

Evilness

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Abstract: *the most valuable information about religion can be find out in the words and life of practitioners who carried out researches about religion and could suggest others key points regarding it. In the following, an except from an interview with the late Allameh Seyed Jafar Morteza Ameli has been offered.*

Key words: *Quran, Imamate history, shitte interaction*

The question of the intrinsic nature of evil and why and how evil exists is an ancient and repeatable question in human history and divine religions. This question arises from the fact that the Abrahamic religions, and especially the religion of Islam, introduce God as the All-Knowing and All-Wise Creator and the All-Powerful and the Just Lord, and the evil that is regarded as the act of God appears incompatible with these qualities of God. Naturally, this question emerges from time to time when human beings experience a natural calamity like

floods, earthquakes, and diseases such as cholera and the like, and the enemies of religion and Islam try to attack people's beliefs by projecting such doubts. In the global coronavirus crisis, this story was repeated, but this time the attack was much stronger and wider and the doubts presented more intensely, because on the one hand, this disease had a rapid global spread and an unparalleled social, economic, political and cultural effects, and on the other hand, global arrogance and disbelief, with dominance over the media and cyberspace used this platform with all its might and waged a cognitive war and instilled doubts on a broad scale and in novel ways, launched a unique attack on the beliefs of the people in the Islamic world as well as the religious people throughout the world. One of the main axis in this attack was the issue of evil.

In this arena, it was necessary to defend against this attack. Rather, the rightly-guided vanguard

needed to shift its position from defensive to attacking the immoral materialistic and secular beliefs and culture and the self-indulgent and self-serving nature of the West. Numerous and large-scale measures were taken by the Jihadi forces and the theological and non-theological experts in this regard, which cannot be explained in this brief note. One of the tasks that the zealous Committee of Coronavirus Crisis and the Deputy of Research in theological Seminaries set out was to produce deep and reasonable matters and firm and fluent texts to respond to the doubts so that it could be a source of intellectual nourishment for the Jihadi and cultural forces in this field.

In order to achieve this basic need, Dr. Berenjkar, the distinguished researcher in the field of religion and chief professor at university of Tehran and the head of the Association of Theological Seminaries, was requested to explain

the issue of evil with a theological approach and respond to the doubts in this regard. Professor welcomed the proposal with a Jihadi spirit and began a foreign lesson in this regard during the Corona period. The book before you is the product of this wise and sacred endeavor. Hereby we appreciate the efforts of this distinguished master and with the hope that his endeavors would draw the satisfaction of the Imam of the Age and acceptance of the Almighty God, we call one and all for the study of this valuable work and utilizing it to defend our Islamic ideals and beliefs.

**Vice-Chancellor for
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Introduction by the writer

The coronavirus, aside from creating serious threats to human health, has also posed challenges for different societies in various cultural, religious, political and social

dimensions, and in particular, has challenged some religious belief with serious questions. Of course, such problems with severity and weakness have existed since ancient times and as an "evil-related issue", it has been one of the ancient questions of human beings and has been discussed in various manners in the history of human perception.

One of the mistakes made by many writers in this regard is that they present a single report about doubts related to evilness and present all the answers raised under it, while the matter of evilness is not a single issue and or a single doubt. Rather, it has been discussed with numerous commentaries in the philosophy of religion and the new theology, dualism, Islamic philosophy and Islamic theology.

In the philosophy of religion and new theology, this matter is often a challenge to the very existence of God?

In the eyes of dualism, evilness raises uncertainty of God's Oneness;

In Islamic philosophy, evilness is a clash against the theory of grace and against emergence and correlation of cause and effect;

In Islamic theology, evilness has been presented as a challenge to the attribute of divine justice and divine wisdom, and hence this discussion has been discussed in the discourse of "Justice"¹

Among most people, the last challenge has often been discussed and for this reason, the Islamic theologians, in the discussion on evilness, present and respond to the challenges facing the divine justice. Of course evil and afflictions, especially the Coronavirus, have raised other questions among the people about the attributes of divine mercy, divine decree and destiny, prayer and beseech, all of which needs to be replied.

