

# The Problem of Evil and Theodicy in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Thought

Muhsin Akbaş

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## Abstract

This thesis is the study of the problem of evil and theodicy in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The principal aim of the study is to explore, discuss, and compare and contrast the major responses to the problem of evil offered in the sacred writings, theology and philosophy of the three Abrahamic faiths. I have demonstrated how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam understood the problem of evil, and responded to the atheistic argument from evil.

In Preamble, I give a brief introductory to the discussions of the problem of evil in the western philosophy of religion. I outline the atheistic formulations of the problem of evil, the theistic concept of God, evil, and theodicy. In the Part Two, I explore the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic responses to the problem of suffering. In Part Three, I compare and contrast the responses offered in the Part Two.

I conclude from the discussion of the responses that some features of Augustinian and Irenaean theodicy in Christian tradition can be detected in Jewish and Islamic theodicies. While the former does not provide a reasonable answer to the fact of evil, the latter is promising. However, the Irenaean type of theodicies, too, do not solve the problem of evil conclusively. They provide a reasonable solution affirming both the belief in God and evil.

## Abbreviations

AH:	<i>Anno Hegirae</i> ("Year of the Hijra")
Am.:	<i>The Book of Amos</i> in Tanakh
Art.:	Article
c.:	<i>Circa</i> ("about")
CE:	Common Era
cf.:	<i>Confer</i> ("compare")
ch.:	Chapter
Col.:	<i>The Letter of Paul to the Colossians</i> in the New Testament
2 Cor.:	<i>The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians</i> in the New Testament
d.:	Death
Deut.:	<i>The Book of Deuteronomy</i> in Tanakh
Gen.:	<i>The Book of Genesis</i> in Tanakh
Ecc.:	<i>The Book of Ecclesiastes</i> in Tanakh
Ed(s).:	Editor(s)
e.g.:	<i>Exemplia gratia</i> ("for example")
et al.:	<i>Et alia</i> ("and others")
etc.:	<i>Et cetera</i> ("and so on")
Ex.:	<i>The Book of Exodus</i> in Tanakh
Ezek.:	<i>The Book of Ezekiel</i> in Tanakh
Heb.:	<i>The Letter to the Hebrews</i> in the New Testament
i.e.:	<i>Id est</i> ("that is")
Isa.:	<i>The Book of Isaiah</i> in Tanakh
Jas.:	<i>The Letter of James</i> in the New Testament
Jer.:	<i>The Book of Jeremiah</i> in Tanakh
Matt.:	<i>The Gospel According to Matthew</i> in the New Testament
n.d.:	No date
n.:	Footnote/endnote
Num.:	<i>The Book of Numbers</i> in Tanakh

<b>p.:</b>	<b>Part</b>
<b><i>1 Pet.:</i></b>	<b><i>The First Letter of Peter in the New Testament</i></b>
<b><i>Phil.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Letter of Paul to the Philippians in the New Testament</i></b>
<b><i>Prov.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Book of Proverbs in Tanakh</i></b>
<b><i>Ps.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Book of Psalms in Tanakh</i></b>
<b>Q.:</b>	<b>Question</b>
<b><i>Rev.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Revelation to John in the New Testament</i></b>
<b><i>Rom.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Letter of Paul to the Romans in the New Testament</i></b>
<b><i>2 Sam.:</i></b>	<b><i>The Book of 2 Samuel in Tanakh</i></b>
<b><i>1 Thes.:</i></b>	<b><i>The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians in the New Testament</i></b>
<b>Trans.:</b>	<b>Translated</b>

## Transliterations of Arabic Words and Names

ا: a	ط: t
ا long vowel: ā	ظ: z
ب: b	ع: ' (glottal stop)
ت: t	غ: gh
ث: th	ف: f
ج: j	ق: q
ح: ḥ	ك: k
خ: kh	ل: l
د: d	م: m
ذ: dh	ن: n
ر: r	ه: h
ز: z	و consonant: w
س: s	و long vowel: ū
ش: sh	ي consonant: y
ص: ṣ	ي long vowel: ī
ض: ḍ	

### Short Vowels

ا: a      ا: u      ا: i

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## INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil is one of the major issues of the Western philosophy of religion. It is the generic name for to the atheistic argument from the existence of evil against the theistic belief in God. As an academic discipline, philosophy of religion examines the reasonableness and coherence of religious beliefs such as belief in God, life after death, miracle and the like taking into account the data available in modern knowledge, particularly science and philosophy. Since the perception of religion differs from one religion to another, and interpretations of knowledge, and methodology of philosophy vary with each philosophical theory, philosophy of religion shows a manifold structure consisting of various theological and philosophical viewpoints including of atheism.

The problem of evil is one of these atheistic arguments based on the so-called inconsistency of the reality of evil, suffering, and pain in the world with the existence of all-powerful and compassionate God. Atheism as a philosophical position can be characterised as a way of denial of the theistic belief in God. Atheist philosophers put forward several arguments to justify the atheistic assertion that religious claims, and particularly that God exists, are logically inconsistent and unreasonable. Personal experiences of pain and sorrow may also lead individuals to ask themselves such questions as "why me?" and "what have I done to deserve this?". This is what can be called the practical problem of evil, which requires applicable solutions suited to personal circumstances. On the other hand, the philosophical problem is a challenge and threat of the reality evil to the theistic belief in God. Atheist philosophers formally state this as a philosophical argument in the western philosophy of religion.

The major theistic religions of the world against which the question of evil is raised particularly are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is the claim of the three religions that they have originated from the same ancestral source, namely the patriarch Abraham. That is why they are often called the Abrahamic faiths. Moreover, the three religions all affirm that there is a good and all-powerful God. For that reason, they are also called the theistic and monotheistic faiths.

Furthermore, I can say this much at this point that Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions agree with the fact that there is evil, suffering and pain in the world even though there are different interpretations regarding to the nature of evil. The happenings of evil are, in fact, partly a reason for the existence of religions. That is to say, the theistic faiths aim at removing evil and suffering from human lives providing peace and happiness in this world as well as in life after death. Therefore, the atheistic argument from evil directly challenges each three theistic faiths requiring an answer that reconciles the existence of evil in the world with the existence of all-powerful and compassionate God.

It is the purpose of this study to explore, discuss and compare the responses to the problem of evil offered by the major theistic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In pursuing this purpose, I shall, firstly, look up the sacred writings of the three theistic faiths as the foundation of theological and philosophical responses to evil and suffering. I shall focus on the canon of Jewish scriptures, namely, Tanakh for the Jewish scriptural responses, on the New Testament for the Christian biblical responses, and finally on the Qur'ān for the Muslim scriptural responses to the problem of evil. At this

point, I need to note that since the Apocaryphal/Deuterocanonical Books<sup>1</sup> are not included in Tanakh, they will not be my primary concern here.

Having outlined their scriptural foundations, I shall explore the theological and philosophical theodicies within each religious tradition. As this is an exhausting subject, the study will focus on the major responses offered by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians and philosophers. The primary objective here is to examine the theodicies, and then to discuss whether they propose an adequate solution to the problem of evil. Doing this, it is inevitable that there will be repetition. Repetition of similar responses and notions becomes necessary for two reasons. Firstly, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share similar responses apart from some dissimilar answers. In this sense, I feel that there is a need to indicate the solutions of each religion to evil separately. Secondly, since the other purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the responses to the problem of evil in the three religions, there is a need to show the theodicies within the framework of the each faith in question separately first. This necessarily involves in some repetition.

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<sup>1</sup> The Apocaryphal/Deuterocanonical Books are a collection of sacred writings which is a part of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, namely, the Septuagint, but not a part of Tanakh, the Jewish sacred scriptures.

## **PART ONE**

### **PREAMBLE**

#### **I. THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

The formulation of a problem and the clarification of its components are obviously important for any scholarly investigation. It is particularly important for a study examining the problem of evil and theodicy from the standpoint of religious traditions. The discussion and comparison of religious and philosophical responses depends to a certain degree on the exposition of the problem of evil. This is particularly true for such a study like this one in the sense that it will examine the answers offered by Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious traditions.

The problem of evil is related a great deal to the question of what kind of deity we are talking about. The reality of evil and suffering may not create the same problem for any faith. It is generally asserted that theistic faiths such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which affirm the existence of an all-powerful, benevolent, and merciful supreme being, are the most vulnerable in the face of evil. Therefore, before starting to explore the responses, one needs to clarify the technical terms that have crucial importance to determine the problem, and to discuss the theodicies. In order to avoid the possibility of involving in the exhausting discussions of God and evil in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, I shall outline the problem of evil as it is expressed in the Western philosophy of evil literature. Then, the theistic concept of God, the notion of evil, and the concept of theodicy are to be clarified.

## A. The Formulations of the Problem of Evil

Everyday occurrences of suffering and death in the world may lead many people to question the belief in God, who is all-loving and powerful. Although this attitude is largely identified with atheistic attitude, the believer, too, may be vulnerable to such everyday phenomena. Whatever one's religious belief is, few people could dispute that there is plenty of suffering and pain in the world. Amidst all these disasters and sufferings, it becomes difficult to hold a belief in a loving and merciful God. Therefore, the core of the problem of evil is the question as to how to reconcile evils and sufferings of the world with the theistic belief in God.

On the philosophical level, the problem of evil is presented as an atheistic argument against the theistic belief in God. It is one of the most influential arguments of atheism. The problem attempts to point that theistic belief in God is incompatible with the reality of evil in the world. As German theologian Hans Küng rightly put it, the problem of evil is regarded as "the rock of atheism."<sup>2</sup> Evil has been for centuries a reason for denying the existence of God.

Philosophers of religion generally detect two different forms of the problem of evil. One is the logical problem of evil, also called the deductive problem and the *a priori* problem; the other is the evidential problem of evil, also called the inductive problem and the *a posteriori* problem. The essential reason behind the logical form of the problem is to show that "religious beliefs lack rational support," and that the central elements of the belief in God particularly are inconsistent with the existence of evil in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. by E. Quinn, (New York, Doubleday, 1976), 432.

Therefore, the atheist's effort is to present these so-called irrationalities. The most influential champion of the logical version of the problem of evil is John L. Mackie. He states "the simplest form" of the logical problem as follows:

"God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three."<sup>3</sup>

Mackie contends that there is a contradiction between the three propositions. If God is omnipotent, why does he not prevent evil? If he is good and merciful, how come there is suffering and pain in the world?

However, the inconsistency of the existence of God and evil is not so clear. It is possible that God has reason to allow evil. In order to attain a greater good God may allow evil. If it is so, there is no contradiction in saying, God is omnipotent, God is good, and also evil exists. To show how the contradiction arises some additional statements are, as Mackie himself affirms,<sup>4</sup> needed.

R. D. Bradley, another fervent defender of the logical form of the problem of evil, expresses these additional premises as follows:

"If God is willing that evil exists, then he is not perfectly good.      Premise (1)

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<sup>3</sup> John L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, (April, 1955), 64, no. 254, 200.

<sup>4</sup> Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 200-1.

If God is unwilling that evil exists, and it exists nevertheless, then he is not omnipotent. Premise (2)

But God must be either willing or unwilling that evil exists. Premise (3)

Therefore,

if evil exists, God is either not perfectly good or not omnipotent.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the theist asserts that God is all-powerful, perfectly good, and at the same time that evil is a reality of the world. In response, the atheist raises the question as to why is this evil in the world if there is God as the theist claims. He should not have brought about evil willingly as he is a perfectly good being. If there is evil contrary to his will, then he has, the atheist asserts, not enough power to prevent the occurrence of evil. Since it cannot be thought from logical point of view that God is both willing and unwilling at the same time, the atheist alleges that there is a contradiction in terms in the claim that God is all-powerful, perfectly good, and that evil is real as a product of the God’s creative power. So theism is accused of being irrational in its assertion. The theist who claims to be rational needs, therefore, to show that at least one premise of the logical argument is incorrect, or the argument itself is logically defective.<sup>6</sup>

The other version of the problem is the evidential problem of evil, also called the *a posteriori* problem and the inductive problem. It can be stated in its simplest form in the way that the existence of abundant, and excessive evil in the world gives “rational support” for the atheistic conviction that God does not exist. The discussion in this

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<sup>5</sup> R. D. Bradley, “A Proof of Atheism,” *Sophia: A Journal for Discussion in Philosophical Theology*, (April 1967), 6, no. 1, 38.

<sup>6</sup> I shall not discuss the logical problem further here for it is explored in A. Plantinga’s Free-Will Defence.



version of the problem changes from “logical inconsistency” of the parts of the belief in God, to the “implausibility” of this belief in question in the face of the variety and abundance of evil in the world. William L. Rowe, one of the contemporary exponents of this theory, states the evidential form of the problem of evil as follows:

“1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby preventing the occurrence of any greater good.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby preventing the occurrence of some greater good.

Therefore,

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.”<sup>7</sup>

This argument is largely based on the atheist’s assumption that in the world there are unnecessary, meaningless and intense human and animal suffering. An all-powerful, perfectly good, and all-knowing Being would not permit pointless and excessive evil. However, such unnecessary and pointless evil does, the atheist asserts, exist in the world. Then, the atheist argues that one has a rational ground for not believing in the theistic belief that God exists. The theist is called to answer whether there is pointless and excessive evil and suffering in the world threatening the theistic belief in God as he is also asked to defend assertions about the existence and character of God.

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<sup>7</sup> William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, (California, Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1078), 87.

## B. The Theistic Concept of God

The existence of evil, as we have seen, poses a serious problem for the theist who holds that there is a God who has power to do everything he wills and is perfectly good, and that evil is a reality of the world. Thus, the atheist who raises the problem of evil especially maintains that there are certain ways in which evil does not create a problem.<sup>8</sup> Firstly, the problem of evil can simply be avoided by limiting God's supreme attributes such as omnipotence and goodness; or denying the reality of evil. If God is regarded as lacking the supreme power or the perfect goodness to create a universe where evil does not exist, this deity would not be responsible for evil taking place in the world outside of his power.

Nevertheless, a belief in such a deity entails that the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam must be discarded. So a strange and impaired notion of theism, if it can be called theism, can avoid the atheistic attacks based on the existence of evil. I shall return to this matter when I am discussing Process Theodicy among the Christian Theodicies. Secondly, to deny the reality of evil by asserting that evil is illusory may settle the problem of evil. Yet, all orthodox monotheistic religions have the concept of the devil or Satan as the personification of pure evil. Satan and its evils are not regarded illusory. In addition, it is not reasonable to regard physical deformities and mental deficiencies we encounter in the world as good.

