

Discuss the view that existence of evil in the world demonstrates the non-existence of God

"After the Shoah [Holocaust] no statement, theological or otherwise, can be made that would not be credible in the face of burning children" – Rabbi Irving Greenberg. The view that that Greenberg holds epitomises the thought among many philosophers (predominantly atheists) that the evil in the world suggest that God does not exist. Commonly known as the problem of evil, it has posed one of the biggest dangers to theism. Though there are two versions (one inductive and the other deductive) they are both a posteriori arguments that show that God's existence is logically incompatible or improbable.

Defences have been created to reconcile the existence of both evil and the amount of it in the world with traditionally conceived God, these are known as theodicies. A theodicy is bound to advocate existence of God, keeping God's attribute as traditionally defined and not denying the existence of evil.

There are two forms of this problem, the first being the Logical Problem of Evil which deductively arrives at the conclusion that God does not exist. Hume (1711 – 1776) illustrated the problem through his inconsistent triad. The triad had two attributes (omnibenevolence and omnipotence) and evil at its points, for triad to be no longer inconsistent, we must remove one of his attributes considering how evil objectively exists. Hume develops his argument by saying that if God is omnibenevolent then he would stop the suffering; if he was omnipotent then he could stop it – so either he is impotent, malicious or does not exist.

Thus he concludes with the view that "the mere existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an all-loving, all-powerful God" and was summarised by Mackie (subsequently mentioned by Epicurus);

- 1) God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent
- 2) Such a God would not allow evil and suffering to exist.
- 3) Evil and suffering does exist.
- 4) Therefore, God does not exist.

As we can see, it is a deductive argument however, premise number two according to Irenaeus is guilty of assuming that the God would want to eliminate evil, indeed, Irenaeus believed evil was made for the greater good and thus he would not want to eliminate evil. Furthermore, do we not see our bravery only in a time of danger; is my compassion not an effect of suffering? Like a child with leukemia being put through kimo-therapy, he suffers, yet in the end he is rid of his cancer. So this problem does not show the non-existence of God. He solves the problem by saying that all evil leads to soul-making (spiritual growth) which can lead us to eschatologically reunited and rewarded by God. This view follows that we are not God's pets, where we live in a comfortable cage but we are God's children and he has created a world for us where we can grown, much like a parent who has to let their child experience in the world.

However we must ask about the evil that does not lead to spiritual growth, much like a child who has not recovered after years of abuse but is forced to kill him self. We must also ask why God didn't just attribute us with the qualities he wants. However Hick states that someone who has obtained these attributes through struggle is far "richer" than someone who has been given it, like someone who works hard for a university place is more worthy than someone who has been given a place because of his father. Thus we are left to conclude that God's existence is not compromised by God. However, we must ask whether this view holds up to second version of the problem.

The second problem is the Evidential Problem of Evil (advocated by Rowe, Darwin and Hume) which accepts that the child may have to suffer to get to greater good of being freed from his cancer but that he should not be stabbed straight after. It can accept that a stolen purse or wallet leads us to be cautious in future but what of the Gulag and the Holocaust? Rowe gives the example of a fawn that is burned but no-one knows - who can possibly grow spiritually? It can be summarised thus;

- 1) Evil and Suffering Exists

- 2) An Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent God could and would prevent such a sheer amount of evil
- 3) It is more likely that there is no such God than there is considering this
- 4) Therefore, an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God does not exist

However we are limited in time and space to know whether an action is going aid someone or something, like a chess-novice playing with a chess-master, we can not say that the master's moves have no purpose until the end of the game for he knows more. Just like the people who have been killed as a result of a volcano may not know that the lava will aid a community in the future.

However, this appeal to ignorance does not undermine the evidential problem. The essence of the evidential problem of evil is to show that it is more probable that there is no God. We can say that is probable that we all no all 'goods' and when we can not think of a justifiable reason, then it is probable that there is no higher good and thus probable that there is no such God. We could even argue that it can never be justified as Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821 - 1881) wrote "And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price."

So we must conclude as Thomas Huxley did and say that "brought to the tribunal of ethics, the universe would stand condemned" because nothing can justify or explain the sheer amount of evil in the world. Iraneus' theodicy does not explain the sheer amount of gratuitous evil in the world and the appeal to ignorance is not successful. Thus, although we might not be able to conclude that the existence of God is logically incompatible we can say that it demonstrates that the existence of God is improbable.