

Addressing the Problem of Evil: Necessary or Not?

I. Introduction

Theists and atheists alike have debated the problem of evil for millennia and though parts of the existential, logical, and evidential forms have been put to rest, there still remains no sound resolution to the issue as a whole. The thing that few philosophers and essayists have focused on is whether or not a theist actually needs an answer to the problem of evil, to which the answer is no. It is not necessary for a theist to have an answer to the problem of evil because there is no answer to it. Formulating or supporting an answer to the problem of evil is not necessary to worship God and thus should not be important to the theist.

II. Background

This short argumentative essay will briefly address the argument for friendly atheism addressed by William Rowe in his essay “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism” published in 1979.¹ Rowe, despite being an atheist himself, acknowledged that a theist could have a rational basis for their belief in God. Rowe states in his essay that there can be more than one rational answer to a situation and that friendly atheists acknowledge this and do not dismiss the beliefs of theists on a rational basis.

III. The Insignificance of the Problem of Evil to the Theist

Many theists have lived out the entirety of their lives without creating or accepting an adequate solution or even addressing the problem of evil. This does not make that person any less of a theist or a believer in God than those who have found an answer they feel sufficient to justify their beliefs. The sole duty of a Christian is to devote one’s life to God by worshipping

¹ William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 no. 4 (October 1979): 335-341.

Him and carrying out Christ-like deeds of goodness. Thus, it is one's actions that constitute a good Christian, not one's philosophical analysis of the existence of God.

The ultimate goal of a true theist is to find their way to God and creating or supporting a theodicy is not a necessary step in this process. Many of the people who have written theodicies or other forms of justifications of the existence of both God and evil have done so out of a place of doubt in God's existence, as in the case of writer and theist C. S. Lewis, who lost faith in God in his young adulthood but later rekindled this and justified his beliefs in several of his publications.² For those true Christian believers, however, whose faith in God has never wavered, there is a good chance that the question of the problem of evil has not or if so rarely, crossed their mind. Personal experience with perversions of good like rape or murder or a tragic event or catastrophe could drive a person to question the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God, but for the people who have never been affected by such events there rarely exists a crisis of faith. Addressing the problem of evil is not an inevitable event to the theist and is thus not necessary to the theist.

Another factor to take into account is that there is no verified solution to the problem of evil, only arguments and justifications of it. No person has been able to solve the problem of evil because humans are incapable of understanding why God allows something to happen that many would perceive as bad because humans are not all-powerful and all-knowing as He is. Many self-proclaimed disbelievers in God do not actually discredit the existence of an all-powerful and all-knowing being but they instead discredit that said omnipotent being is all-good and thus disapprove of His actions and express some form of anger towards Him. This, however, is a

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Quebec: Samizdat University Press, 2016), PDF e-book, page 6.

logical fallacy because one cannot hate something they do not believe in. One cannot attempt to use logic to justify the existence of God when God is above logic.

Justification is not necessary when describing one's faith, though many theists have a justification for their beliefs that does not take the problem of evil into account. People may believe that one has to give reasons for their faith in God, but in reality, theists only need to answer the problem of evil if they cannot believe in God without it, in which cases their faith is in question to begin with. Christianity would not be a faith if it did not require one to believe the illogical and embrace the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent being. One must take a leap of faith in order to be a man or woman of faith. Humans have a deep desire to seek answers to things that they cannot explain. These are the people who need some form of a resolution to the problem of evil. People, however, who acknowledge that there are things that cannot be explained by science such as miracles and logical improbabilities, can easily carry out their role as a Christian without adequately addressing the problem of evil. The problem of evil need not be addressed by a Christian if their belief in God is strong and unquestioning. In Rowe's argument in favor of friendly atheism, he states that a theist might justify his or her beliefs "by appealing to one or more of the traditional arguments: Ontological, Cosmological, Teleological, Moral, etc."³ Each of these potential justifications for believing in God do not require an address to the problem of evil, thus proving that one's belief in God can be unaffected by the existence of evil. Therefore, Christians do not have to answer the problem of evil on the grounds that it has no bearing on whether or not a theist believes, what matters is that they do believe in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

³ Rowe, 341.

IV. Conclusion

In this essay, an argument against there existing a need for a theist to answer the problem of evil is presented and argued. This paper asserts that most theists do not have an answer to the problem of evil and this does not affect their belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God. While a theist may desire an answer to the problem of evil, it is not a necessary part of their continued faith in God.

Bibliography

Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. Quebec: Samizdat University, 2016. PDF e-book.

Rowe, William L. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (October 1979): 335-341.