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<sup>8</sup> H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (April 1960), 10, no. 39, 98. See, also, Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 200.

Thirdly, the fact of evil is not a problem for certain forms of religious dualism suggesting that God is the creator of goodness only, and that evil is originated by some other cause as in ancient Zoroastrian and Manichaean religions. It is ambiguous whether Zoroastrianism was originally in a dualistic form when its founder Zoroaster (c. BCE 618-541) preached it.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no doubt that later Zoroastrianism expounded two rival deities, namely, Ahura Mazda (or Ormuzd) as the deity of goodness, and Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman) as the deity of evil. In addition, Zoroastrianism called its followers to take part on the side of the good deity in the constant fight against evil.<sup>10</sup> So, Ahura Mazda could not be responsible for disasters caused by the deity of evil, namely Angra Mainyu. Therefore, it cannot be talked about the problem of evil in Zoroastrianism in the sense that theistic faiths face.

We can see John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) as the champion of the modern dualistic position in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Having rejected the classical teleological argument for the existence of God, he concludes that the “author of the cosmos worked under limitations; that he was obliged to adapt himself to conditions independent of his will and to attain his ends by such arrangements as those conditions admitted of.”<sup>12</sup> Mill supposes that one of the reasons that limits God’s power is the nature of the material “not admitting of any arrangements by which his purposes could be more completely

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<sup>9</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 271.

<sup>10</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 218.

<sup>11</sup> J. Hick calls Mill’s position “the external dualism”, see Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> J. S. Mill, *Theism*, ed. by R. Taylor, (New York, The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 34.

fulfilled.”<sup>13</sup> As John Hick points out, since Mill’s dualistic position does not even face the problem of evil, it cannot be appropriate to say that his external dualism solves it.<sup>14</sup>

It can be argued that the problem of evil may be avoided by adopting a dualistic position such as in Zoroastrianism and Mill. Yet, this brings about further problems concerning the notion of God and the creation. Moreover, any dualistic concept of God is contradictory with the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three proclaim that God is the only creator of existence that is present and to come out; and he has no partner whatsoever in his deeds. Therefore, monotheistic concept of God suggests that he is the ultimate cause of everything, both good and evil.

Finally, the reality of evil may not create a problem for some certain concepts of God such as Paul Tillich's concept of God as "being-itself." He believes that "God is being-itself, not a being," so it cannot be naturally talked about whether evil can be attributed to the Almighty Being. If he is being itself, it means that there is nothing but him only. In this sense, there is nothing external to him to pose a threat. On the other hand, process theology, also called "dipolar theism," has a different concept of God from the traditional theistic concept. Process theologians contend that God is "eternal-temporal consciousness, knowing and including the world in His actuality."<sup>15</sup>

Charles Hartshorne, an influential process theologian, explains the process notion of God asserting that God has two sides, concrete and abstract. His abstract side is

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<sup>13</sup> Mill, *Theism*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 17.

absolute, unchangeable and constant, but the concrete side is, on the contrary, influenceable, and changeable. At the same time, God, both abstract and concrete nature together, is “unsurpassably excellent.” Hartshorne clarifies that he does not mean that “unsurpassable” means ultimately perfect in terms of classical theism. He means that there is no creature as powerful and good as him.

To explain this, Hartshorne employs what he calls “dual transcendence” principle. According to this principle, “there is no contradiction in saying that God is both finite and infinite” or simple and complex, or cause and effect and so on. Hartshorne argues that “for its a logical truism that S is P and P is not S can be consistent if they apply to A in different respects or aspects.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, evil does not constitute a threat to process concept of God claiming that God has still been changing on one of his aspects within the universe. Consequently, the reality of evil is a problem only for the theistic faiths professing that God is all-powerful, perfectly good, infinite and the only Being that created everything visible and invisible.

How do the theist describe God? The contemporary theist Richard Swinburne describes God as “a person without a body (i.e., a spirit) who is eternal, is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things.”<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that this description is in accord with the main monotheistic faiths of the world religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The three “Abrahamic faiths” proclaim that

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<sup>16</sup> Hartshorne, “Whitehead’s Revolutionary Concept of Prehension,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, (New York 1979), 19, 261ff.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford, At The Clarendon Press, 1979), 8.

there exists an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-benevolent God,<sup>18</sup> even though each one of these monotheistic religions puts special emphasis on different characteristics of God. While Christian tradition heavily stresses “the love of God” towards mankind, the sovereignty and power of God are highlighted in Islamic and Jewish tradition.

It ought to be pointed out here that this variation of emphasis in the attributes of God in one religion does not exclude the other omni-attributes of God in another. That is to say, it does not mean that Islam does not affirm the love of God, or Christianity divine power. God in all three religions is a perfectly good, all-powerful, all-knowing deity. What happens is that certain divine attributes are emphasised more than others in accordance with particularities of each faith.

As opposed to theism, there is the negative position widely called atheism. In this sense, atheism is the absence and denial of the theistic belief in God. Because the term atheism consists of the prefix “a-”, and the noun “theism.” One of the meanings of the prefix “a-” is identical to the meaning of the preposition “without” like asocial, anarchy, and the like; so “a-theism” literally means “without theism.”<sup>19</sup> That is to say, atheism is the lack and denial of the belief in God.

It ought to be mentioned at this point that Alvin Plantinga, the theist philosopher well-known with his significant solution to the problem of evil, namely the Free-Will Defence, calls the enterprise of alleging the irrationality of the belief in God by argument “natural atheology.” The term atheism in this work will be used in the sense of an

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Badham, “Towards a Global Religious Solution to the Problem of Evil,” in W. Cenkner (ed.), *Evil and the World Religions*, (New York, Paragon House, 1996), 241.

<sup>19</sup> George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God*, (New York, Prometheus Books, 1979), 7.

intellectual position that negates the theistic belief in God by reasons and arguments, particularly by the reality of evil in the world.

### **C. Evil, Suffering and Pain**

The existence of evil and suffering in the world is one of the main components of the problem of evil against the existence of God. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the adjective “evil” as “the antithesis of good in all its principal senses.”<sup>20</sup> Although the adjective “bad,” not evil, is just the opposite of “good,” the term “evil” is used in the most extensive sense of discontentment, dissatisfaction, or disparagement of any kind. Each specific evil condition and event is expressed by other words such as suffering, pain, disaster, etc.

Evil is generally classified in the literature of the problem of evil as moral evil, and natural evil. On the one hand, moral evils are bad actions originating from human beings such as cruelties, massacres, and traits like hatred, pride and the like. Natural evils are, on the other hand, some adversities caused by nature such as earthquakes, floods, famines, mental and physical deformities of foetuses and the like. Besides, there are some composite evils brought about by both nature and human attitudes, such as causing disasters by way of building houses around seismic regions and so on. While it is a natural phenomenon that earthquakes occur around fault lines in seismic regions, building houses in seismic areas gives rise to heavy casualties.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 5, 471.

## D. Theodicy

The term “theodicy” is sometimes used in a similar sense with the phrase “the problem of evil,” a popularly recognised term consisting of the forms of the problem of evil and their suggested defences. The word theodicy originally comprised of the Greek equivalent of God, and of justice in the sense of the justification of God. It is widely accepted that G. Wilhelm Leibniz coined the term “theodicy” as a technical term expressing specifically the Christian defence of God in spite of the existence of actual evil.<sup>21</sup> Afterwards, it has become a general name for the problem itself and, at the same time, for the responses of particular faiths and philosophers to it. Thus, when I refer to the word theodicy in the rest of the work, it will be used in the general sense of the responses to evil unless specified.

In the literature of philosophy of religion, there are different conceptions of theodicy. Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga understand “theodicy” as an intellectual endeavour aiming at reconciling the reality of evil in the world with “the being of a God who might, or might not, exist.”<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, John Hick affirms that “the theodicy project stands ... within an already operating belief in God.”<sup>23</sup> For Hick, this is within the Christian concept of God. Kenneth Surin concurs with Hick,

“theodicy is inaugurated by an act of *accusation*... In responding to her adversary, the theodocist engages in an attempt to convince, to

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<sup>21</sup> Hick, *Evil and the Love of God*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 82.

<sup>23</sup> Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 39.



persuade...Theodicy in this sense is a species of rhetoric, and is thus irreducibly performative. In this respect, God exists, as the One who is accused."<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the endeavour of theodicy needs to be theological in order to justify a particular conception of God.

From historical point of view, the need for reasonable answers to the questions posed by opponents of Christianity such as Gnosticism and the innate human nature to explain beliefs intelligibly seem to have contributed the emergence of Christian theodicy. Moreover, the Hellenistic philosophy has immensely influenced the rationalisation of Christian tenets from the first century onwards. Therefore, the venture of theodicy can be seen as a rational attempt at reconciling the belief in God's goodness and power with the evils of this world. What is characteristically Christian in this entire endeavour is the meaning of Jesus Christ's life and death. Thus, the meaning of suffering, particularly that of Jesus, have a central place in Christian thought. In this aspect, the problem of suffering seems to have been felt more pressing by Christian theologians and philosophers than their Muslims and Jewish counterparts; that is, if we ignore the recent tragedy of the Holocaust.

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<sup>24</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 107, n. 21.

## PART TWO

### THE THEODICIES

#### II. THE JEWISH THEODICIES

The Jews have, as one of the most ancient nations of the world, experienced a great deal of suffering, perhaps more than any other nation on earth. As the Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891) notes, "This is the eighteen-hundred-year era of the diaspora [from the destruction of the second temple in CE 70 down to 1850] of unprecedented suffering, of uninterrupted martyrdom without parallel in world history."<sup>25</sup> They have experienced a lot of pain, loss, grief, defeat, pogroms and holocausts for five millennia. The experience of suffering seems to have deeply affected the Jewish people and faith. The Jewish sacred books still carry the scars of historical instances of suffering in their rituals, prayers, and even in their festivals.

Before exploring the answers offered in the writings of the Hebrew Bible, I believe it is appropriate to mention the context in which the problem of evil occurs. The story of the Exodus from Egypt seems to present itself a good starting point. Yahweh was the God of the Jewish people, and he had chosen them as his own flock. God and the people of Israel had made a covenant, and both promised not to break their words. Yahweh was going to protect them, and they were going to worship none but Yahweh. When God had saved them from the torments of the Pharaoh and from the exile in Egypt, the Jewish people held firmly their faith in Yahweh.

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<sup>25</sup> Heinrich Graetz, "The Diaspora: Suffering and Spirit," in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Modern Jewish Thought: A Source Reader* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 20.

At the mountain Sinai, or Horeb, God gave them the Ten Commandments, and demanded from the Jews to obey them. It was a mutual agreement between God and the Jews. However, this agreement had also implied that God, too, had to keep his promise to protect and prosper the Jewish nation. It seems that both sides did not keep their side of the contract at times. This seems to have raised a serious problem for the Jews leading them to question their faith.

The first place to look for the Jewish reactions to the instances of suffering is the writings of the Hebrew Bible. Whether the biblical writings are taken as the word of God, as many orthodox Jews accept today, or the experience of certain individuals in Jewish history with God, I believe that they are the foundation of the Jewish responses to suffering in later ages. In Jewish Scriptures, the question is not simply why suffering exists at all. It seems that the biblical authors did not have serious problems with the existence of evil in theoretical sense.

They are, however, troubled by the irregularities in and magnitude of human suffering in certain contexts. The question, most of the time, is why afflictions befall on the righteous and innocent while the wicked prospers. As Bowker points, "The problem is not the *fact* of suffering but its *distribution*."<sup>26</sup> The basic assumption seems to be that suffering is acceptable as long as it is in proportion with the wickedness committed. This brings us to one of the major answers of the Jewish Scriptures; that is, suffering is a punishment for sin.

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<sup>26</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 9.

## E. The Major Responses of Tanakh

### 1. Suffering as Retribution

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines retribution in terms of “requital usually for evil done.” In this sense, the notion of suffering as retribution is based on the presupposed relation between sin and its punishment. Accordingly, human suffering is God’s judgement for sin. As a formerly Jewish idea, the prophets and writers of the Hebrew Bible affirmed that God’s justice manifested itself in this world as well as in the hereafter in terms of reward and punishment. Accordingly, human afflictions are God’s punishment for sin and rewards are His blessing.

The direct correlation between sin and punishment is one of the most ancient answers to the problem of human suffering. A large proportion of Tanakh, the Jewish Scripture, considers suffering as a direct consequence of sin. This explanation seems to be based on the biblical doctrine of the belief in the just and powerful God and the covenant of Israel with him.<sup>27</sup> The covenant signifies that the people of Israel promised to God to obey his commandments expressed as the Law. They are warned from the beginning that the violation of divine commandments brings about disasters. Therefore, the notion of covenant implies a possible reward and punishment.

We learn from certain biblical passages that the prophets of Israel constantly asserted and their followers accepted that there is a correlation between wickedness and disaster. For instance, *Jeremiah* 14:10 reads, “Thus said the Lord concerning the people:

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Gordis, “The Temptation of Job-Tradition Versus Experience in Religion,” *Judaism*, 4 (1955), 198.

‘Truly, they love to stray, they have not restrained their feet; so the Lord has no pleasure in them. Now he will recall their iniquity and punish their sin.’<sup>28</sup> Since Israel was violating the covenant, they must have expected humiliation, defeat, suffering and so on. Most of the prophetic assertions presuppose a close link between a national disaster and a national sin.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, a calamity emerges either as a result of a wrong that the whole nation perpetuated or as an outcome of a widespread wickedness.

The references to sufferings as a punishment in this world are ample in the Hebrew Bible. In the second passage of the *Shema* (in Hebrew “Hear”),<sup>30</sup> *Deuteronomy* 11:13-21, God warns the Jews that if they worship other gods, there will be drought, and, consequently, they will have to leave soon the God given land. Similarly, the curses that shall visit the Israelites are enumerated in *Deuteronomy* 28:15-68 if they do not observe God’s commandments and laws.

The classical example of this explanation in the Bible is Adam’s sin and its consequence; that is, his exile from the Paradise. When Adam and Eve ate a fruit from the forbidden tree, God punished them with exile from Paradise by throwing them onto the earth and to a life that is full of struggle (*Gen.* 3:17-19). Furthermore, God destroys humankind with the deluge when they do not listen to Noah’s warnings and continue with

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<sup>28</sup> The version of the Hebrew Bible referred to in this part of the thesis is *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> Robert Goldenberg, “Early Rabbinic Explanations of the Destruction of Jerusalem,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33, no. 1-2, (Spring-Autumn 1982), 517.