In this book, we will first discuss the challenge and threat posed by "evilness", particularly the Corona disease, against the very basis of God's existence, and then discuss the challenges associated with divine attributes, namely monotheism, justice, wisdom, mercy, as well as decree and destiny, and finally, praying to God and appealing to the infallibles. At the end of the book, three discussions related to corona will be examined, namely natural causation, the challenge of evil against the theory of grace and the relationship between science and religion.

**Reza Berenjkar Qom /
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1-The concept of "evilness"

Before discussing corona and evilness, it is appropriate to

explain the meaning and concept of evilness.

Evilness is often divided into "natural evil" (such as floods, earthquakes, and diseases) and "moral evil" (such as war, oppression, murder, and looting). Other types of "evil" too are mentioned such as "perceptual evil" or pain and suffering, "meta-physical shame" or limitations and defects, all of which seem to be the source of evil, and evil itself is "physical and mental suffering in contrast to delight and physical and mental pleasure."

Islamic theologians also use the word "آلم" instead of "شرّ" (evil), which indicates their analysis in referring evil to pain and suffering. The title used by Khajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (Allah's Mercy be upon him) in his discussion about evil is: "In pain and in good state". He begins his sentence as follows:

بعض الآلم قبيح يصدر منا خاصة و بعضه حسن
يصدر منه تعالي و منا

"Some pains and sufferings are ugly and come only from us humans, and others are good and come from God and us".²

In explaining the meaning of evil, the contemporary philosopher John Hick writes:

Evil refers to physical suffering and mental pain and moral evil. Moral evil is one of the causes of the first two evils.³

So "John Hick", like Islamic theologians, refers evilness to pain and suffering.

Ibn Sina and Molla Sadra too have mentioned the same meaning:

و يقال: شرّ لما هو مثل الآلم و الغم الذي يكون ادراك

"Things like pain, suffering and sorrow that can be perceived are called evil."⁴

و قى يقال للآلم و الآذي و الجهل المركب و كل ما لا يخلو عن ادراك من صاحبه

“And sometimes pain, suffering, compounded ignorance, and anything that comes with perception are called evil.”⁵

If we refer to our common sense, we will realize the reason we consider floods, earthquakes, and diseases to be evil is because they cause pain and suffering otherwise if floods do not bring us any harm and instead are beneficial, we will never consider it to be evil.

It seems that there is another meaning for good and evil as sensed commonly by the people, which ultimately goes back to pleasure and suffering. We shall explain these two meanings by using verses from the holy Quran as well as hadiths.

In the Holy Quran and the hadiths of the Ahl al-bayt, good and evil are used in two senses. The first meaning of good and evil is the same meaning that is discussed about doubts concerning evilness. In this sense, good refers to the pleasant affairs of

man and evil refers to the unpleasant affairs. Of course, sometimes evil refers to suffering itself, and sometimes to something that causes pain and suffering such as disease, poverty, flood, earthquake and war.

Amir al-Mu'minin Ali, in his commentary on good and evil, regarding the verse:

و نبلوكم بائسًا و الخير فتنة

“.....and We test you by evil and by good by way of test”⁶ says:

فالخير: اصحة و الغني و الشراء: المرض و الفقر ابتلاء و اختبارا

“By good is meant health and wealth, and by evil is meant illness and poverty by way of trial and test.”⁷

The second meaning of good and evil concerns the ultimate good and evil. In this sense, the meaning of good is that which is beneficial to man that makes him prosperous in this world and the

hereafter; And evil is something that is harmful to man and brings for him misery and wretchedness in this world and the hereafter. Of course, misery and wretchedness too finally leads to mental and physical suffering and eternal torment in hell.

