Kourtney Landis

The Existential Problem of Evil: A Problem Theists Need Solved

**Introduction**

 I believe the existential problem of evil is the most difficult for theists to address. In “The Existential Problem of Evil: An Unsolved problem that Need not be Solved”, the author argues that this problem need not to be solved. The existential problem of evil is an issue for individuals who believe in God yet have emotions that may not agree. This seems to be an issue for believers, so why does this article state it need no answer. I feel that theists have a hard time addressing and responding the atheists regarding the existential problem of evil. I will define the existential problem of evil and address why theists struggle to address/answer this problem.

**Background**

 The existential problem of evil involves individuals who believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-benevolent God, and feel they have good reason to do so. Additionally, theists believe in some sort of basic theodicy involving freewill that allows suffering into this world. Many theists agree with the idea that evil exists in the world because of free will. God gave all humans the ability to decide what they what to do in every situation. They are able to decide to do what is good or evil. With that being said, some theists believe that due to humans ability to choose evil, there is then suffering in the world. God cannot eliminate evil without eliminating free will. Despite this, many theists struggle to affirm the ways of God regarding evil and suffering. Once theists are faced with a situation where an innocent individual endures an immense amount of pain and are asked to affirm God’s decision, they struggle to do so (The Existential Problem of Evil: An Unsolvable Problem that Need not be Solved). For example, if someone had the ability to eliminate all the suffering in the world if one innocent 5-year-old girl had to die, would the theists be able to affirm God for allowing that to happen? Can humans see beyond and past this 5-year-old girl dying? This task is what theists struggle to address and answer.

 With all the evil in the world, theists want to understand God’s rationale for allowing it. Theists are in the dark about why God lets innocent suffering happen. Some situations where innocent individuals are caused harm, may result in anger towards God. Theists want to understand He allows such evil and suffering to happen to innocent people. Marilyn Adams frames the issue with the question; “How can I trust (or continue to trust) God in a world like this (in distressing circumstances such as these)” (Adams, p. 173). Having trouble trusting God, with all the evil that is currently in the world, is how many theists experience the existential problem of evil.

**Argument**

 At the end of the essay, “The Existential Problem of Evil: An Unsolved Problem that Need not be Solved”, the author starts to address the answer to the existential problem of evil. The author names the final section “A Problem That Cannot Be Solved”. The author states how theists believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-benevolent God, but struggle to affirm his ways. While this is a problem for theists, they are asked to perform a task that is somewhat unrealistic. God is eternal, which means that he sees outside of the past, present and future; he sees our lives and the world as a whole; He does not merely see one specific time and place. Humans are unable to see the reasoning for all the evil in the world. Humans only have the ability to see in the present. We cannot begin to understand or comprehend seeing the world eternally. Theists believe in an all good God but struggle to affirm it because we can only see in the present. Theists trust in God that everything happens for a reason.

 Then the question is posed, “Need the Existential Problem of Evil Be Solved?”. The author discusses how there is no answer to the problem of evil because, as humans, we are unable to see life as God does, eternally. In “The Brother’s Karamzov”, there is a scene where a skeptic brother named Ivan, asks his religious brother, Alyosha, to answer a question for him. Ivan asks his brother to imagine that he had the ability to determine all of humanity’s destiny. Ivan tells Alyosha that he has the power to make everyone on earth happy and give everyone a happy ending, but he has to cause death to one innocent baby. Ivan asks his brother if he would be able to cause this harm in order to create happiness for the rest of mankind. Alyosha answers that he wouldn’t be able to consent (Dostoevsky, p. 226). In this scenario, a devout Christian is asked to do an incredibly tough task by an atheist. This Christian is asked to “play God” and see if he could intentionally cause or allow harm to happen to an innocent child. This is what makes the existential problem so difficult for theists.

 Theists have faith. Faith means believing in something one is unable to see. Theists believe in an all good, all knowing, all powerful God. They have faith that this God would not allow unintentional evil. They may struggle, at times, to understand God’s reasoning but then again theists are only human. They cannot see eternally like God. I feel that the above situation is a main issue related to the existential problem of evil. Theists truly believe in an all-3 God, but sometimes their emotions may create questions for God. This is when atheists or non-believers will try to prove that God is not real. It is hard to explain the existential problem of evil to atheists because they are lacking faith. Atheists may see this questioning a sign of doubt, but it is the opposite. It is the want for understanding and full explanation. The existential problem of evil is hard to explain and answer to individuals who lack faith and the basic belief in God. The existential problem of evil will cause more confusion between atheists and theists.

**Conclusion**

 The existential problem of evil is the most difficult evil to address and answer to atheists or non-believers. It adds another layer of faith and trust that non-believers do not have. It is a problem that does not need an answer but creates more question and confusion. I think the existential problem of evil is difficult for theists to answer themselves, rather answer to the rest of the world.