<sup>30</sup> The *Shema*, the Jewish declaration of faith in one God, is composed of three Biblical passages, *Deut.* 6:4-9, *Deut.* 11:13-21 and *Num.* 15:37-41.

their wickedness (*Gen. 6:11-13*). Moreover, in spite of Abraham's persistent intercession, God destroys Sodom and Gomorra for their sin is very grave (*Gen. 18:20-22*).

Some natural phenomena such as plague (*Ex. 7-11*), disease (*Num. 11:33; 2 Sam. 24:15*), drought (*Jer. 14:1-7*), famine (*Ezek. 5:12, 16*), earthquake (*Isa. 29:6; Am. 8:8*), lightning (*Num. 11:1*) are regarded by the biblical authors as instruments of divine punishment. As David Kraemer points out, for the pious people of Israel, evil occurrences are "expressions of God's justice, a justice that insists upon obedience to God's will and repays nonobedience with suffering in various degrees."<sup>31</sup> When the people of Israel violate divine law, the conditions of covenant, disasters visit them.

Since Israel did not obey the commandments of Yahweh, he inflicted humiliation and suffering onto them through natural disasters. In this way, the moral imperfection of human beings becomes the cause of such natural evils as disease, famine, drought and so on. The flood is, for instance, justified in *Genesis 6:5* because human beings are wicked: "The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time."

If suffering is a punishment for sin, what about the suffering of the innocent? The Jewish people in the past must have realised that every sufferer is not wicked, or that many suffer innocently. Among them, there must have been some children or pious subjected to affliction as well. It would not be a proper answer to say that they suffered because they did not obey divine law or commit immoral conduct. What sin could a child

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<sup>31</sup> David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.

have? Their answer was that the innocent suffers because of the sins of his or her ancestors. *Exodus 20:5-6* reads,

“You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

The psalmist cries for help from God not to punish them for the sins of their ancestors: “Do not remember against us the iniquities of our forefathers” (*Ps. 79:8*). However, not every biblical writer seems to be happy with this thought. Ezekiel, for instance, refuses to accept the idea of suffering as a punishment for the ancestral sins. He professes,

“The person who sins, he alone shall die a child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone.”

Yet, even for Ezekiel the innocent might be a victim of the sins of the wicked community. Yet, this does not show that sin passes from one generation to another. It is only a natural consequence of the failure of the corporate responsibility within a society. Since people live in communities, something that one does inevitably affects others living in that community as well. That is why Ezekiel accuses the people of Israel then for the downfall of Jerusalem (16:2).

Besides, certain biblical writers seem to object to the idea that suffering is a punishment for sin. The reason for that must have been the instances of prosperity of the wicked that the Jewish people encountered. Jeremiah, for instance, openly challenges this notion although he is well aware of who shall be triumphant. He cries, "You will win, O Lord, if I make claim against You, yet I shall present charges against You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (*Jer.* 12:1). It seems that Jeremiah holds onto God's promise that he was going to speak through Jeremiah and to stand by him (1:7-10). Jeremiah continues to believe in God and divine justice.

A similar approach is found in the *Book of Job*. As the epitome of suffering, Job flatly refuses to accept the idea of suffering as a punishment. Having negated the similar charges against himself voiced by his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job accuses God with injustice. Moreover, Job defies any generalisation: "He destroys the blameless and the guilty" (*Job* 9:20-22). Nevertheless, Job like Jeremiah surrender to God's wisdom in the end even though he had no apparent answer from God.

## **2. Suffering as Discipline and Test**

The Jewish Scriptures describes the world in moral terms. In this sense, suffering has a moral purpose, which is to refine and enrich the human soul. Therefore, the idea that suffering is discipline underlines that true human character emerges through suffering. Afflictions might be an instrument to develop human nature. Through suffering, many may come to know and worship God. Since Israel is the chosen people of



God, he cares about them and shows a unique attention to them.<sup>32</sup> The author of the *Proverbs*, for example, advises, “Do not reject the discipline of the Lord, my son; do not abhor His rebuke. For whom the Lord loves, He rebukes, as a father the son whom he favors” (*Prov.* 3:11-12; cf. *Ps.* 94:12). In this sense, afflictions are signs of God’s love of Israel. It is not possible to understand the following passage otherwise: “Bear in mind that the Lord your God disciplines you just as a man disciplines his son” (*Deut.* 8:5).

Connected with the idea of discipline is the notion that suffering is a test of faith. God apparently puts the faithful to test because he or she has something to be tried of. In this sense, suffering is a test of one’s sincerity in his or her trust in God on the one hand; it is a means of God’s blessing on the other. The classic example of this sort is the test of Abraham with the sacrifice of his son. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his “favored” son, Isaac, as a burnt offering to God. We do not know how Abraham felt, but stress, agony, sorrow must have been overwhelming, not enough to doubt of his faith in God though. Having convinced of Abraham’s faith, God intervenes and replaces the sacrifice of Abraham’s son with a sacrifice. As a reward, God promises that he will multiply their descendants and make them victorious against their enemies (*Gen.* 2:1-18).

God does not take pleasure from the suffering of the wicked as well as the righteous. All he wants is that they come to know God and live a righteous life. Therefore, suffering of the wicked is to dissuade them from committing anything evil. Ezekiel states this view very clearly, “Say to them: As I live—declares the Lord God—it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from his [evil] ways and

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<sup>32</sup> Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*, 22.

live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, that you may not die, O House of Israel!”

(*Ezek.* 33:11; cf. 18:23, 32).

### 3. The Free-Will Explanation

It is relatively difficult to differentiate the explanations of free-will and punishment for sin from each other since they are closely related and interconnected. However, as some biblical passages form a ground for later formulations of Free-Will Explanation in Jewish theology, it seems appropriate to mention it here even if it is briefly. The classical expression of free-will in Tanakh can be found in *Deuteronomy* 30:19-20. Here Moses speaks to the people of Israel:

“...I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life-if you and your offspring would live-by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commandments, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.”

Hence, the people of Israel either choose to obey divine commandments and live on earth or choose not to; in that case suffering is inevitable. While the just is praised for his good works he or she achieved, the wicked is condemned to pain and sorrow because of what he did. “Hail the just man, for he shall fare well; he shall eat the fruit of his works. Woe to the wicked man, for he shall fare ill; as his hands have dealt, so shall it be done to him” (*Isa.* 3:10-11). This is the biblical expression of the idea that suffering is the product of human free-will. That is why the righteous makes soul-searching in the face of suffering to find out the sin behind that disaster.

Some biblical authors seem to see human heart as a place in which evil inclinations of humankind dwell. *Jeremiah* 17:9 reads, “Most devious is the heart; it is perverse—who can fathom it?” Heart functions in similar way human free-will does. One’s free choices determine the actions and their consequences, namely, the reward and punishment of the actions. The notion that suffering is a human doing is more clearly expressed in the following passage of *Genesis*: “The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time” (*Gen.* 6:5; cf. 8:21).

#### **4. Suffering as Redemption:**

Not every suffering is a punishment for sin or as a choice of human beings. It is sometimes a consequence of mission conferred by God on a prophet. In this sense, suffering becomes a purposeful and redemptive suffering in the way that it is an outcome of a process of expiating the sins of the community. Jeremiah is, for instance, was chosen by God to be his servant: “Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nation” (*Jer.* 1:5). Jeremiah did not feel like a prophet himself, more like a youngster. Her replies, “I don’t know how to speak for I am still a boy” (1:6).

Nevertheless, Jeremiah is selected to be a servant of God. He was going to foretell his people that there were disasters waiting at the gates of Jerusalem because the people of Judah have forsaken God and turned to other gods (1:16). He is told what the consequences will be: “They will attack you, but they shall not overcome you; for I am with you-declares the Lord-to save you” (1:19). Jeremiah’s suffering becomes so deep that he makes an outburst of complaint under the strain of God-given-mission. “Accursed

be the day that I was born!...Why did I ever issue from the womb, to see misery and woe, to spend all my days in shame!" (20:14-18). This is the cry of a servant of God who endured sorrow and pain in order to deliver the people of Judah from idolatry.

The epitome of redemptive suffering in the Hebrew Bible is regarded as the suffering of the servant in the so-called Servant Songs (*Isa.* 40-66). The main point of the passage is that the servant's suffering redeems the faults of the people of Israel. The Servant Songs, also called the servant passages, are believed to have been written during the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem was lost to the Babylonians; the Jews were subjected to humiliation, mental and physical anguish.<sup>33</sup> The servant bears suffering not because he is guilty but he obeys God. He says, "The Lord God opened my ears, and I did not disobey, I did not run away. I offered my back to the floggers, and my cheeks to those who tore out my hair. I did not hide my face from insult and spittle" (50:5-6). Many turned away from the servant because of his suffering and sickness. "Just as the many were appalled at him, so marred was his appearance, unlike that of man, his form, beyond human semblance" (52:14).

God intervenes and vindicates his servant. He did not suffer for he sinned. His suffering was the punishment for the sins of the people. Isaiah, also called Deutero-Isaiah, witnesses that the suffering of the servant is redemptive suffering building a new peaceful future for Israel. Here suffering is not a punishment for sin, but it is atonement from the sins of the Hebrew nation. Deutero-Isaiah writes,

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<sup>33</sup> Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 20.

“Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing, our suffering that he endured. We accounted him plagued, smitten and afflicted by God; but he was wounded because of our sins, crushed because of our iniquities. He bore the chastisement that made us whole, and by his bruises we were healed” (53:4-5).

Harry M. Orlinsky objects that there is any idea of vicarious suffering in the servant passages. He extensively scrutinises the biblical notion of the “Servant of the Lord,” and traces the origin of the concept the “Suffering Servant” and “Vicarious Sufferer.” He asserts that they are both the output of Christianity produced in the period subsequent to the death of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> Orlinsky believes that the idea of vicarious suffering lacks the support of the rest of the Hebrew Bible and opposes to the concept of the covenant. In his words,

“I know of no person in the Bible, nor has any scholar pointed to any such, who took it upon himself, or who considered himself, or who was appointed or considered by others, to be a vicarious for wicked people deserving punishment. This should hardly be surprising in the light of the covenant.”<sup>35</sup>

However, Philip Sigal thinks otherwise. He maintains that vicarious suffering is of Judaic origin, and its reference to Jesus is “as valid as its application to any other figure...”<sup>36</sup> He believes that the Jewish Scriptures regard the concept of vicarious atonement as the redemptive suffering of Israel for the rest of the people of the world.

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<sup>34</sup> Harry M. Orlinsky, “Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah: The So-called ‘Servant of the Lord’ and ‘Suffering Servant’ in Second Isaiah,” in Harry M. Orlinsky (ed.), *Isaiah 40-66: A Study of the Teaching of the Second Isaiah and Its Consequences* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Orlinsky, “Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah...” 54.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Sigal, *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Pickwick Press, 1980), 1, 132.

The identity of the suffering servant is a controversial subject as well. There are clear references in the Bible that the servant is the people of Israel who endure the sufferings in exile (*Isa.* 49:3; 52:13). However, it is also possible that the servant is an exemplary Jewish figure such as Job in *the Book of Job* or Isaac (*Gen.* 22:1), the son of Abraham.<sup>37</sup> The Christians, to the objection of the Jews, identifies the servant with Jesus. In this sense, the servant passages are foretelling of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that the suggestion of Jacob Agus, a contemporary Jewish thinker, is more reasonable. He states, “the life of nearly every prophet could have served for Isaiah as the prototype of his vision.”<sup>38</sup> The prophets were the people who devoted their life to restoration and salvation of Israel. Doing this, they faced humiliation, suffering and even death sometimes. In this sense, suffering is a natural consequence of advocating a belief that is threatening an authority. Its reward is from God.

Whether the servant is identified with the nation of Israel or a particular figure in history has a secondary significance. What is important for our present purpose here is whether the redemptive or vicarious suffering of servant, namely, Israel, Job or another person, helps to solve the problem of suffering. I think that the idea of redemptive suffering does not seem to offer an adequate response. It is difficult to explain, for example, the Nazi Holocaust in terms of redemptive suffering and its victims as the suffering servants. As the chief Rabbi of the Great Britain Jonathan Sacks maintains, “The ‘suffering servant’ paradigm of Isaiah is no longer adequate to a post-Holocaust

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<sup>37</sup> Sigal, *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism*, 1, XV-XXII.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob B. Agus, *The Evolution of Jewish Thought: From Biblical Times to the Opening of the Modern Era* (London and New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 24.

world.”<sup>39</sup> For it is a horrendous and unwanted disaster indifferent to aged, children, women, believers and unbelievers.

## 5. Mystery

Some of the biblical figures try really hard to find an answer to the problem of suffering. Eventually, they feel compelled to acknowledge that this is an unsolvable question. They arrive in this conclusion after a harsh questioning God as to why he inflicted or allowed affliction to his people. Habakkuk, who lived during a violent period before the fall of Jerusalem, cries to God for help (1:2-6). God’s answer to Habakkuk’s appeal is very concise “My just man shall live by his faith” (2:4). It seems that Habakkuk is satisfied with the answer he got.

Jeremiah, for instance, openly challenges God even though he is well aware of who shall triumph. He cries, “You will win, O Lord, if I make a claim against You, yet I shall present charges against You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?” (*Jer.* 12:1). It seems that Jeremiah resorts to God’s promise that he was going to speak through Jeremiah and to stand by him (1:7-10). Jeremiah continues to believe in God and divine justice.

The author of Ecclesiastes shares the notion that the problem of evil is insoluble. He seems to be convinced that any generalisation of the justification of evil is inadequate. The good suffers as well as the wicked. He states, “I have further observed under sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the valiant; nor is bread won by the

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought After the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 17.

wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance comes to all” (*Ecc.* 9:11).

Having realised the mystery of rational problem of evil, the author of *Ecclesiastes* offers a practical solution. Life is not all misery and sorrow. There are some pleasures to enjoy as long as we are alive: “Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun—all your fleeting days” (9:9). John Bowker asserts that it is not right to see the writer of *Ecclesiastes* as a sceptical just because he points to some of the delights of human live.<sup>40</sup> He only emphasises the significance of the quality of human life. The following is a simple expression of this: “...Go made men plain, but they have engaged in too much reasoning” (7:29). What seems to be important for the author of *Ecclesiastes* is to realise the importance of life and make effective use of it.