We name the first meaning as "primary good and evil" and the second meaning as "final good and evil". The reason for this naming is that a thing may appear good at the first glance because it causes pleasure, but upon further examination, it becomes clear that the same thing ultimately leads one to misery, destruction, and eternal suffering. The Holy Qur'an refers to these two meanings of good and evil as follows:

عسي أن تكرر هوا شيئاً و هو خيرٌ لكم و عسي أن تحبُّوا شيئاً و هو شرٌّ لكم و الله يعلم و أنتم لا تعلمون

“But it is possible that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and that you love a thing while it is

evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know.”⁸

Whatever thing man dislikes, as the word «شيئاً» (thing) is referred to in the sentence (*“it is possible that you dislike a thing”*), is evil in the first sense. The continuation of the verse introduces the same evil in the first sense as something actually good (*“while it is good for you”*). This introduction refers to good in the second sense.

According to this noble verse, things may appear evil at the first glance, but with a deep and final observation, it later becomes clear that it is good.

These two meanings of good and evil are also mentioned in the hadiths.

Amir al-Mu'minin Ali in his will to Muhammad Hanafi says:

ما خيرٌ بخير بعدة النار و ما شرٌّ بشرٌ بعدة الجنة
“The good that is followed by the fire of hell is not good and the

evil that takes one to heaven is not evil.”⁹

According to this hadith, what is good in the first sense but causes the fire of hell is not good in the second sense (i.e., the main and final good). The same is true of evil.

In a hadith from Imam Sadiq, it is stated that good and evil would be known only in the Hereafter, because all the goodness is in heaven and all the evil is in hell, since heaven and hell are lasting and eternal:

لن تري الخير و الشرّ الا بعدالاحرة
لأنّ الله جلّ و عزّ جعل الخيركله في الجنة و الشرّ
كله في النار لأنهما الباقيان

“You will not see good and evil except after the Hereafter, because God has placed all good in heaven, and all evil in the fire of hell, because these are eternal.”¹⁰

In the below verse, fighting and being killed, which is evil at the first glance, is considered good if it is

in the way of God since it leads to eternal bliss:

وَلَيْنِ قُتِلْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ مُتُّمْ لَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ
وَرَحْمَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ

*“If you are slain in the way of Allah or die, forgiveness and mercy from Allah are surely better than what they amass”.*¹¹

Similarly, in the below verse, abundant wealth, which at first sight seems good - is considered evil for the transgressors:

وَلَا يَحْسِبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ
خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ

*“And let not those who are niggardly in giving away that which Allah has granted them out of His grace, deem that it is good for them; nay, it is worse for them.”*¹²

In this verse as well as aforesaid hadiths, good and evil in the

first sense, as compared to good and evil in the second sense, have never been considered good and evil. This is because limited pleasure and pain versus eternal pleasure and pain are something insignificant, even though worldly pleasure and pain itself are real, and thus we call them good and evil.

Among the primary and final good and evil, what is most important is the final and eternal good and evil. Besides, this final good and evil too is at the discretion of man because God has illuminated the path of prosperity and misery for the human beings through human intellect and also through His messengers, and it is we who choose our ultimate and eternal good and evil by selecting the path of prosperity or the path of misery.

Therefore, in the Qur'an and hadiths, ugly deeds and moral vices are declared "causes of evil" and good deeds and moral virtues are considered

"obstacles to evil". For example, God places impurity, which is the worst kind of evil, for those who do not use their intellect:

وَيَجْعَلُ الرَّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

*"....and He lays impurity on those who do not exercise their reason."*¹³

It is narrated from Imam Amir al-Mu'minin Ali:

الحرص رأس الفقر و رأس الشر

*"And greed is the root of poverty and the basis of evil."*¹⁴

The Imam said in another place:

عاقبة الكذب شرّ عاقبة

*"The consequence of lying is the worst consequence."*¹⁵

It has also been narrated from the holy Prophet that "staying away from evil is the result of modesty."¹⁶ And they have also said:

أَنْ طَاعَةَ اللَّهِ..... نَجَاةً مِنْ كُلِّ شَرٍّ

يَتَّقِي

“Obedience to God saves one from any evil that one refrains from.”¹⁷

So the ultimate good and evil goes back to man himself and his will; What must be answered in the topic concerning ‘doubts of evil’ is evil in the first sense.

