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The Problem of Evil

1. **Introduction**

The question of if God is real based off all of the evil that happened in the world is often debated. In this paper, I will argue why William Rowe’s formulation of the evidential problem of evil is successful in providing evidence against God’s existence as well as discuss the Navajo Indians origin of evil in their religion.

1. **Background**

Rowe’s argument for the rationality of atheism based on evil:

1) “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.

2) 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.

3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being (Rowe 336).”

1. **Main Argument**

First, I will explain why Rowe’s argument adequately provides evidence against God’s existence. Rowe presents a scenario of a fawn slowly suffering in the woods. He explains how pointless the fawn suffering is and how an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God could have stopped this suffering. By utilizing this easy and familiar scenario, the reader can believe, understand, and conceptualize how it could really happen. With this realistic example, Rowe causes his readers emotional turmoil that might make them question the existence of a wholly good God. This causes the reader to accept premise 1 of his argument. When I read Rowe’s example, it made me realize how much we suffer every day. People are dying in horrific ways with little sign of good equal to the evil, or that stopping it would cause an equal or worst evil. So, if there was an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God, by using Rowe’s example of the fawn, personally, it creates doubt that a fawn suffering which was “preventable and … pointless” couldn’t have been stopped by a wholly good God without some greater evil from happening (Rowe 337).

A question that arises from the evidential problem of evil is proving that it is ration to believ that God does not exist. Even I have times where I question whether I know the purpose of everything that happens in the world and whether there is someone pulling the strings. However, the evidential problem of evil just requires a “rational” case for belief in God’s nonexistence. Rowe believes that his argument illustrates that belief that God does not exist is rational because it is probable. Rowe describes this through a probable scenario of two people, who are both unqualified for office, becoming presidents, “although we cannot know with certainty that it is true, it perhaps can be rationally supported, shown to be a rational belief” (Rowe 337). This example provides a smaller version of the wide scale meaning of Rowe’s argument with God, but it gives a similar account that makes his argument more comprehensible and understandable. We are rational to believe that the first premise of Rowe’s argument is true and most theist will grant the second premise as obviously true. Since both premises are true, then we are rational to believe that the conclusion, “There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being (336)” is also true.

Now, I will argue that Rowe adequately identifies the evidential problem of evil. The evidential problem of evil states logical proof that shows how the existence of evil illustrates the probability of the nonexistence of God. Rowe argues for atheism by referring to intense human and animal suffering. He uses intense human and animal suffering as the framework to create his argument. It is because of the suffering that he thinks God does not exist. To validate his argument, both of his premises must be correct in order for the conclusion to be accepted. Just as Rowe pointed out, I also believe that the best way to fight for this argument is to start with the second premise. This is the easiest premise for atheists and theists to both agree to be true. Since both atheist and theist agree that premise two is plausible, the theist make it easier for the atheist to argue for premise one and the conclusion. The atheist can say to the theist, ‘you can’t argue with me if you agree with me.’ Pointless evils are pointless for a reason. They do not serve any purpose in the long run of the world. Since pointless evils are not logically needed and are preventable, an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God could easily stop it with other some worse evil happening. He does this through the explanations of intense human and animal suffering and the example of the dying fawn, allowing him to create his own explanation of the evidential problem of evil.

Third, I will explain the Moorean Shift and how Rowe benefits from using it as evidence in his argument. Rowe explains two possible techniques that a theist might use to defend their argument for the existence of God. The first technique is the direct approach. This technique tries to directly justify each evil. Rowe puts down this defense pretty fast saying, “the direct attack against premise (i) cannot succeed and violates basic beliefs associated with theism” (Rowe 339). The direct approach cannot succeed because there is an infinite amount of evil in the world and to try and justify the evil, you would have to address every single one. He then suggests the indirect approach as a friendly gesture. Rowe calls the indirect approach the “Moorean Shift” where the theist should argue indirectly against his premises rather than directly attacking his argument in direct approach (Rowe 339). Using the *Moorean Shift,* the theist would negate Rowe’s original conclusion and makes this negation the new first premise, “not-3. There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being” (Rowe 339). The second premise then stays the same since it is agreed upon by both atheist and theists. This then leaves Rowes first premise to also be negated, becoming the new conclusion, “not-1. It is not the case that 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” (Rowe 339). By using the *Moorean Shift*, the theist claims that his evidence for God is better than his evidence that the evils in the world are pointless.

Rowe’s use of the *Moorean Shift* is an ingenious way to steer the rebuttal of this argument in a way that Rowe is able to explain. By coming up with a defense that a theist might respond with, he is then able to strengthen his argument by providing a response to this objection. This also demonstrates that Rowe is open to discussing his argument and anticipates what people with a different belief might think. He manifests a sense of charity that makes it easier for people to try and understand his view rather than saying that his argument is right, and the theists are wrong. Rowe in a way, uses the Moorean Shift to show why the theist should have “rational ground” for believing his argument against God’s existence just as Rowe did for the theist by proposing the Moorean Shift for God’s existence.

1. **Additional Research**

Every culture has a different religion or a different version of their religion than any other culture in the world. The Navajo Indians’ religion is heavily based on their culture and history. Their religion stems from their ancestors and the way that they lived. The Navajo participate in ceremonies and rituals to learn from and strengthen their connection to their ancestors (Marshall). Instead of having a bible, the Navajo create rules and establish the ways that they should act on the myths that they tell. The Navajo’s bible is their mythology. This is how they spread their views and teachings. Every story is told differently by different people, just like how Christianity is taught differently around the world (Vecsey).

Overall Navajo religion is different from Christianity and theology, there are some of the myths that are similar in nature. The Navajo creation story, *Diné bahane’*, is consider to be the story of the First Man and First Woman (Vecsey). When the Navajo describes the story of the First Man and First Woman, they describe them as “humanlike only in that they were male and female and were attracted to each other” (Witherspoon 141). Just like in the Christian creation story, the First Man and First Woman had a fatal flaw that caused bad repercussions. The First Man and First Woman gave into their desires and violated their relationship causing men and women to be separated from that point on. Their separation laid way to” spawned disfigured beings, symbols of ugliness, whom the people abandoned” (Vecsey). These abandoned creatures soon turned into monsters caused the Navajo ancestors extreme trouble with threats against their existences. This was how the Navajo believe that monsters and evil entered the world, through the abandonment or creatures (Vecsey).

Stories like the First Man and First Woman have help shape the Navajo’s idea of monsters and evil. For the Navajo, “monsters” are things that prohibit them from living their life and are created by the Navajo ancestors. “Navajos believe in moral cause and effect, an extrinsic teleology” (Vecsey). In order for the Navajo to be healthy, have wealth and pleasure, and to live a long life in the way of the ancestors, they must resist all pain, sickness, trouble, and poverty. The pain and suffering that the Navajo try to avoid stems from contributions made from the people in health and social relations. These contributions are considered to be “monsters”: “selfishness, greediness, envy, hate, jealousy” (Vecsey). Just like in Christian theology, evil or “monsters” comes from the person. The sin of the person. “Monsters” stem from insecurities in each person and led to immoral behavior that causes pain and sickness (Vecsey).

1. **Conclusion**

Rowe’s argument for the evidential problem of evil is successful in providing evidence against God’s existence.

Works Cited

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