*The Book of Job* is often seen as a significant discussion of the problem of evil in the form of Job’s suffering. While he was a righteous person, various afflictions befell on him. He lost his prosperity, got sick, and so on. He cannot understand why a righteous like him suffers. In the dialogue between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, all the classical answers to the problem of evil are expressed by the friends. In turn, Job questions each response and denies their possibility.<sup>41</sup> Although Job does not curse God at all, he charges God with injustice: “He destroys the blameless and the guilty” (*Job* 9:20-22).

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<sup>40</sup> Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*, 30.



In the final part of the book, God reveals himself in a whirlwind. Neither God explains nor Job asks again to God why all those sufferings. Instead, God rebukes Job's friends for attempting at justifying Job's suffering. In addition, Job's ignorance and the superiority of divine wisdom are emphasised. Consequently, Job accepts his ignorance, and repents in dust and ashes in an affirmation of the mystery of evil and suffering. Why did Job not say or ask anything to God in the face? Perhaps he was not expecting any answer from God since he was not there. Oliver Leaman suggests that "That is hardly surprising, since the whole object of his line of complaint was that God would not address him with answers to his charges, and any response is a success given Job's starting position."<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the vision of God itself was a response to Job. David Shapiro, on the other hand, argues that the appearance of God is not a new answer, but "It merely reaffirms the Biblical principle of faith-that God cares. Man suffers, but God has not forsaken him."<sup>43</sup> Whatever the reason is, there is no answer offered for the problem of evil at the end of the *Book of Job*.

To conclude, as it appears in the experiences of Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Job from the first hand, the Hebrew Bible does not provide a concrete solution to the problem of evil. Although the Jewish Scriptures discuss the dilemma of suffering extensively, they appear to resort to silence at the end. Perhaps it is not for Scriptures to justify the reality of evil in the world. Each answer offered in Tanakh may be taken as a comforting

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<sup>42</sup> Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>43</sup> David S. Shapiro, "The Problem of Evil and the Book of Job," in *Judaism*, 5 (1956), 52.

response to the individual cases of suffering. However, the lack of an eschatological response to suffering in the Bible seems to make the problem more problematic.

## **F. The Jewish Theological And Philosophical Theodicies**

Having considered the biblical foundation of the Jewish answers to the problem of suffering, I shall explore the major Jewish theological and philosophical responses here. A pious person may be convinced with the ideas in Scripture without needing any further enquiry. Whereas a theologian and philosopher always try to look for a rational explanation of religious beliefs. At least, he or she expects that religious propositions should not be irrational to hold. Otherwise, one cannot have any criterion to discern a wrong belief from a right one.

With similar concerns, Jewish theologians and philosophers too approach to the problem of suffering. Here I shall focus on some of the principal answers given by Jewish theologians and philosophers. Firstly, the traditional theodicies such as the privation of good, the Free-Will Explanation, vicarious suffering and eschatological resolution; then, the modern answers offered to the problem of evil will be examined. Since the Nazi Holocaust posits a serious problem in modern Jewish thought, most of the discussions in the last part will turn around the problem of evil within the framework of the Holocaust.

### **1. The Traditional Theodicies**

#### **a. The Privation of Good**

The privation theory that evil is nothing else than absence of good, explicitly appears in the writings of the medieval Jewish sage Saadia Gaon (882-942) apparently

for the first time. He contends that God did not create evil. He is the ultimate good and wise God whom cannot be thought to have caused evil. Saadia is aware that God says, "I form light and create darkness..." (*Isa. 45:7*). Interpreting the passage, Saadia asserts that God created air as "the vehicle of light and darkness, according to whether [the former] is present or absent [respectively]."<sup>44</sup> He explains the source of evil in a similar way. God creates things that contain good and evil potentialities together. Through the choice of individual, one of these qualities, namely good or evil, becomes manifest. Therefore, evil is, to Saadia, absence of good and an inner quality of those things that God created.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) is also an exponent of the privation theory as he believes that whatever God creates is "an absolute good." According to Maimonides, what we customarily call evil is the absence of "being." Since existence is good as the creation of a good God, he could not be the Creator of evil.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, no evil can be attributed to the good and wise God of Maimonides. He believes that the evils of the world originate from corporeal nature of mater and human free-will. The only evil that is real in the world is the ones brought about by free beings.

We see the medieval Jewish philosopher Judah Halevi (1075-1141) in opposition to the theory of privation. He refutes the idea that evil is the deprivation of goodness or being. According to Halevi, evil is a reality of this life as much as good is. Therefore, God who is the "Prime Cause" brings about both good and evil. Every single

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<sup>44</sup> Saadia Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. by S. Rosenblatt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 65-66.

<sup>45</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. by Shlomo Pines, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 440.

thing in this world is brought about by divine will either directly or through intermediary causes.

Halevi explains this idea with reference to *1 Samuel* 26:10 which is about David's report of the three causes of death. Halevi construes this verse in a way that "The Lord will strike him down;" points to divine cause of death; "or his day will come to die;" to natural causes; and finally "or he will go down into battle and perish." to accidental causes. Consequently, Halevi affirms that everything, good and evil, life and death, and so on is related to God.<sup>46</sup> Since everything is led back to the deity in one way or another in Halevi's thinking, the occurrences of evil as well as of good are not privation but the actual happenings in the world.

The kabbalists, the Jewish mystics, like Halevi thought that evil was a real and dynamic power within divine emanation called *sefirot*. They regarded evil as the *sitra aħara*, "the other side" of the divine goodness and grace. Evil is traced in the passages in the Zohar, the main text of Jewish Kabbalah, to one of the emanations called the *sefirah Gevurah* also named *Din*, that is the attribute of "Judgment." During emanation, a conflict ensues between the *sefirot Gevurah* and *Hesed* ("Love"), and this brings forth the emergence of "the other side."<sup>47</sup> Evil is, thus, regarded as something embedded in the actual life of Godhead.<sup>48</sup> Evil is compared in the Zohar to the husk or bark (*kelippah* in

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<sup>46</sup> Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, Introduction by Henry Slonimsky, trans. by Hartwig Hirschfeld, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 279-290.

<sup>47</sup> Fischell Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of the Texts*, trans. by David Goldstein, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2, 459.

<sup>48</sup> Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar.*, 2, 460.

Hebrew) of the tree of emanation.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, evil is regarded by the kabbalists as “the other side” of the Godhead or the bark of the sefirotic system, but less real than God.

In modern times, it seems that the idea that evil is privation of good, has lost its popularity among Jewish thinkers. The orthodox Jewish philosopher Eliezer Berkovits (1900- ), for instance, disapproves of the privation theory, which was very popular during the middle ages. He believes that to deny the reality of evil is against the view of Isaiah 45:7 as God is the creator of all reality including darkness and evil. Berkovits contends that “There is evil, but no evil principle, in the universe.”<sup>50</sup>

To conclude, the idea that evil is nothing but privation, lack, defection of certain perfection in an entity was very popular among the Jewish thinkers. Some of the Jewish thinkers such as Saadia and Maimonides could not reconcile the belief in a good God with the occurrences of suffering. They have chosen to deny the reality of evil in favour of the belief in God who is good and full of wisdom. However, the majority of the Jewish philosophers in modern times have compelled to recognise evil as a reality in the world. The Nazi Holocaust was in front of them as an undeniable reality. How could one deny that the death of millions of people was not evil? Perhaps that is why we do not encounter any modern Jewish philosopher explaining evil in terms of privation.

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<sup>49</sup> Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*, (New York and London: Macmillan, 1980), 435.

<sup>50</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History: A Jewish Interpretation*, (Middle Village, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1979), 77-78.

## b. The Free-Will Explanation

The rabbis saw the origin of moral evil in the dual nature of human beings. According to this, each human individual has one good impulse or inclination (*yetzer hat-ov* in Hebrew) and one evil impulse or inclination (*yetzer ha-ra*). While the former urges a person to do good, the latter is the source of wickedness.<sup>51</sup> Different from soul-body duality, the rabbis believed that human beings are born with these dual inclinations. Although the rabbis did not have an idea of original sin as the Christians believed, they maintained that human beings were born with the capacity to do evil. In this sense, the rabbinic conviction was that human beings had free-will to choose between the two inclinations.

The rabbis seem to be aware of the dilemma of divine predestination and human free-will. Some of the rabbis believed that God determined everything in detail before the person was born except moral choices. That is to say, God left to human beings to choose between good and evil. The second century sage Rabbi Akiva, for instance, is believed to have said that “Everything is foreseen by God, but the right to choose is given to man.”<sup>52</sup> However, according to some of the rabbis, God also knows what a person chooses in which case the question stands why God, then, allowed sufferings.

In the middle ages, Maimonides was as a fervent defender of the Free-Will Explanation. He advocated that human beings were free to choose whatever they wished. He writes, “Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn toward the

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<sup>51</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Faith*, the second edition, (London: SPCK, 1995), 76.

<sup>52</sup> Avot 3:15 as quoted in David S. Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe?*, 97.

good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn toward the evil way and be wicked, he is at liberty to do so.”<sup>53</sup> He saw a close relationship between the idea of free-will and the notion of human responsibility for actions. If human beings were not free to choose any course of action, it would not make sense to hold them accountable for their actions. Instead, Maimonides ascribed the cause of moral evil to human body and free-will. Quoting the biblical passages of *Deuteronomy* 32:5 and *Proverb* 19:3, he states that “We suffer because of evils that we have produced ourselves of our free will.”<sup>54</sup>

Later in the same chapter of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides categorises the evils that befall humankind into three species. The evils of the first species take place because of the inherent composition of a person. That is to say, the human body is made up of matter, of flesh and bones. The evils of the second species are those that individuals cause to others such as killing each other. Finally, the evils of the third species are those that individuals inflict upon themselves by his own actions.<sup>55</sup> This is, to Maimonides, the most common kind of evil in the world.

Joseph Albo (1380-1444), a medieval Jewish philosopher, also holds that some of the suffering human beings endure are due to human free-will. In his analysis of possible acts, he categorises human acts into three groups. He asserts that some acts are

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<sup>53</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhoh Teshuvah 5 as quoted in Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe?*, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 443.

<sup>55</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 444-446.

free, some are necessary, and some are composed of freedom and necessity.<sup>56</sup> Concerning to human actions, Albo affirms that human beings must be free so that they can be responsible for their actions. He relies on the rabbinic literature in his argument: “the Rabbis always say that every evil which befalls man is in the nature of punishment.”<sup>57</sup> That is to say, God punishes the wicked because he freely chose to commit sin.

According to Martin Buber (1878-1965), good and evil have special significance in individual’s relation to God. In this context, evil is the result of the failure on the part of human being to enter into a proper relationship with God. Likewise, evil is restored to good by establishing this relation. For Buber, good and evil are not mere opposites like right and left, but “‘Good’ is the movement in the direction of home, ‘evil’ is the aimless whirl of human potentialities without which nothing can be achieved and by which, if they take no direction but remain trapped in themselves, everything goes awry.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the misuse and abuse of human potentialities produce suffering. The employment of human potentialities in the right direction establishes “I-Thou” relation between God and human being, which is good.

The orthodox Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovits (1900-) in his *Faith After the Holocaust* offers a form of free-will explanation to the problem of the Holocaust. Inspired from the biblical concept “hiding of God’s face” (*Ps. 44:23-24*), *Hester Panim* in Hebrew, Berkovits asserts that the Holocaust is a result of God’s hiding his face in human

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim (the Book of Principles)*, trans. by Isaac Husik, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 4, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, 4, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1961), 103.



history. He explains the notion as an attribute of God necessary for humankind to be himself or herself. It is not a punishment for the sins of Israel.

If there is to be "man," God must grant him freedom of decision. In order that a person has freedom and is to be responsible for the actions he or she brings about using freedom of choice, "God must absent himself from history."<sup>59</sup> Only through this way, human beings can use their freedom, and continue to exist. This gives to individual the possibility of creating goodness or evil depending on how they use their free-will. Berkovits asserts that without freedom and responsibility one cannot speak of the existence of human beings as such. In the case that a person abuses his or her freedom of decision and go for the wrong choice, the suffering of the innocent or the prosperity of the wicked might emerge. In short, they are inevitable consequences of human freedom.

It is the contribution of the Free-Will Explanation that human beings make free choices. Human beings enjoy the dignity of being human being through the quality of freedom. However, the problem with the Free-Will Explanation is that it does not explain why God allows the occurrences of evil. Human beings may be free in choosing or not choosing a course of action, but a good, merciful and just God is expected to response to the prayers of his creatures. Where is God when the wicked inflicts pain on an innocent person? Where is God when the sufferer cries for help? The Free-Will Explanation does not give answer to these questions.

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<sup>59</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1973), 107.

### c. The Vicarious Suffering

The rabbis inspired by the passages of *Isaiah* 40-66 developed a notion of vicarious suffering. Rabbinic literature is abundant with accounts of vicarious suffering. They thought that as the servant of God suffered for the sins of humankind, any suffering endured patiently may be vicarious as well. Rabbi Joshua b. Levi states, "He who accepts gladly the sufferings of this world brings salvation to the world."<sup>60</sup> It is even possible to find rabbis who praise sufferings and afflictions:

"Beloved are sufferings, for they appease like offerings; yea, they are more beloved than offerings, for guilt and sin offerings atone only for the particular sin for which they are brought in each case, but sufferings atone for all sins, as it says, 'The Lord has chastened me sore, but He has not given me over unto death' (Ps. CXVIII, 18)"<sup>61</sup>

The rabbis interpreted the biblical account of Abraham's attempt at sacrificing his son, Isaac, in terms of "atonement for Adam's sin in behalf of all the seed of Abraham and all who enter into the covenant to the end of time." In this sense, Abraham "brought the children of Israel to His service" by taking the burden of sacrificing his son for God upon himself.<sup>62</sup> In what way Abraham's sacrifice expiates the sin of Adam and following generations, the suffering of the righteous atones the sins of the Jewish people in a similar fashion.

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<sup>60</sup> Ta'an. 8a as quoted in C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, third printing, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 542.

<sup>61</sup> Midr. Ps. On CXVIII, 18 (243b, § 16), Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 543.

<sup>62</sup> Jacob B. Agus, *The Evolution Of Jewish Thought From Biblical Times To The Opening Of The Modern Era* (London And New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 219.

The medieval Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo affirmed that Israel's misfortunes were momentary and necessary for the process of Messianic redemption. He explains with an analogy,

“For the chick is not generated in the egg until after it has become rotten and the seed begins to sprout only when it has turned seemingly to mud. Thus, too, the salvation and bliss of the nation will be attained only after the nation had descended to the very depths of disintegration, resembling almost complete decay.”<sup>63</sup>

As in the example of the egg-and-chick, in order that Messiah come and bring peace to the whole world, the suffering of Israel needs to get worse. Considering the joy that Messiah will bring, the sorrows of this world lose their significance and fade away.