2- Evil and the principle of God's existence

In the new philosophy of religion and theology, the “ambiguity regarding evil” is presented as a challenge to the very basis of God's existence. Thus the "problem of evil" is the most serious intellectual critique concerning belief in the existence of God, so much so that the German theologian Hans Kung called it a refuge for atheism.¹⁸

This ambiguity has been interpreted in different ways. Some,

such as John Mackie, consider evil to be contradictory and inconsistent with the core attributes of God, and others, such as Edward Madden, do not consider evil to be incompatible with God's attributes, but believe that religious beliefs cannot provide a rational explanation of evil. The first ambiguity is called the "logical problem of evil" and the second doubt is called the "problem of evil as symmetrical."¹⁹

Here we examine the logical issue of evil, because while discussing the logical problem of evil and the discussion of rationality of evils, the answer to the question of evil as symmetrical becomes clear.

The logical issue of evil

The logical question of evil in short is that divine religions claim that God has three main attributes: "absolute knowledge," "absolute power", and absolute benevolence. On the other hand, these three attributes

are not compatible with evil. Therefore, considering the existence of evil in the universe, it must be concluded that God does not exist.²⁰

In explaining this inconsistency, it is said that the existence of evil is either because God has no knowledge of evil and thus caused evil out of ignorance, or He has knowledge of evil, but does not have the power to prevent the realization of evil, or He has knowledge of evil and the power to prevent their realization, but since He is not absolutely benevolent to human beings, He has afflicted them with some evils.

Independent answer to the logical problem of evil

There are several answers to this doubt: some answers, such as the denial of God's knowledge and absolute power, which have been proposed by dynamic theology, are incompatible with religious principles.

Other answers have been set forth by some Hindu sects,²¹ such as "denying the very reality of evil" and "considering it to be illusionary", as well as by the "Christian epistemology" sect founded by Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy in the United States.²²

This answer too is against the conscience of human beings who perceive evil as pain and suffering and is contrary to the sacred texts of divine religions that consider evil as something real. So, this reply is unacceptable.

Therefore, the discussion should be focused on "God's benevolence." It must either be shown that the existence of evil is not incompatible with God's benevolence, since limited evil or primitive evil can be a prelude to unlimited or ultimate goodness or we should find fault with the concept of absolute benevolence that has given rise to this doubt. Of course, these two answers can be

summed up together. Here we will examine the second answer and the first answer will be raised in the course of our discussion.

Absolute benevolence means that God has always willed the good of man, but it is important to see what this good will means. Will is divided into two categories: "a legislative will" and "an indispensable will". The objective of God's legislative benevolence is that God's legislative will pursue that human beings achieve the good of this world and the hereafter, and this is done by bestowing wisdom to them and also by sending 124,000 prophets and their successors and guiding them to the path of goodness.

This meaning of benevolence is accepted by divine religions, but this meaning does not conflict with the existence of evil, because God's legislative will is based on the fact that human beings achieve the good of this world and the

hereafter in the face of evil, patience, perseverance and refuge in God. Therefore, evil is not only in harmony with this meaning of God's benevolence, but it is the very benevolence of God and evil is the tools with which the good of this world and the hereafter can be achieved.

But if the meaning of absolute benevolence is that God has originally or indispensably willed that all worldly pleasures and joys reach man and that no evil, disease or misfortune befalls him, then this benevolence is the same as the "principle of felicity" in a special and recent sense in theology, which most theologians do not accept, albeit conflicting with the existence of evils and diseases. This meaning of benevolence is neither possible nor obligatory.

