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Belief in God and the Evidential Problem of Evil

1. **Introduction to the Evidential Problem of Evil**

The evidential problem of evil addresses the existence of God and how evil makes His existence improbable. William Rowe discusses this idea in his paper “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism” (Rowe). However, I am going to refute Rowe’s ideas and defend my belief in God through his Moorean shift method of argumentation and my supporting evidence. The theist is able to feel confident and be rationally justified in both their belief in a wholly good being coexisting with suffering and evil because of the compensating good that must flow from it as well as the belief that we may not know God’s justifying reasons for the existence of evil.

1. **Background**

An abbreviated form of Rowe’s atheistic argument is as follows. There exists instances of intense suffering [pointless evils] that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without losing some greater good. An omniscient, wholly good being would have prevented such instances of suffering. Therefore, there probably does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. These premises were created by Rowe as the basic argument for the rationality of atheism regarding the coexistence of God and evil (Rowe, p. 336). However, it is suggested that theists can shift these premises and apply it to their belief in the coexistence of God and evil through the Moorean Shift, an indirect approach to the problem of evil. An indirect approach means that you take the argument you wish to reject, in this case the above argument for atheism, and negate one of the premises. With this approach, an individual is not required to provide reasons for every instance of suffering. Whereas, with a direct approach an individual would have to give the greater good that comes from each instance of suffering which is implausible. When the Moorean shift is applied, the conclusion is that pointless evils and suffering do not exist because an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being does exist. In further detail, the premises of the Moorean shift are as follows. There probably exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of intense suffering [pointless evil] it could. Therefore, it is not the case that there exist instances of intense suffering [pointless evil] which an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being could have prevented without losing some greater good (Rowe, p. 339).

1. **Belief in God and the Coexistence of Evil**

In the theistic argument for belief in God, theists trust they have stronger evidence for believing in God than they do in pointless and intense suffering. Furthermore, a theist is able to say that he or she has rational grounds for believing in God, which allows him to be rationally justified in rejecting the atheistic argument. The main theistic idea leading to this conclusion is that an omniscient and omnipotent being, such as God, would prevent such suffering if it were pointless. However, since He did not prevent it then there must be a greater good that comes out of it, and it would not be a pointless evil as the atheist might claim. This evidential problem of evil has to be addressed from an indirect approach rather than a direct approach. If addressed from a direct approach, a theist would have to take every instance of intense suffering and show the greater good that comes from it, which is implausible. However, with the indirect approach, an individual takes the argument he or she wants to reject and shifts it to where they have rational grounds for their belief in God. Skeptical theism is the idea that although there may be justification for intense evils and suffering, there is no guarantee we could discover or know that reasoning. Although we, as theists, believe we are justified in our belief in God as mentioned earlier, we are not required to supply reasons for that justification. Therefore, we are also justified in our belief that pointless evils do not exist even though we are not able to know the reasons for that occurrence of evil. I can see this in my own life as there are evils, such as natural disasters, that even as a Christian I do not have the knowledge to give reasons for. However, because of my belief that God is wholly good, I am confident and rationally justified in believing in God, just as I am in that some good must come from such instances of evil.

Although Christians may not have exact explanations for instances of intense suffering, we are able to conclude that because a wholly good being would prevent these instances if there were not a greater good, then there must be a greater good that comes from it. A main idea in theistic belief is that we are not omniscient, meaning we are not all-knowing. Therefore, we are not able to know the reasoning behind all instances of intense suffering, leading us to trust God that there is a greater good that will flow from it and that such evils are not pointless. An atheist may ask a theist to show their justification, however, this may not be possible because a theist might not know the reasons for an occurrence of such evil.

For example, let’s look at other reasons why a theist may support the rejection of the atheist’s argument and find rational justification for evils. Many Christians believe that human pain and suffering is a form of punishment for sin, resulting from the misuse of free will in the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, suffering can serve as a test or a means to bring one closer to God. C.S. Lewis explains throughout his book, *The Problem of Pain*, that we will not naturally surrender to God without pain and, with pain, theists will then turn to God (Lewis, 1996, p. 98). Therefore, suffering is a means to bring individuals back closer in their faith with God, or, in context, to bring about a greater good. Many individuals may ask, “How does this defend belief in God in the face of evil?” A theist answers this question by saying an omniscient, wholly good being probably exists, therefore, it can only be rationally concluded that instances of pointless pain and suffering probably cannot exist. Furthermore, in my opinion, God has his reasonings for permitting such evils that we, as non-omniscient humans, may not be able to understand. If pointless sufferings did exist, then God would not be wholly good because he ought to want to prevent these occurrences. Therefore, it is improbable that pointless, intense suffering can coexist with a wholly good being. A theists belief in God is rational because it aligns with their reasons and logic. For example, a theist has reason to believe in a wholly good God because it aligns with their faith. Therefore, because they have this strong belief that they have rooted in logic, that belief is rational. Although an atheist and theist disagree with the existence of God, each has their reasons, based in logical conclusions, that make their belief acceptable and rational.

It is uncontroversial that there does exist evil in the world, both natural evil, such as hurricanes, and moral evil, such as murder. However, the justification of this evil poses an important question about God’s existence and goodness. Hud Hudson discusses this in his book *A Grotesque In The Garden* (Hudson). It is necessary to think of the option that evil is permitted by God because it has a compensating good. For example, think of an individual who is sick and is getting treatment. This individual is suffering but a greater good, that of being healthy, flows from the pain of treatment. Defending belief in a God that makes sense of His coexistence with evil is plausible when one looks at theistic beliefs and the idea that there must be a good that flows from each evil, even if we are not knowledgeable of what that good or reasoning may be. I believe that both theists and atheists are rationally justified in their beliefs, even though I agree with the theistic view of the Moorean Shift. Furthermore, a theist can be rational in believing in a wholly good being because they see it through there logical Christian viewpoint and belief system. Whereas an atheist would see their reasonings from a different perspective. Each individual has logical reasons for believing what they do, however, these reasons may develop from different perspectives of religion and the coexistence of evil with God.

1. **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Moorean Shift, and other supporting evidence, applied to the evidential problem of evil rationally justifies both a theists belief in an omniscient, wholly good being in the face of evils and occurrences of suffering and the belief in not knowing God’s reasonings.

References

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