Following the rabbinic teaching, Jacob B. Agus (1911-1986), a modern Jewish scholar, asserts that the idea of vicarious suffering is a Jewish concept. He argues, “The Jewish people of any generation may suffer for the sins of their ancestors, just as they generally benefit by the accumulated ‘merits of the fathers,’ or from the merits of their contemporary saints (Sabbath 33b).”<sup>64</sup> Agus asserts that the idea of vicarious suffering of the righteous has been replaced with the ritual of animal sacrifices. According to this, the saints of the community offered their sufferings as sacrifice to God so that he could forgive them. In support of his argument, Agus refers to some rabbinic accounts. He writes, “The Holy One, blessed be He, inflicted agonies upon the prophet Ezekiel, in

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<sup>63</sup> Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, 1:51.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob B. Agus, *The Evolution Of Jewish Thought*, 75-6.

order to purge the sins of Israel (Sanhedrin 39a).’ We read too that the blood of King Josiah, spilled when he was shot at by the Egyptian soldiers, ‘atoned for all Israel.’”<sup>65</sup>

The Jewish reform theologian Ignaz Maybaum (1897-1976) offers a classical response to the tragedies of the Holocaust in his book *The Face of God After Auschwitz*. Maybaum’s response can be described as classical for the reason that his explanation is based on the biblical notion of the suffering servant in the *Book of Isaiah*, particularly chapter 53. Maybaum believes that the doctrine of vicarious atonement designates that the servant of God suffers for the rest of humankind. Jewish tradition largely maintains that Israel is the suffering servant who covenanted with God. Through suffering of the servant, stability and endurance of all creation are ensured.

Maybaum contends that the Holocaust was a part of divine providence, and the Jews who died in the concentration camps were the suffering servants of God. “The millions who died in Auschwitz,” says Maybaum, “died ‘because of the sins of others.’”<sup>66</sup> This is not a kind of divine retribution, but it is a divine intervention into human history to bring about God’s providential plan for the world. Therefore, God, according to Maybaum, inflicted suffering in the concentration camps “to cleanse, to purify, to punish a sinful world.”<sup>67</sup> Maybaum employs the Christian interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus as a model when he accounts for the sufferings of the Holocaust in sacrificial terms.

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<sup>65</sup> Agus, *The Evolution Of Jewish Thought*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God After Auschwitz* (Amsterdam, Polak and Van Gemep, 1965), 35 as quoted in Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), 156.

<sup>67</sup> Maybaum, *The Face of God After Auschwitz*, 59 as quoted in Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, 163.

According to the Jewish theologian, the death of the Jews under the Nazi oppression is analogous to the crucifixion of Jesus through which humankind is liberated.

Two traditional Hebrew concepts that are important in Maybaum's account for the Holocaust are *churban* (destruction) and *gezerah* (evil decree). For Maybaum, the term *churban* signifies irreversible cataclysmic events wrought by divine intervention in Jewish history. Yet, they have a decisive significance for both the Jewish people and the rest of humankind. On the other hand, the term *gezerah* (pl. *gezerot*) designates relatively less cataclysmic and, at the same time, avoidable tragedies such as the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492. Moreover, a *gezerah*, unlike a *churban*, does not mark an end to an old era and a beginning to a new era.<sup>68</sup>

Maybaum applies the notion of *churban* to three major tragedies of Jewish history, which each one of them signals the termination of one era and the inauguration of another. The first *churban* was the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, or the Temple of Solomon, by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. As a result of the first *churban*, the Jews went into exile; and, consequently, there they spread the word of God to other nations. The eradication of the Second Temple by the Roman army in 70 CE was the second *churban*. Through the destruction of the Temple of Herod, the institution of the synagogue was initiated, and the sacrifice-based religious life was transformed into study and litany-based Jewish piety in the synagogue.

According to Maybaum, the Holocaust during World War II is the third *churban* through which religious authoritarianism of the Middle Ages came to an end and a new

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<sup>68</sup> Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, 158.

era of modernity initiated.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the Nazi regime was the last representative of the suppressive medieval world view. In short, the Holocaust signifies “progress through sacrifice” even though it was achieved by the death of six million Jews in the concentration camps.

Is Maybaum's account of *churban* as vicarious suffering coherent with the traditional Jewish concept of God? In criticising Maybaum's explanation of the Holocaust, Cohn-Sherbok points out that the idea of *churban* contradicts to the traditional Jewish faith in an omnipotent and benevolent God. In the face of the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust, it becomes difficult to defend God's compassion, justice and power. Maybaum's interpretation does not seem to accomplish this requirement.

Moreover, Cohn-Sherbok criticises Maybaum's application of Christian terminology to explain the tragedies of the Holocaust. First, the idea of Jesus' vicarious atonement in Christianity stems from the Christian belief in Christ being God incarnate. Therefore, it is God who has suffered willingly on the cross for the whole humankind. In Maybaum's interpretation, God sacrifices his people, not himself, contrary to their will or without taking their consent. Second point is related to Maybaum's concept of *churban*. Cohn-Sherbok asserts that “the concept of progress achieved through sacrifice is essentially a non-Jewish idea.”<sup>70</sup> He claims that even when sacrifice was a way of worship to God, it was to approach God and to expiate their sins, not for progress further.

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<sup>69</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, “God and the Holocaust,” in Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *Theodicy* (Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>70</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 40.

In my opinion, even if we suppose that the idea of vicarious suffering is a Jewish notion, it is difficult to accept that it offers a solution to the problem of evil. One individual suffers for others. It seems to me that it is a way of avoiding the question why God allows disasters at the beginning. If he did not let suffering happen, he would not choose a person to redeem the sins of others. Moreover, vicarious suffering is a long way for a God to redeem the sins of human beings. While he could save countless people with no time and effort, why would he want to choose to inflict suffering on another person? Even if we assume that vicarious suffering enables further progress, it is not necessarily the case.

#### **d. The Eschatological Resolution**

The rabbis were not completely satisfied with the biblical answers to the question of suffering. If God is just and wise, how could he allow the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked? Troubled with instances of injustices and innocent sufferings in the world, the rabbis believed that there must be a day in which ultimate justice take place. Rabbi Akiva explains,

“The Holy One is exact with the righteous as well as with the wicked, searching out the very depths of their being. He is exact with the righteous, holding them to account for the few wrongs they committed in this world, in order to lavish bliss upon them and give them a goodly reward in the world-to-come. On the other hand, He lavishes ease upon the wicked and rewards them

in this world for the few good deeds they performed in order to requite them in the world-to-come.”<sup>71</sup>

The hereafter is the abode of exact reward and punishment. If divine justice is not realised here, there must be a life after death in which every wrong is to be corrected.

Saadia is convinced that the ultimate justice will be in the hereafter. No one must expect total compensation or punishment for every action conducted in this world. The abode of ultimate justice is life after death. Saadia believes that if there were no reward and punishment in the afterlife, nothing would compel human beings to behave in a certain way. Therefore, the existence of “perpetual sojourn in hellfire” and “perennial delight and perpetual reward” in paradise is necessary.<sup>72</sup> This is, for Saadia, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible.

We can find traces of an eschatological response to human suffering in the kabbalists as well. It appears that the death of a child posed a serious problem for the kabbalists.<sup>73</sup> They could not understand why a child would die since he had no sin. Was his or her death a punishment for the sins of the ancestors? The kabbalists believed that the premature death of a child was not a punishment, but, in fact, was a blessing of God. Because God rewarded the child taking him or her to paradise without the child commits any sin in this world. In this sense, reward in the hereafter vindicates the premature death of the child. However, they do not explain why God needed to bring a child to the world

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<sup>71</sup> Bereshit Rabah 33:1 as quoted in Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe?*, 102.

<sup>72</sup> Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 185.

<sup>73</sup> Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe?*, 103.



and then did not let him or her live. If he did not bring the child to life knowing that the child will die soon after his or her birth, there would not be any problem.

Joseph Albo discusses the nature of reward and punishment in the hereafter. He argues first for eternal punishment for the wicked, and temporal reward for the righteous. Then, he realises that every human individuals commit sin, so everyone is doomed to eternal punishment. Then, he changes his position, and affirms that the merciful God will forgive the sinner. Consequently, he opts for temporal punishment and reward in life after death. Albo writes, "strict justice requires that reward should be temporary, nevertheless God in His abundant kindness gives to those who do His will eternal and infinite reward, as He is eternal and infinite."<sup>74</sup> It seems that in this way, he to a great extent avoids the problem of divine goodness in the face of eternal punishment in hell.

The contemporary Jewish philosopher Dan Cohn-Sherbok in his book *God and the Holocaust* offers an eschatological response to the problem of the Holocaust. He argues that the eschatological response is the only alternative that will "serve as the fulcrum of religious belief" in the future.<sup>75</sup> Cohn-Sherbok maintains that many religious Jews in the Nazi concentration camps believed that their suffering and death was "a prelude to a more glorious future."<sup>76</sup> They knew that there was the world to come in which God would reward them for their righteousness in this life. According to Cohn-Sherbok, most of the victims of the Nazis celebrated the practice of the tradition of

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, 4, 36.

<sup>75</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1996), 129.

<sup>76</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 126.

*Kiddush ha-Shem*, “the sanctification of divine name,” in the concentration camps facing the death penalty. As the testimonies of the surviving Jews show, by sanctifying God’s name the Jews in the concentration camps believed that their deaths would bring reward for themselves and forgiveness to the rest of the Jewish people.<sup>77</sup>

Cohn-Sherbok from here infers that it is obvious that the motive behind the practice of the sanctification of the divine name among the Nazi victims was “an absolute faith in the life beyond death.”<sup>78</sup> The religious Jews were quite certain that there was the real life beyond the concentration camps and gas chambers in which the Jewish people would attain eternal bliss. Cohn-Sherbok concludes that “the promise of immortality” is the only way by which the Jewish people will be able to sustain the belief in God.

However, Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881-1983), the founder of the Reconstructionist movement in modern Judaism, asserts that the belief in life after death is no more a viable solution to the problem of evil in modern age. He acknowledges that in Jewish tradition the belief in the afterlife was as a solution of the problem. However, he contends that today human suffering cannot be explained with resorting to the belief in the world-to-come. He explains,

“Modern men cannot see why we must suffer here in order to be compensated hereafter. The atrocities perpetrated against six million Jewish victims by the Nazis, and the similar suffering imposed on many other human beings by Nazi, Fascist, and Communist persecution, and by the armies of both sides in

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<sup>77</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 126.

recent wars, constitute a tragedy of such dimension that no posthumous reward can compensate for it, or explain it away.”<sup>79</sup>

The belief that the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished in the hereafter does not explain the reason for the suffering occurring in this world. For Kaplan, the Jewish religious tradition does not offer any satisfactory answer to the problem of evil. Therefore, there is an urgent need of a new concept of God in order to reconcile the reality of evil in the world with the belief in God.

One could understand the objection that there is no life after death; but it seems to me difficult to understand how the belief in the hereafter cannot be a solution to the problem of evil. Kaplan would be justifiable if the reason for suffering in this world would be reward or punishment in the afterlife. As far as I am concerned, the Jewish theologians and philosophers do not assert that human beings must bear suffering in this world in order to be rewarded in life after death. What they seem to say is that this is the world of free creatures, and God’s justice will be in the hereafter. Anyone with a right mind acknowledges that the Nazi destruction is overwhelming.

However, to say that “no posthumous reward can compensate for it, or explain it away” destroys nothing but the hopes of the sufferers and victims of the Holocaust. It seems that the majority of the victims of the Holocaust found the eschatological resolution satisfactory. In addition, in order to make such a judgement one has to know

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<sup>79</sup> M. Kaplan, “The Principles of Reconstructionism and Some Questions Jews Ask,” in N. N. Glatzer (ed.), *Modern Jewish Thought*, 153.

what the compensation is. It is possible that eternal bliss that the faithful is expected to find in the afterlife shall erase all the nightmares of this world.

To conclude, the Jewish theological and philosophical responses offered to the problem of evil provide limited help to solve the problem completely. It seems that the theory of privation does not help to explain the reality of evil in the face of the Holocaust. The Free-Will Defence explains the origin of human actions, but not God's silence amidst suffering. It seems that the tragedy of the Holocaust has made it difficult to believe that the Jewish people suffer for other nations. In fact, they were subjected to suffering against their wish by other nations directly or indirectly. Perhaps the only way out of this trouble is to be able to unite with God, who is the ultimate source of the existence.

## **2. The Modern Theodicies**

So far, I have explored the traditional Jewish responses to the problem of evil. In this part of the thesis, I will look into what I call the modern Jewish responses to the religious problem of the destruction of the European Jewry by the Nazis during World War II. The explanations that will be examined in this section are considered modern in the sense that they are distinctively different from the traditional responses to the problem of evil.

### **a. The Holocaust as a New Revelation**

Emil Ludwig Fackenheim (1916-), a reform rabbi and philosopher, has dedicated his life to understand possible meanings of the Holocaust. His ideas on the Nazi atrocities show progress through his wide range of books and articles. For about

twenty years at the beginning of his career, Fackenheim thought, "the Holocaust was not a theological problem for Judaism."<sup>80</sup> Eventually he has come to view that the modern catastrophe is "the most radical counter-testimony" to Judaism.<sup>81</sup> Facing the religious problem of the Holocaust, Fackenheim rejects the idea of renouncing the Jewish belief in God as a response to the horrors of the concentration camps. He maintains that the Jewish people should keep their faith in order not to make Hitler's victory complete.

Fackenheim makes a distinction between the attempts of "seeking a purpose" in and of "seeking a response" to the Holocaust. He thinks that while the former is blasphemous, the latter is inevitable.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, he rejects the classical response that suffering is a punishment; and he also denies the idea that there is a purpose in the Holocaust. The biblical epitome of suffering, namely, Job, had already discarded the view that human suffering is a punishment of the sins human beings committed. For Fackenheim, this is impossible to think in the case of the Holocaust as well. Moreover, while recognising a connection between the Holocaust and the rise of the state of Israel, Fackenheim repudiates any kind of purpose in the extermination of the European Jewry. In his words: "No purpose, religious or non-religious, will ever be found in Auschwitz."<sup>83</sup> Therefore, he believes that Judaism needs an adequate response to the horrors of the Holocaust.

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<sup>80</sup> R. L. Rubenstein and J. K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987), 317.

<sup>81</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 317.