Absolute indispensable benevolence is not possible, because no matter to what extent pleasure and

joy is created for human beings, yet rationally speaking, more than that is possible because pleasures and joys have no limit and whatever amount and number one may mention, the possibility of more still exists. It is against the conscience to say that human beings are limited and cannot receive more pleasures or suffer less evil, and there is no restriction on receiving more pleasure and experiencing lesser evil. In addition, God can increase the capacity of human beings to receive more pleasures, as it would be in Paradise.

Absolute indispensable benevolence is not obligatory either, because the creation of pleasures and joys falls into the category of grace and beneficence, not justice. Grace and beneficence are not obligatory on God; what is obligatory is justice i.e., granting of the right, and the enjoyment of pleasures is not the obligatory rights of human beings over God.

There are several reasons for this, which will be mentioned in the discussion of “principle of felicity”. Here, we shall mention few reasons:

1)**Lack of proof**

To prove God’s obligation requires reason, and lack of reason is sufficient to reject the obligation. On the other hand, there is no rational and narrative reason for granting all the pleasures obligatorily.

2)**Lack of rational reproach for not bestowing blessings and pleasures**

If granting of all pleasures is obligatory, the intellect should obviously and clearly denounce the denial of every pleasure while such a rational denunciation does not obviously exist.

3)**Prayers**

In their prayers, human beings ask God for pleasures and

blessings that they do not possess. God has also commanded prayers and the infallibles too have asked God for material and spiritual blessings in their prayers. If the bestowal of worldly pleasures was obligatory on God, surely God would have done it and there was no need to pray and ask from God. Thus, if it is obligatory to grant all the pleasures, then praying and asking for these pleasures will turn null and void.

4) The necessity of being thankful for the blessings and being satisfied with whatsoever God has willed and destined.

The intellect, the Qur'an, and the hadiths have invited people on the one hand to be thankful for the divine blessings, and on the other hand, they have asked human beings to be satisfied with the divine destiny, even if there is a lack of blessings. Now, if granting of all blessings was obligatory on God, neither gratitude for blessings nor one's satisfaction

with denial of blessings had any meaning.

5)Un-fulfilment of some pleasures

All human beings naturally and conscientiously realize that they do not possess some of the blessings and pleasures. This indicates that it is not obligatory for God to grant all the pleasures, because if it were obligatory, divine justice would require God to fulfill the obligatory rights.

The conclusion is that if the meaning of absolute benevolence is the same as the legislative meaning, then God is absolute benevolent and this meaning of benevolence is not incompatible with the existence of evil. However, if the meaning of absolute benevolence is that God has originally or indispensably willed that all worldly pleasures and joys reach man devoid of any evil or misfortune, then from the viewpoint of reason and narration, such a meaning is not compatible with God's attributes so

that the conflict of this attribute with the existence of evil can be considered as a reason for denying God's existence.

It should be noted that some philosophers of contemporary religion, such as Mr. Robert Mary Hugh Adamer, also believe that the attribute of God's absolute benevolence has not been mentioned in the New and Old Testament texts, namely Christianity and Judaism, and from the point of view of reason, absolute benevolence is neither possible nor obligatory.²³

It is appropriate to examine here the most famous answer to the logical question of evil in the philosophy of religion. This answer is a defense based on free will as explained by "Alvin Plantinga". Of course, in most of the answers given to the question of evil, especially "moral evil," human discretion has been used.

Criticism and review of Plantinga reply, "Discretion-Based Defense"

On the one hand, Plantinga's answer is centered on moral evil because, according to Augustine's answer, which is accepted by the majority of Christians, natural evil is the result of moral evil and human sins. On the other hand, his reply focuses on the attribute of God's power.

In short, Plantinga's reply is that, in order to resolve the contradiction between evil and the existence of God with aforesaid three attributes, he takes the discussion on God's power and says: "God could not have created a world that has moral virtue and no moral evil, because God cannot create beings on the one hand who at his own discretion achieve moral perfections, and on the other hand, these free beings can always choose good, because free human being, willingly or unwillingly, may sometimes choose evil.

