonal, beginning with BB (the Big Bang) & ending with either the BM (the Big Melt, if it implodes) or the BC (the Big Chill, if it continues to explode). There are what? & why? & how? but **no who?** (God or other consciousnesses:

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no scientists to do the natural science, "nature" being (the 1st ¶ of this Thinksheet) "commensurable reality"). Even before the last century began, Wm. James was panning the notion that "science" can believe in people without believing in God. These atheists (who as "humanists" were soon to take over in Am. pub.sch. science) suffered a self-inflicted "paralysis of their native capacity for faith...mental weakness, brought about by the notion...that there is something called scientific evidence by waiting upon which they shall escape all danger of shipwreck in regard to truth. But there is no scientific or other method by which men can steer safely between the opposite dangers of believing too little or of believing too much." (THE WILL TO BELIEVE [1897], Preface x-xiii [222 Mod.Lib.]). A dozen years later, in A PLURALISTIC UNIVERSE (303-316 [214f Mod.Lib.]), James detailed a world "discontinuous" with reason & nature. Paul & Luther experienced a world of "light" & life "inverting" "pagan pride" & the human illusion of "self-sufficiency"--a world of grace, the "death of everything that paganism, naturalism, and legalism pin their faith on and tie their trust to." This passage into the grace-world, let's call it a **conversion from nature to creation**, (James *ibid*) "a world in which all is well, in spite of..., indeed *because* of certain forms of death...."

As (Heb.) "teshuvah" (turning) requires a caesura (Lat., "cutting"), one must stop before reversing direction. We don't know what stopped urbanite Abraham that led to his becoming "a wandering Aramaean." We do know what stopped Paul ("a light from heaven" [Ac.9.3]) & Luther (another heavenly light, viz. lightning). We know that **disaster** often leads to a thinking-talking moment (as now, much in the media, Tsunami '04)....the Jews got theologically creative when they lost their land ("the pessimistic utterances in our Bible" coming from "the day's of Solomon's glory" [Wm. James, WB 47-50--321 Mod.Lib.]....Before he was 12 years jailed for doing it, Bunyan was too busy preaching to have time to write PILGRIM'S PROGRESS--the allegory of Christian's dream of his city's coming disaster ("burned with fire" [chap.1]) & his resulting action (as detailed in his poetic preface): he "runs and runs / Till he unto the gate of glory comes." Not all suffering gives birth to creativity, but let's pray that Tsunami '04 eventuates in "teshuvah" from old hates & fears to advances in justice & peace commensurate with this the world's greatest outpouring of compassion. And as Christians, may be reinvigorate the Lord's Prayer in our private, churchly, & public lives of witness & service.

5 The question is humanly unavoidable: what **caused** Tsunami '04? Was God involved? (Larry King's 1.7.05 "God and the Tsunami" confronted six religion-leaders as directly as possible, including one-by-one "Do you doubt?") Let's look at the 1.8.05 results of the beliefnet.com **poll**:

- (1) 3% "Yes, God is punishing us."
- (2) 8% "Yes, God is testing us."
- (3) 30% "Yes, the earthquake and tsunamis were sent by God, but we don't know what the purpose was."
- (4) 50% "Although I believe in God, the supernatural has nothing to do with this tragedy."
- (5) 9% "God doesn't exist, and disasters like this are just forces of nature."

6 WHERE ARE YOU in the poll? Only if you're in position 5 do you not have the problem (though you atheists have no-God problems). Half of the respondents were, one might say, half atheist (position 4). Lincoln was a regular worshipper in a (sovereignty-of-God) Presbyterian church (have you sat in his pew?) & would have checked box 3 ("The Almighty has his own purposes....").

Positions 1-3 are "acts of God" biblical. Am.Heritage (2000) Dictionary: "A manifestation especially of a violent or destructive natural force...that is beyond human power to cause, prevent, or control." My experience of Charleston S.C. is of a sun-light Southern paradisaic city, but in its four centuries it's undergone dozens of "natural" disasters--with which Theo.Steinberg opens his ACTS OF GOD: THE UNNATURAL HISTORY OF NATURAL DISASTERS IN AMERICA (Oxford/02). He prefaces this tale of woes with (p3) a Coney Island 1905 carnival of historic natural disasters, the promoters correctly anticipating success because of the public's "delight for horrors," fascination with (yes) "acts of God." (Whatever it says of humanity, Tsunami '04 is providing vast audiences with entertainment, as well as eliciting pity & compassion.)