<sup>82</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return Into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return Into History*, 29.

Fackenheim in *God's Presence in History* contends that God has been present, or revealed through a series of decisive events in Jewish history. These historical occurrences are "root experiences" that made impact on the destiny of Jewish existence. The people of Israel experienced God's saving presence at the Red Sea during the Exodus from Egypt and His commanding presence at Sinai in the giving of the Torah. Fackenheim asserts that "root experiences," in general, have three peculiar characteristics. First, divine presence is instantly affirmed by the witnesses during root experiences. Second, events of this sort are open to the public and a momentous one. Third, root experiences are "accessible to later generations."<sup>84</sup> In short, "root experiences" are not only past occurrences but also present instances of faith in God's saving action.

Further, Fackenheim maintains that there are also some major crises in Jewish history which challenges and tests Israel's "root experience." These are, Fackenheim calls, "epoch-making events."<sup>85</sup> Among others the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and of the Second one by the Romans were the "epoch-making events" that tested divine presence in history. In response to these challenges, the prophets and the talmudic sages who lived through the tragedies, called the people to maintain their faith in the presence of redeeming God.<sup>86</sup> After all those catastrophic events through history, Israel managed to reaffirm her faith in God's saving and commanding presence.

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<sup>84</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, 153.

<sup>86</sup> See Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, 25-31 for Fackenheim's detailed exposition of rabbinic response to the "epoch-making events."

Fackenheim argues that the Holocaust is an “epoch-making event” with its characteristic of challenging God’s presence at the concentration camps. Because, in Fackenheim’s words “Never, within or without Jewish history, have men anywhere had such a dreadful, such a horrifying reason for turning their backs on the God of history.”<sup>87</sup> However, he negates the rejection of the belief in God as an answer to the Holocaust. Although there was no “redeeming voice” at the concentration camps, Fackenheim insists that a “commanding voice” was heard. This “commanding voice” is a new revelation, in Fackenheim’s words, “614<sup>th</sup> commandment.” While there are 613 commandments in the Torah, God revealed in the concentration camps a new commandment to the Jews. Fackenheim spells out the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment as follows:

“Jews are forbidden to hand posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish.”<sup>88</sup>

These are the sacred duties of the Jews in the post-Holocaust era. This passage as Fackenheim’s interpretation of the Holocaust has been one of the most influential response to the Holocaust.

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<sup>87</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 44.

<sup>88</sup> Emil Fackenheim, “The Voice of Auschwitz,” in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Modern Jewish Thought*, 188.

Fackenheim in his book *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* writes that the Holocaust created a “rupture” in history. Since the rupture occurred in this realm, repair (*tikkun*) is also required here.<sup>89</sup> According to Fackenheim, *tikkun* entails the involvement of the whole Jewish community including religious Jews as well as secular ones. Additionally, the land of Israel is the only place where *tikkun* can take place. It seems to me that Fackenheim left unjustified his response to the Holocaust in terms of a new revelation. Was the Holocaust really a new revelation to the Jews? Cohn-Sherbok criticises, “he does not attempt to justify his claim that Auschwitz was a revelation-event bearing Torah to twentieth-century Jews.”<sup>90</sup> While a considerable number of Jews negates the belief in God, Fackenheim does not attempt to rationalise his view. Cohn-Sherbok contends that the survival instinct of the Jews after the Holocaust is not because of God’s revelation contrary to Fackenheim’s assertions; but it is a basic innate human instinct that can be found in every human being. Moreover, Fackenheim’s urge Jewish people to preserve the belief in God so that Judaism survives cannot be a sustainable reason for such a religious belief.

If we take Fackenheim’s view of the Holocaust as a revelation, some problems arise. First of all, it is something to say that God creates evil as well as good, something another evil is his revelation. Can he not reveal what he needed to reveal in a good revelation? Was it necessary that so many people should die? Furthermore, if the Holocaust was a revelation, who could testify that it was? Is it rather Fackenheim’s

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<sup>89</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 48-9.

<sup>90</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, “God and the Holocaust,” in Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *Theodicy* (Lampeter:UK, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 89.



wishful thinking? How can one determine that it is a real revelation not wishful thinking? Fackenheim does not seem to address these questions.

### **b. The Holocaust as *The Tremendum***

Another important theological response to the Holocaust comes from the Jewish theologian Arthur A. Cohen. In response to the death camps, he in his *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (1981) offers a new interpretation of the Jewish concept of God coupled with a version of Free-Will Defence. Cohen argues that since the Nazi terror is unique in terms of its enormity, the traditional Jewish concept of beneficent and providential God must be reconceptualised.

Inspired by the concept of “*mysterium tremendum*,” God’s holiness, coined by the German Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto, Arthur Cohen adopts the term “the *tremendum*” for the Holocaust. According to the phenomenology of the Holy that Otto (1869-1937) develops in *the Idea of the Holy*, *mysterium tremendum* is the deep and impenetrable mystery experienced by the worshipper in contemplation of the divine being.<sup>91</sup> In Cohen’s argument, on the other hand, *the tremendum* designates the “immensity” of the catastrophe. Cohen writes, “I call the death camps the *tremendum*, for it is the monument of a meaningless inversion of life to an orgiastic celebration of death, to a psychosexual and pathological degeneracy unparalleled and unfathomable to any

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<sup>91</sup> For further elaboration of Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*, See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959), 26-55.

person bonded to life.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the destruction of the European Jewry by the Nazis is, to Cohen, the unique “human *tremendum*” which repudiates meaning.

According to Cohen, the *tremendum* is unique and incomparable to the other disasters in history. Therefore, the traditional responses to such old catastrophes as the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain are not adequate for the *tremendum* any more. This is because “a beneficent and caring God appears to have allowed his elected people to be brought to the borders of extinction.”<sup>93</sup> If he was a caring God, as the traditional view maintains, how it could have been possible that God remained silent while the Jews were being killed in the gas chambers. In response, Cohen suggests to reconsider the traditional Jewish notion of providential God and to construct a new theology. This constructive theology must affirm, first, the presence of God in the universe without denying the reality of evil. Second, it must see God’s relation to the world, including to “demonic structure” in it, as meaningful and significant. Finally, it must not separate God’s selfhood from His involvement in the world. Cohen asserts that if any of these features are denied, creation and God become a mere metaphor for the unaccountable.<sup>94</sup>

Cohen tries to formulate his theology featured above bringing together two theological traditions, in his own words, “the kabbalistic counter-history of Judaism” and “a tradition that runs from Joachim of Fiore through Schelling to Franz Rosenzweig.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 50-1.

<sup>94</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 86.

<sup>95</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 86-88.

Cohen describes the kabbalistic doctrine of God (*Ein Sof* in Hebrew) and of His relation to the world in the way that the being of God was passive because of its absoluteness and necessity. He had no means to will and no reality to create. Subsequently, God's being was activated by "the spark of nonbeing," that is, the condition of otherhood.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Cohen refers to the Schellingian dipolar idea of God. That is to say that within God there are two directions: God's essential "own-ness" and selfhood on the one hand, "the abundant and overflowing" direction on the other. Cohen asserts that this is the source of "the dialectic between necessity and freedom, ...the sufficient nothing of the world and the creation of being."<sup>97</sup> Thus, God is hidden in one aspect, revealing in the other.

As the Jewish theologian Steven Katz points out,<sup>98</sup> Cohen concludes from the synthesis of these two notions that, first, God has a necessary passive and hidden side; second, God's love produces creation essentially; third, God's overflowing nature requires human freedom; and finally, in Cohen's words, "The divine essence is dipolar in its nature and in its manifestation."<sup>99</sup> God's nature from His perspective is His abundance from ours. The creation, objects and incidents in the universe, is within God's eternal nature at the same time. Since creation is necessity within God, it is completed with the creation of human beings that have freedom and reason.

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<sup>96</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 89.

<sup>98</sup> Steven T. Katz, "The Shoah," in Daniel H. Frank, and Oliver Leamen, *History Of Jewish Philosophy*, (London And New York: Routledge, 1997), 2, 860.

<sup>99</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 91.

At this point, Cohen introduces his version of Free-Will Defence, which is closely connected with his dipolar conception of God. Cohen argues that the existence of free human beings is a natural outcome of God's overflowing side. Therefore, human beings are free to act in whatever way they choose good or evil. Cohen explains,

“There is in man an enduring strife and tension, enlarged and made threatening by our finitude, in which freedom enhances when it is marked and contained by reason, but when reason fails to find language, freedom is destructively cut loose or bends toward untruth or succumbs to sheer willfulness.”<sup>100</sup>

In this sense, human history with its irregularities and evils is the product of human freedom, not of a providential God. If history is, as the Jewish tradition maintains, the direct work of God, “How could it be that,” Cohen asks, “God witnessed the holocaust and remained silent...”<sup>101</sup> Why did he not confute the plans of the Nazis, and save the Jews in the concentration camps as he is reported to have done several times in the Jewish history? For Cohen, “God is not the strategist of our particularities or of our historical condition, but rather the mystery of our futurity, always our posse, never our acts.”<sup>102</sup> Although the historical is within the domain of human freedom, God is not wholly indifferent to the historical. Cohen understands divine life as “filament” within the historical “securing the implicative an exponential significance of the historical.”<sup>103</sup> The

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<sup>100</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 92.

<sup>101</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 95.

<sup>102</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 97.

<sup>103</sup> Cohen, *The Tremendum*, 97-8.

*tremendum* representing the demonic, then, signifies human impediment to the divine filament.

Therefore, in Cohen's conception, the historical events, good as well as evil, are the natural outcome of free human beings, not of the God who the Jewish tradition thought to be the interferer. Consequently, the misuse of human free-will is the cause of the Holocaust. It is not the result of God's providential plan. Hence, it is human beings, not God, who are responsible for the crimes of the death camps.

Is Cohen's explanation and its indispensable part, that is, his conception of God, is coherent with the traditional Jewish thinking? According to Cohn-Sherbok, Cohen ignored an essential aspect of traditional Judaism; that is, the doctrine of a historical God who is in history as well as outside.<sup>104</sup> He is the one who saved the people of Israel from Egyptian exile miraculously. The traditional Jewish God creates, sustains and intervenes into human realm. It seems that while Cohen tries to avoid the problem of evil by replacing the traditional concept of God with a deistic conception, he has caused more severe problems than at hand.

### **c. A New Voluntary Covenant**

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, an American orthodox Jewish thinker, deals with the theological meaning and consequences of the Holocaust in his writings. In his important essay "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," Greenberg argues that the enormity of suffering and the worthlessness of

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<sup>104</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, "God and the Holocaust," 83.

human life at the Nazi camps is a radical challenge to both Judaism and Christianity.<sup>105</sup> In close resemblance with Emil L. Fackenheim's idea of the Holocaust as a new revelation, Greenberg maintains that the Holocaust marks the beginning of a new era in Jewish covenantal history.

Greenberg argues that the Holocaust as a colossal evil requires urgent response from humanity. Firstly because the enormity of suffering challenges all the religious norms of the world. Secondly, humankind has to confront to the Holocaust so that it will never happen again. In Greenberg's words, "Failure to confront it makes repetition all the more likely."<sup>106</sup> However, since the challenge of the catastrophe to the religious, political and intellectual norms current today is enormous, there is no conclusive answer to the Holocaust. "The only morally tenable way for survivors and those guilty of bystanding to live" is, Greenberg argues, "dialectical moves and understandings."

He describes these dialectical moves and understandings in the sense that they "stretch our capacity to the limit and torment us with their irresolvable tensions."<sup>107</sup> Then, Greenberg offers a verification principle for answers to the death camps: "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children."<sup>108</sup> However, it is the essential responsibility of theologians to respond credibly to the Holocaust, and to hear further revelation.

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<sup>105</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, And Modernity After The Holocaust," In Eva Fleischner (ed.), *Auschwitz: Beginning Of A New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977), 11.

<sup>106</sup> Greenberg, "Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire," 20.

<sup>107</sup> Greenberg, "Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire," 22.

<sup>108</sup> Greenberg, "Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire," 23.

Greenberg asserts that the responses of both classical theism and atheism are inadequate and implausible “in the presence of the burning children.” Nevertheless, he believes that faith is still possible after Auschwitz in the form of “moment faith.” Greenberg borrows the term from Martin Buber, who speaks of “moment gods” in the sense that the knowledge of God can be attained only at the moment when divine presence is felt by an individual. In a similar fashion, Greenberg describes moment faith as “a life response of the whole person to the Presence in life and history.”<sup>109</sup> Although faith is overcome in the presence of the burning children, it comes back afterwards.

In the face of the Holocaust, Greenberg suggests four reasons for the persistence of what he calls “dialectical” faith. The first reason is that the reality of Exodus and liberation are still experienced in this post-Holocaust era. The second reason is that there is no worthy alternative to religion. Secularism, which has described itself as the alternative to religion, played an essential role in the Holocaust. Therefore, secular culture is not an option against God.

The third reason not to abandon the faith after Auschwitz is the moral urgency and necessity to search for religious experience. The last reason is the revelation in the redemption of Israel. This revelatory event is, according to Greenberg, the emergence of the State of Israel.<sup>110</sup> Despite all these arguments for the possibility of religion after the Holocaust, faith remains as “moment faith.” It is because “Faith is a moment truth, but

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<sup>109</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 27.

<sup>110</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 32.

there are moments when it is not true.”<sup>111</sup> In the moments of catastrophe, sufferers would not live in the presence of the Redeemer.

Greenberg employs three biblical models in describing the relationship between God and humankind after Auschwitz. They are the models of Job, the “Suffering Servant” in *Isaiah 53*, and what Greenberg designates as the model of the *Lamentations* 3. The model of Job signifies the restoration of the contact with God after the afflictions befell on him. In this sense, the emergence of the State of Israel after the Holocaust manifests further revelation of God’s presence that restores the relationship between Israel and God.

The second theological model is the Suffering Servant in *Isaiah 53*. It is reported in Tanakh that he was subjected to suffering not for his sins but for the sins of humankind. Some theologians such as Karl Barth, Roy Eckardt, and Eliezer Berkovits suggested that the Jewish people suffer for nations’ revolt against God. However, Greenberg’s model of the Suffering Servant is “a kind of early warning system of the sins intrinsic in the culture but often not seen until later.”<sup>112</sup> In this sense, the Holocaust was a warning of the evils embedded in the potentials of modernity. Therefore, all the movements, religious, political, and intellectual, have to be questioned constantly not to lead to another catastrophe, which will inevitably embrace the whole world.