Therefore, in order to prevent evil, God must deprive man of

his authority and free-will, the result of which is the deprivation of man from moral goodness and spiritual perfections. So, considering that God wants human beings to achieve moral goodness, He will produce evil. So the existence of God is not in conflict with evil.

A world in which all the free-will individuals are always on the right path is undoubtedly possible, but the creation of such a state of affairs is not in the power of God. In fact, the independent and free creatures of such a universe, with their free choices, help to realize that world. Those who believe in discretion-based defense emphasize that God cannot determine the actions of free persons.²⁴

Thus, Plantinga accepts that it is inherently possible for a free man not to sin, but if at the time of occurrence, God wishes to do something so that none of the independent beings commit sin, then He must determine and exert influence

over their actions and that determination and exigency are incompatible with free will.

Critics, including Mackie and Flo, have unraveled that human free will is compatible with divine or natural causation.

Finally, Plantinga responds that discretion is incompatible with the necessity of causation and with divine or natural determination.²⁵

It seems that both Mackie and Flo's last argument are untrue and Plantinga's reply too is not correct.

The problem with Mackie and Flo is that predestined actions, whether resulting from natural causes or divine causes, makes human action unavoidable and man is unable to abandon that action, while power and authority, as theologians have said, means the ability to do or not to do.

The drawback of Plantinga's reply is that God is Omnipotent and capable of everything, and that free human beings who do not sin are

possible. Apart from the fact that these non-sinful free human beings do exist in reality, the prominent example being the infallibles, the Angels too are examples of such beings.

In explanation, it can be said that God can create a world in various ways in which human beings do not sin. One of these ways is not to place in us the desire for sins and only give us the desire for good deeds. God has done this in the case of angels, and they worship God of their own free will, and since they have no desire to sin, they do not imagine sin at all, and if they do, they have no desire and hence no temptation. It's like humans who have no desire to eat glass or impurities and so never even think about eating them.

End notes

¹ For further study, refer to *Kashf al-Murad* of Tusi.

² *Kashf al-Murad* of Tusi.

³ *Philosophy of Religion*, by Hick, page 89

⁴ *Al-hayat min Kitab al-Shifa*, by Ibn-Sina, page 415

⁵ *Commentary on Usul al-Kafi* by Sadruddin Shirazi, Vol 1, page 415

⁶ *Sura Anbiya*, verse 35

⁷ *Majma'ul-Bayan* by Majlisi, Vol 7, page 74

⁸ *Sura Baqarah*, verse 216

⁹ *Man La Yahzurul Faqih*, by Shaikh Saduq, Vol 4, page 392

¹⁰ *Tohfatul-Uqool* by Ibne Shu'ba, page 306

¹¹ *Sura Aale-Imran*, verse 157

¹² *Sura Aale-Imran*, verse 180

¹³ *Sura Anfal*, verse 55

¹⁴ *Ghurur al-hikam wa Durar al-Kalim* by Al-Amidi, hadith 1574.

¹⁵ *Tohfatul-Uqool* by Ibne Shu'ba, page 84.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, page 17

¹⁷ *Al-Kafi*, by Kulaini, Vol 8, page 82

¹⁸ *Intellect and religious beliefs* by Peterson and others, page 177

¹⁹ *Ibid*, page 178 and 184

²⁰ *Evil and Absolute Power* by Jake L. Mackie, *Keyhan* magazine, No 3 page 5.

²¹ *The World's Living Religions* by Hume, page 358.

²² Philosophy of Religion, by Hick, page 90

²³ "Should God create the Best" by Adams - Kayhan-e-Andishe magazine, No 62 page 97-109.

²⁴ Intellect and religious beliefs by Peterson and others, page 183

²⁵ Ibid, page 180-184