Existential Problem of Evil

**I Introduction**

There are three different problems of evil: logical, evidential, and existential. The logical problem of evil is that it is impossible for God to exist and have this much evil in the world. The evidential problem is that the amount of evil in the world shows that God probably does not exist. Lastly, the existential problem is a problem due to one’s emotions as they are experienced. The existential problem of evil is not a strong argument against God because we as humans cannot understand the decisions God makes because we lack God’s perspective. First, I will explain the existential problem of evil. Then, I will discuss how this is a weak argument. Lastly, I will answer an objection.

**II Background**

The existential problem of evil becomes a problem when a person experiences a terrible event and begins to question God’s actions. The existential problem of evil is mainly a problem for those who already believe in God but question why He chooses to do things. Not all people experience the existential problem of evil in the same way or at the same time. For example, Dostoevsky uses child abuse as his occasion for questioning God (Dostoevsky, 57). Not all families experience child abuse; therefore, they most likely will not question God for why He allows child abuse to take place. In the existential problem of evil, there is a dissonance between intellect or belief and feelings or actions. C.S. Lewis’ book, *A Grief Observed*, is a great example of the existential problem of evil. In this book, Lewis explains his feelings about his wife’s death from cancer. Before his wife died of cancer, Lewis was happy and in love. Lewis did not begin to question God’s actions until his wife passed. This is a wonderful example explaining the existential problem of evil because Lewis captures the true meaning of it. He does this by explaining his feeling of his wife’s death. We know people die everyday from horrific diseases such as cancer, but we do not question why God allows people to die from these diseases until it happens to someone close to us. Many people will not question God if their life is going well; they only begin to question God when their life starts to become something they don’t want.

**III Why the existential problem of evil is a weak argument**

The existential problem of evil is not a valid argument because it is based on emotions and since emotions vary from person to person, the emotion alone cannot provide evidence that the existential problem of evil is a strong argument. The existential problem of evil is normally a problem for people who believe in God. They believe God exists and are only questioning why He chose to do something that hurt them. The argument of the existential problem of evil is weak because no one knows why God does the things He does. Christians believe that God does everything for a reason and believe that, in the end, everything He does will be for the better. This defeats the existential problem of evil because if people believe God’s actions are for the greater good then He should not be questioned. However, people still question Him. For example, in Dostoevsky’s passage about the existential problem of evil, Dostoevsky’s character, Ivan, claims that innocent children should not have to suffer through the pain adults do (Dostoevsky, 59). He does not understand why God allows horrific things, such as beatings, to happen to young children. However, this cannot be answered. God is eternal and can see all things in the past, present, and future. We, as humans, can only see what is happening in one moment. Humans will never be able to have the wisdom God has because they lack God’s perspective. Humans also cannot affirm all of God’s actions; this means we cannot understand or make the same decisions God does. This is because we are unaware of His intentions; we do not know what will happen in the future or the effects of God’s actions. The existential problem of evil also sometimes does not affect people in their day-to-day lives. For example, at this time, I have not experienced any horrific events to make me question God’s existence; therefore, I am not experiencing the existential problem of evil. Dostoevsky also asks his brother if he could make the same decision God made. God allowed the beatings of children in order to achieve a grand harmony in the end, and Alyosha said no (Dostoevsky, 66). Of course, he would say no because he does not have God’s knowledge of the world. He, as a human, does not have the eternal perspective that God has where there is no isolated evil, and it is already part of the grand harmony.

In the nursing profession, nurses see a lot of evil in the form of diseases and death. Many of them have to witness the death of a patient at least one time in their nursing career. Normally, these patients are innocent people who have the bad luck of getting a specific disease such as cancer. Nurses have a heavy workload and adding the death of a patient can lead to nurse burnout. There are high amounts of stress, and many nurses put off caring for themselves in order to take care of their patients. Nurses have patients from all different cultures and ethnicities so they must be up to date on the needs for those patients in order to give them the best care possible. Nurses in their actions and attitudes towards their patients can serve as an answer to the existential problem of evil. This is true because many nurses are with their patients all throughout the day and are there when they need them. Nurses must be kind and caring towards their patients in order to make their patients feel comfortable in a stressful situation. Most nurses do not question God without a reason. For example, when a patient who was a good person and was caring to others dies, many nurses will look to God and ask why that patient had to die when other horrible people got to live. This is much like C.S. Lewis questioning why his wife had to die from cancer as soon as he was finally able to experience love and happiness. Not only do nurses have to cope with their own questioning of God, they potentially must deal with their patients questioning God. According to Ferrell’s study, multiple seriously ill children question God’s reasoning for why they have a serious illness (1168). These children are great examples of the existential problem of evil because they believe in God but question why He has chosen them to have a terrible disease. This is also a good example of why the existential problem of evil is weak because without the disease, these children would not be questioning God. If these children did not have such strong emotions about “why them” then there would be no need to question God, thus making me believe that the strength of the existential problem of evil stems from the evidential problem. This then proves the existential problem of evil is weak because these children are using their emotions to question God’s actions. In Betty Ferrell’s article, seriously ill children express their doubts about God to nurses and ask their nurses for answers. Nurses are humans who cannot answer why God chooses to do things and why He chooses specific people. Only God can answer to why He does things. According to Pauline Bakingba, the nurses in Uganda choose their profession based on a calling from God (1345). These people, from a young age, feel they have been called on by God to perform a certain task and in this case. These people felt called to pursue the career of nursing. Many of the nurses in Uganda feel they are serving God through their work. They feel as though God assigned them a task, and if they carry out their task then they will be sent to heaven. Since these nurses feel they are doing God’s work, they rarely question God’s actions when it comes to patients. When a patient dies, these nurses look at it as though it was God’s plan all along, and the patient is now with God and in a better place no longer in pain. This shows the existential problem of evil is weak because these nurses do not feel the need to question God’s actions due to their strong belief in Him.

**IV Rebuttal**

Some people would argue that the existential problem of evil is the strongest argument among the different problems of evil due to the emotional appeal. Most theists and atheists agree that the logical problem of evil was answered by Plantiga. The evidential problem of evil is successfully answered by the Moorean shift. The Moorean shift originally states “There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.” The Moorean shift switches the atheist’s argument on how God does not exist, to an argument on how he does exist. He does this by negating premise three and putting it in place for premise one. He leaves premise two where it is and lastly, negates premise one and puts it in place for premise three. However, this leaves the existential problem not having an answer because it is based on emotion. Thus, making it appear to be a strong argument because it cannot be switched or negated to prove it is a weak argument. However, this is what makes the existential problem of evil a weak argument because there is not one solid topic the existential problem covers that can be answered. The existential problem of evil aims to demonstrate that any belief in God may be stronger than some belief in a pointless evil. Since the existential problem of evil is a problem for people who already believe in God, they already know that there is no answer for why God does things. No one, not even nurses, can answer the existential problem except for God Himself because He is all knowing and can see everything while we can only see what is happening right now. This makes the existential problem of evil a pointless argument because there is not an explanation for God’s actions and why He chooses to do things. This also could be used to try to find an answer to the evidential problem of evil as well.

**V Conclusion**

Overall, the existential problem of evil is a weak argument due to the emotional appeal. Nurses must cope with many emotions in their profession. We as humans cannot see what God can or make the decisions God can; therefore, we cannot understand why God does what He does. Nurses see evil everyday through their jobs yet many still believe in God and that He has a plan for all of us. The nurses in Uganda are a great example of why the existential problem of evil is not a strong argument because even though they see evil on a regular basis, they feel they are called by God to do this work and thus do not feel the need to question Him or His actions.

References

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