Greenberg’s third theological model finds its biblical expression in Chapter 3 of the *Lamentations*. It is the story of a man who was afflicted apparently without any

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<sup>111</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 33.

<sup>112</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 37.



reason with various kinds of evils by God. Because of this, he was angry with God, and had lost his hope. When he remembered the past mercies of God, Greenberg explains this with the Exodus memory, he started a new relationship with God. In the case of the Holocaust, the Lamentations 3 suggests “a total and thoroughgoing self-criticism that would purge the emotional dependency and self-abasement of traditional religion and its false crutch of certainty and security.”<sup>113</sup> Greenberg confesses that in the post-Holocaust era these models cannot provide articulate explanations concerning the relationship to God now. Therefore, this is the time of silence in theology. During this period, the only testimony is the one of human life. That is to say, in Greenberg’s words, “The act of creating a life or enhancing its dignity is the counter-testimony to Auschwitz.”<sup>114</sup>

Greenberg in his article “The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History” argues that the Holocaust brought about a new era in which the covenant is not compulsory any more but voluntary. God cannot command or force anyone to participate into the covenant. He divides the Jewish covenantal history into three cycles. The first period is the biblical era. He describes this first covenant with reference to Ezekiel 20:32-33 as follows: “God is the initiator, the senior partner, who punishes, rewards and enforces the partnership if the Jews slacken.”<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, when the First Temple was destroyed, the Jewish people then thought that it was God’s punishment for their sins.

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<sup>113</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 40.

<sup>114</sup> Greenberg, “Cloud Of Smoke, Pillar Of Fire,” 41.

<sup>115</sup> Greenberg, “The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History,” printed and circulated by the National Jewish Resource Center (New York: 1981), 6 as cited in Steven T. Katz, *Historicism, The Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1992), 235.

Greenberg argues that the destruction of the Second Temple in c.70 CE marks the beginning of the second era. This national tragedy transforms the idea of covenant in the biblical era. The rabbis responded to the destruction in the way that “The manifest divine presence and activity was being reduced but the covenant was actually being renewed.”<sup>116</sup> The theme of human freedom came to the front along with divine punishment. The rabbinic view of the divine self-limitation, the hiding of the Face, gave more responsibility to Israel in her covenant with God.

The third era emerges as a consequence of the Holocaust. Greenberg believes that the death camps broke the Sinai covenant. Thus, the Holocaust has transformed the old covenantal relationship between God and Israel into a new form in which the people of Israel has the full responsibility. Having seen the flames of the crematorium, in Greenberg’s words, “God can have no claims on the Jews by dint of the Covenant.”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the covenant with God after Auschwitz is voluntary. Amazingly, the Jewish people have chosen to maintain the Jewish identity, and established the State of Israel voluntarily in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Accordingly, the existence of the God of Israel continues in the post-Holocaust era.

To sum up, Greenberg argues in a similar fashion with Emil Fackenheim in the sense that the Holocaust marks the beginning of a new era in Jewish covenantal history. Now the covenant is voluntary. Accordingly, in the new era human beings, not God, are fully responsible for the future of the world. It was humankind, not God, who was

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<sup>116</sup> Grenberg, “The Third Great Cycle,” 9.

<sup>117</sup> Grenberg, “The Third Great Cycle,” 23.

supposed to prevent the Holocaust, and to bring redemption to the world. What is incumbent upon us now is not to let anything like the Holocaust happens again.

As Steven T. Katz argues, “the God of all the traditional omnipredicates does not fit easily with a ‘God’ who is a ‘silent partner.’”<sup>118</sup> If God is a silent partner, how are such Jewish notions as redemption and covenant to be understood? Greenberg does not say anything about it. He only suggests that after the Holocaust the covenant is voluntary. God cannot force anyone to participate into covenant. Katz asks, “can this covenant be ‘shattered’ by a Hitler?”<sup>119</sup> If Hitler is so powerful that he can annul the Jewish covenant, then does it not Hitler, not God, become central to the Jewish faith?

It appears that Greenberg’s argument suffers from internal discrepancies within the Jewish tradition. That is to say, to change the traditional concept of God, God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, and to replace it with a silent partner does not solve the problem of evil. It changes the metaphysical predicates of a God. The notions such as God as silent partner, voluntary covenant, and momentary faith or disbelief seem to be alien to and not in accord with the Jewish faith. Most importantly, they do not solve the problem of evil completely.

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<sup>118</sup> Katz, “The Shoah,” 864.

<sup>119</sup> Katz, “The Shoah,” 865.

### 3. The Anti-Theodicies

#### a. The Protest of God's Silence

In contrast to the positive explanations to the problem of the Holocaust we have seen so far, the Jewish intellectual Elie Wiesel negates that there can be found any answer to the terrible dilemma which the Holocaust posed. As a witness to and survivor from the Nazi terror at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Wiesel maintains that the experience of the Holocaust destroys all doctrines.<sup>120</sup> He explores and criticises a wide range of theological responses to the Holocaust in his numerous novels. As Eugene Borowitz points out,<sup>121</sup> Wiesel's novels are not mere fictions aimed at entertaining the reader, but they are "reflective narrative explorations" written in response to the modern catastrophe.

In his autobiographical novel *Night*, Wiesel describes from the first hand the Nazi horrors and the suffering of the victims at Auschwitz. From the death camps he was dragged into as a pious teenager, he was liberated protesting God's silence during the Holocaust. In *Night*, he describes the dramatic effect of his discovery of the human suffering at Auschwitz at his first night as follows: "never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith."<sup>122</sup> As François Mauriac pointed out in his "Forward" to *Night*, for Wiesel the notions of the God of love and mercy have disappeared "in the smoke of a human holocaust."<sup>123</sup> The horrors of the death camps were so evil that human

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<sup>120</sup> See Elie Weisel, "The Holocaust As Literary Inspiration," in Elie Weisel et al., *Dimensions of the Holocaust*, Lectures at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1983).

<sup>121</sup> Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide* (West Orange, New Jersey: Behrman House, Inc., 1995), 190.

<sup>122</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. from French by S. Rodway (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1981), 45.

<sup>123</sup> François Mauriac, "Forward" to Elie Wiesel, *Night*, 10.

beings could not have a proper explanation. In this sense, the Holocaust is, to Wiesel, a unique catastrophe in human history transforming Jewish conception of God and the world.

In the face of evils, the traditional Jewish justifications of God such as the Messianic redemption or the recompense in the Hereafter are not satisfactory any more in the post-Holocaust era. The reason for this is that the classic responses to evil presuppose a God who is just, merciful, and almighty, as is formulated in the Jewish tradition. Wiesel refuses to praise God with these positive attributes. If there is anything to exalt him for, it is his negative aspect. "How could I say to Him:", asks Wiesel,

"Blessed art thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praised be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine altar?"<sup>124</sup>

This is not to deny that God exists; but it is a human protest against justifying God since it means to legitimise the Holocaust. It is reported that Wiesel have said that "If I told you I believed in God, I would be lying; if I told you I did not believe in God, I would be lying."<sup>125</sup> After Auschwitz, therefore, one can only hold onto God by protesting his silence without justifying the death camps.

Among others, *Night* is seen as the most articulate book written by Wiesel on the Holocaust. As Richard Rubenstein and John Roth suggest,<sup>126</sup> the majority of Wiesel's

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<sup>124</sup> Wiesel, *Night*, 78

<sup>125</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 285.

<sup>126</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 283.

writings are not explicitly about the question of the Holocaust in the sense that *Night* is. However, that the horrors of the death camps can be felt in any one of Wiesel's writings. The silence of God on Israel's suffering and Israel's protest in response are generally the main themes he employs throughout his writings on the Holocaust.

Wiesel in his novel, the *Accident*, emphasises the negative aspect of God strongly. The protagonist of the novel, Eliezer, reflects upon God in view of evil. He believes that it is not human beings but God to be blamed for the evils of the world. Humankind is nothing but His favourite toy. Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok points to the background of Lurianic kabbalah in Wiesel's view of the negative conception of God.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps this negative image is nowhere explicit than here in the *Accident*. He writes,

“Condemned to eternal solitude, he [God] made man only to use him as a toy, to amuse Himself. That's what the philosophers and poets have refused to admit: in the beginning there was neither the Word, nor Love, but laughter, the roaring, eternal laughter whose echoes are more deceitful than the mirages of the desert.”<sup>128</sup>

Thus, for Wiesel, the idea of loving and caring God is no more tenable in the face of human suffering.

Perhaps it ought to be noted that the cantata *Ani Maamim* seems to be an exception among his writings. Here Wiesel apparently takes a different stand from his other works. God is no more a malevolent deity or unconcerned with Israel's suffering.

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<sup>127</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and The Holocaust*, 93.

<sup>128</sup> Elie Wiesel, *The Accident* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962) as quoted in Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 93.

He joins His people in their grief weeping. In addition, He is overwhelmed with Israel's loyalty to Him even in the face of horrendous evil like the Holocaust. Wiesel does not finish *Ani Maamim* protesting God. Instead, the last verses express the classical Jewish longing for the Messiah:

I believe,

I believe in the coming of the Messiah

Even if He delays,

I will wait for Him on the day that He will come,

I believe.<sup>129</sup>

The cantata *Ani Maamim* shows that Elie Wiesel does not contend that atheism is an alternative in the post-Holocaust era. On the other hand, Wiesel maintains throughout his writings that the flames of Auschwitz made the traditional Jewish concept of God, who is believed to love and care the Jewish people, untenable. While there is, to Wiesel, no religious explanation for the Holocaust, human being has a right to protest God for His silence.

Wiesel might not be an atheist, but he does not sound like a believer either. As Cohn-Sherbok notes, "he repeatedly casts doubts on the traditional Jewish understanding of God."<sup>130</sup> Since he cannot be both at the same, unless he shares the view of "momentary faith" with Greenberg, he needs to clarify his position. Wiesel's protest can be emotional

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<sup>129</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Ani Maamim* (New York: Random House, 1973) as quoted in Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 98-9.

<sup>130</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, "God and the Holocaust," 77.

human reactions to such a horrendous event as the Holocaust. Unless he states that is so, his protest can be easily taken as against the existence of God.

### b. The Death Of God

The Jewish Reform Rabbi Richard L. Rubenstein (1924-) is well known with his radical approach to the Holocaust. In his book, *After Auschwitz* published in 1966, Rubenstein writes that “we live in the time of the death of God.”<sup>131</sup> That is to say that the horrors of the death camps destroyed the traditional Jewish concept of God. Rubenstein’s theological position initially emerges as a result of his interview with Heinrich Grüber, the dean of the Evangelical Church in East and West Berlin. In his interview with Rubenstein, Grüber advocated the biblical notion of God who constantly acts in history. Accordingly, the Holocaust was one of God’s doings. Hitler, like Nebuchadrezzar in ancient times, was only a “rod of God’s anger.”<sup>132</sup> The encounter with Grüber had an impact on the emergence of Rubenstein’s death of God theodicy.

Later Rubenstein came to believe that the problem of the Holocaust is the most crucial challenge to Judaism. In his book *After Auschwitz*, Rubenstein is convinced that Jews cannot believe any more in “an omnipotent, beneficent God” after the Holocaust.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, the biblical theodicy that suffering is God’s punishment because of the sins of Israel, cannot be true in view of the murder of innocent people. In Rubenstein’s words,

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<sup>131</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz:; Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1966), 151 as quoted in Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 309.

<sup>132</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 309.

<sup>133</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 310.



“The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.”<sup>134</sup> It is not possible to see a purpose in the Holocaust.

However, Rubenstein has never accepted being an atheist. He writes, “No man can really say that God is dead. *This is more a statement about man and his culture than about God.*”<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche’s phrase “God is dead,” was, for Rubenstein, the most appropriate term in describing the event of the Holocaust and the post-Holocaust era. In another time and culture, there might have been another phrase conveying the brokenness of God-humankind relationship. As a “religious existentialist” living after Nietzsche and Auschwitz, Rubenstein describes what he means by “the death of God” as follows: “the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?”<sup>136</sup> It can be safely concluded from this assertion that Rubenstein does not affirm the traditional Jewish concept of loving and providential God.

Rubenstein has changed his attitude with the emergence of the State of Israel from existentialism to nature paganism. As described in *Approaches to Auschwitz* (1987), written by Richard Rubenstein and the Christian theologian John Roth, cosmos is the manifestation of God who is “the single unifying and unified Source and Ground.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, Rubenstein expected that after the Holocaust, the Jews who returned to Israel

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<sup>134</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 311.

<sup>135</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 311. The italics are the author’s.

<sup>136</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 311.

<sup>137</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 313.

would revert to the “earth gods of Canaan,” as they did in pre-biblical times. As Dan Cohn-Sherbok explains, “This does not imply that Jews will worship Baal and Astarte, but rather that earth’s fruitfulness, vicissitudes and engendering power will become the central spiritual realities of Jewish life in Israel.”<sup>138</sup> Additionally, Rubenstein’s nature paganism points to the “demonic side” of God. In Rubenstein’s words, “To say that God and nature are at one with each other, that they are alive and life-engendering, is to affirm the demonic side not alone in us but in divinity as well.”<sup>139</sup> After the Holocaust, Rubenstein thought that this was the only plausible alternative left for the Jews.

However, Rubenstein observed that a great number of the Jews in Diaspora did not regard Israel as their home. In addition, the Jews in Israel did not turn to nature paganism contrary to his expectation. They have mainly become secular Jews. Having seen this fact, Rubenstein turned to the mystical view of God that he could subscribe to in the post-Holocaust era.

His new conception of God contains some elements of Buddhism and Hegelian philosophy. Accordingly, Rubenstein designates God as the “Holy Nothingness” who is the source and ground of all that exists. He is the “Nothing” because he is an infinite God who cannot be defined. The reason for that it is called mystical view is that “At times, mystics also spoke of God in similar terms as the *Urgrund*, the primary ground, the dark unnameable abyss out of which the empirical world has come.”<sup>140</sup> Each existence is, on the one hand, detached from, and, on the other hand, attached to divine Ground. While

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<sup>138</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 86

<sup>139</sup> As quoted in Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 87

<sup>140</sup> Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 315-6.

some sees little Jewish characteristic in this reflection, the mystical view of God is, for Rubenstein, the only credible conception of God after Auschwitz.

To conclude, Rubenstein maintains that the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis indicates that the classical Jewish view of providential God is dead. If God had acted in history, as it is taught so by the Jewish tradition, he would have had to intervene at the death camps to save His chosen people. Since He did not do so, the Jews are not expected to affirm a loving and caring God after Auschwitz. As an alternative to the theistic concept of God, Rubenstein first predicted that the Jews would return to nature paganism in the pre-biblical times. When the Jews became secular rather than pagan, he has modified his position and affirmed the mystical view of God. After Auschwitz this is, for Rubenstein, the alternative conception of God as the source and ground of existence.

The rhetoric of Rubenstein does not solve the problem. Although he affirms that “there is a conception of God,” his identification of God with divine nothingness has very little to do with the traditional Judaism. As Cohn-Sherbok states, “To say that God is Divine nothingness merely confuses the issues.”<sup>141</sup> Clearly Rubenstein does not subscribe to the Jewish faith in God. His conception of God is different from the traditional concept. It seems to me that the only sensible answer to the problem of such an excessive suffering as the Holocaust is the eschatological answer. One can suggest a theodicy in order to explain proportioned evils. However, pointless and excessive evils can only find justification when their creator is faced in the hereafter.

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<sup>141</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, “God and the Holocaust,” 80-1.

### III. THE CHRISTIAN THEODICIES

#### G. The Major Responses of the New Testament

The New Testament responses to human suffering in this world throw considerable light on the problem of evil. Even though these explanations do not offer, in a philosophical sense, a complete solution to the problem, they have been, and still are, helpful for Christians in developing a positive attitude towards suffering. In addition, the practical aspect of suffering rather than the theoretical is often thought to be the subject matter of the New Testament.

Donald Guthrie, a contemporary theologian, calls attention to this point, "The ever present problems involved in God's willing suffering for his people are nowhere discussed."<sup>142</sup> This is not because the early Christians were unaware of the problems, but because they must have submitted to the perfection of divine wisdom and will. This was what their faith required from them. In *the First Letter of Peter* 4:19, the Christians who suffer "in accordance with God's will" are urged to "entrust themselves to a faithful Creator."<sup>143</sup> Therefore, the New Testament seems to suggest that there is no suffering in this life contrary to God's will whether this divine will for allowing suffering can be determined or not.

It seems to me that suffering is a more immediate and crucial problem for the New Testament than it is for the Jewish Scriptures and the Qur'ān. The reason for that is

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<sup>142</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, (Illinois and Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 97.

<sup>143</sup> The version of the Christian Bible referred to in this part of the thesis is *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

often seen in the nature of this New Covenant. That is, Christians believe that as the Son of God Jesus Christ's works, suffering and death on the cross are the bases of the New Testament. He had neither home nor family. He travelled exhaustively to spread his message and encountered with bitter hostility quite often. Finally, his earthly life, according to Christian tradition, ended up on the cross in a dramatic manner. Therefore, the New Testament is the first place to look up for an explanation for the suffering and death of Jesus.

Along with the original theme of Jesus' suffering and death, it is possible to find some of the classical Jewish responses to evil in the New Testament. The reason for this may be seen in the historical facts. That is, Christianity initially emerged as a new Jewish sect, and early Christians more or less belonged to the milieu of Jewish culture.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, one immediate problem the writers of the New Testament most likely faced must have been to harmonise the teachings of the Hebrew Bible with the "New Covenant." Additionally, the acceptance of the Jewish sacred writings as the Old Testament must have led them to re-interpret the Jewish ideas in general, of suffering in particular, from the standpoint of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Daniel J. Simundson in his *Faith under Fire* affirms that the major New Testament responses to evil have their roots in the Old Covenant. In that sense, the theme of the suffering servant in Isaiah 40-55 and the eschatological themes in the last part of the Jewish Scriptures seemed to have been the main inspirations for the New Testament

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<sup>144</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 44.

writers on their account of suffering.<sup>145</sup> The prevailing theme in *Isaiah* 40-55 is often seen as redemptive suffering. That is, the servant of God atones the sins of others through his suffering. He suffers on behalf of his community. Moreover, the eschatological literature promises a future state of happiness in response to suffering in this world. This life with its evils is approaching its end, and God's judgement will take place in the hereafter. What is distinctively Christian in this is the Christ-centredness of the majority of the New Testament answers.

Apart from these two main responses, suffering is sometimes seen as God's punishment for human sins. I shall first look into this retributive explanation making its way persistently through the Jewish Scriptures into the New Testament, and later into the Qur'ān.

### **1. Suffering as Retribution**

For centuries Christians believed that this Jewish idea is also reflected in certain New Testament passages. Those who follow the literal understanding of the New Testament generally advocate the view that human suffering is a punishment for sin. However, it appears that some modern Christian scholars tend to deny that the New Testament offers a retributive answer to suffering at all.

For Paul, who was formerly a Pharisee, the justice of God is important. Because the work of Jesus can only be explained in terms of divine justice. Since God is just, then retribution is, for Paul, an inevitable consequence. The story of Ananias and his wife

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<sup>145</sup> Daniel J. Simundson, *Faith under Fire: Biblical Interpretations of Suffering*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 123.

Sapphira in *Acts* 5:1-11 is, for instance, taken to be a typical example of the retributive suffering. The sudden death of these people is understood by the author of the *Acts* as punishment for their transgressions. Since Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter the apostle about the proceeds of their land they kept back, they fell down and died in front of Peter for violating a principle of the Church. Therefore, their death was considered as divine punishment for their lies. Simundson points out<sup>146</sup> that there is a similarity between the death of these two people and the death of Jeremiah's adversary, Hananiah, in the Old Testament. Hananiah, too, was struck with death since he "urged disloyalty to the Lord" (*Jeremiah* 28-15-17). It is a traditional conviction that in both instances death was inflicted as a punishment for the wickedness of the people in question.

The theme of the wrath of God in the New Testament is seen as an expression of retributive judgement of God. Paul talks about divine wrath manifesting itself in the world (*Rom.* 1:18-32 and *1 Thes.* 2:16) as well as in the hereafter (*Rom.* 2:5, 8 and *1 Thes.* 5:9). Stephen H. Travis, a British Christian theologian, in his *Christ and the Judgment of God* maintains that Paul uses the term the wrath of God in both a personal and impersonal sense, and that divine wrath is manifested for unbelievers, never for Christians.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973), a Welsh biblical scholar, takes the view that the term is used in an impersonal sense. Dodd argues that Paul "retains the concept of 'the wrath of God'...not to describe the attitude of God to man, but

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<sup>146</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 125.

<sup>147</sup> S. H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament*, (Basingtone, Hants: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd., 1986), 31.

to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe.”<sup>148</sup> While Travis believes that God reveals the wrath personally as punishment for infidelity, Dodd seems to suggest that the universe has moral laws as well as natural laws operating on the grounds of cause and effect. Whether the wrath of God is personal or impersonal does not make much difference in terms of God’s responsibility. Because either way He is accountable for His actions, no one else.

—The Jewish idea of sickness as a punishment for sin seems to be echoed also in the New Testament. In *1 Corinthians* 11:27-30 Paul attributes the weakness, illness and death of the congregation at Corinth to their “unworthy manner” in their observation of the Lord’s Supper. In addition, Jesus’ miracles of healing are occasionally referred to in support of the idea that illness is a penalty for sin. *Luke* 5:17-26 reports that Jesus heals a paralysed man by forgiving his sins as if the sickness is the requital of sin.<sup>149</sup> John Ferguson, a contemporary scholar of religion, interprets Jesus’ pronouncement of the forgiveness here as “the demonstration to the watching scribes and Pharisees *on their own terms*<sup>150</sup> that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins.”<sup>151</sup> Simundson, on the other hand, suggests that Jesus’ saying may be understood in “a symbolic way” in the light of Genesis 3.<sup>152</sup> That is to say, since suffering and death is thought to have come into this world as a result of the original sin, human suffering and death can also be seen as the

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<sup>148</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, (London: Hodder, 1932), 23 as quoted in Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God*, 32.

<sup>149</sup> cf. Mark 2:1-12 and Matthew 9:1-8.

<sup>150</sup> Italics belong to Ferguson.

<sup>151</sup> J. Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering*, (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1972), 82.

<sup>152</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 127.



natural consequence of this. In this context, it was the purpose of Jesus to remove the guilt and to bring salvation to humankind. Thus, Jesus' forgiveness of the paralytic's sins is nothing else than the annulment of the original sin.

On the other hand, *Luke* 13:1-5 appears to renounce the idea of retributive suffering, at least in the case of Galileans suffering under Pilate and those who were killed under the tower of Siloam. Jesus says, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? No, I tell you" (*Luke* 13:2-3). Commenting on the same text, Schmid, however, contends that "when Jesus encounters special cases of misfortune he sees in them on the one hand punishment that is deserved, on the other a warning to others."<sup>153</sup> While suffering of Galileans and of the victims of the tower of Siloam is punishment, these disasters are, on the other hand, warning to the rest of the community. Because Jesus finishes the passage with a warning, "unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did" (*Luke* 13:5).

Brian Hebblethwaite, a contemporary Christian philosopher, talking of *Luke* 13:4, maintains that Jesus "explicitly" rejected the Jewish view of suffering as a punishment for sin. The striking example is that Christ warns the disciples not to assume that the people of Siloam were exceptionally sinful.<sup>154</sup> Simundson, too, denies the existence of "deserved suffering" in this life. He writes, "These unfortunate persons who got in the way of Pilate or the Siloam tower were not worse sinners than anyone else."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Josef Schmid, "Suffering: Later Judaism and the New Testament," *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Johannes B. Bauer (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 894.

<sup>154</sup> Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 49.

<sup>155</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 127.

In addition, Simundson takes Jesus' urge to repent in eschatological sense. That is to say, humankind will see the result of what they have done in the future.

*John 9:1-3* is also a significant passage in which Jesus explicitly rejects the idea of retributive suffering in the case of a blind man. The disciples of Jesus enquire about the reason for blindness of the man: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (*John 9:2*). Jesus replies, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (*John 9:3*).

This passage is important for three reasons. Firstly, it suggests that the disciples of Jesus must have held the retributive explanation of suffering previously. They sounded certain that blindness was a punishment for sin, but they were not sure whether it was his or his ancestors' sins. Secondly, Jesus seems to deny the view that suffering is a punishment of sin. However, this does not necessarily mean that he rejected the retributive suffering completely. Thirdly, Jesus proclaims that his blindness is "an opportunity for God's glory to be seen."<sup>156</sup> Characteristically, the Gospel of John affirms that afflictions including Jesus' suffering and crucifixion are an occasion for glorification of God.

This last point is also reiterated in *John 11:4* concerning the illness of Lazarus. When Jesus is informed that Lazarus is ill, he says, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory. So that the Son of God may be glorified through it." As is seen here, the New Testament's interest is clearly directed towards suffering as the

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<sup>156</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 128.

opportunity of glorifying God.<sup>157</sup> This seems to be a relatively comforting. The reason for that is that this account offers consolation only if it is you who are chosen for the manifestation of the glory of God. Otherwise, it does not solve the problem if it does not make it worse. Why some are worthy of his glorification, the others are not? Does that mean that who suffers is more deserved than the one who escapes that fate? Obviously, it is not to correct to assume that a good and just God could choose some of His creation over others without any reason.

The majority of modern biblical scholars seem to think that the New Testament does not affirm a retributive explanation. How could the God of love inflict pain and suffering on his creation even for their sins? Did He not know beforehand that human beings would sin if He created them? Why did He, then, create them? In order to punish? God cannot be thought as a sadist who enjoys inflicting pain, and human beings as His plaything. In addition, even if we assume that the idea of suffering as a punishment adopted by the authors of the New Testament, it does not seem to be adequate as an overall explanation because not all sinful people are punished and indeed the wicked often prosper. Perhaps the only positive side of this explanation may be that the faithful conscious of the retributive explanation might evaluate his or her attitudes in the case of suffering and then correct them. Although the retributive theory may to a degree make sense from human standpoint, it seems not from the viewpoint of God.

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<sup>157</sup> Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering*,. 82.

## 2. Suffering as Discipline and Test

It is also possible to find in the New Testament the Jewish view of suffering as a means of discipline (*Heb.* 12:3-13; *Rev.* 3:19; *Jas.* 1:2-4,12) or test (*Rom.* 5:3f; *1 Pet.* 1:7). The notion of suffering as a test of faith is sometimes seen as a supplement for the inadequate explanation of the retributive suffering.<sup>158</sup> The faithful is tried for their commitments, and is asked to prove how sincere he or she is. It is believed that this is not something to be upset with. On the contrary, the Christians must rejoice over their suffering (*Jas.* 1:2-4; *1 Pet.* 1:6).<sup>159</sup> It appears that this view helped the early Christian martyrs to deal with their suffering particularly in the second century. Paul develops this theme further. Suffering is good because “it produces endurance, character, and hope (*Rom.* 5:3-5).”<sup>160</sup> This explanation can also be seen in Peter. He thinks that some suffering is a test, “a fiery ordeal” (4:12). “A faith which has stood the test of suffering is like gold which has been refined in the fire (1:6-7). Peter does not say that God sends suffering in order to test us, but that suffering is among the circumstances of life, and does in fact provide a testing-ground.”<sup>161</sup> In the letter to Hebrews, it is implied that human beings need suffering for their well-being. Limited amount of suffering may help people to develop good traits such as sympathy for others and endurance (12:7-11; see also 5:7-9). Its author applies this notion even to Jesus’ suffering. He says, “he learned obedience in the school of suffering” (2:10).

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<sup>158</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 49.

<sup>159</sup> Schmid, “Suffering: Later Judaism and the New Testament,” 895.

<sup>160</sup> Green, “Theodicy,” 436.

<sup>161</sup> Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering*, 93.

Moreover, the beatitude passages of New Testament preserved in *Matthew 5:3-12* and *Luke 6:20-23* seem to suggest that suffering is a “special comfort” from Jesus to the sufferer who is aware of the value of his suffering. According to Guthrie, the beatitudes are not general ethical principles, but they are special ethical teachings for “who are willing to accept the discipline of discipleship.”<sup>162</sup> Therefore, suffering is a valuable beatitude. *Matthew 5:3-12* declares that the prosperous, strong, healthy are not blessed. The blessed are the poor, the mourners, the meek, the hungry, and those who are being persecuted for a righteous cause. *Luke 6:20-26* also pronounces the same point even more clearly. If one considers the first centuries of Christianity, this explanation makes more sense. That is to say, the first Christians were under constant threat, and were subjected to suffering more than anyone else. Therefore, the suffering that the faithful endured for his or her faith is blessedness from God testifying to his or her sincerity in faith.

### **3. Suffering as Redemption**

A weighty answer to human suffering in the New Testament is that the suffering of the righteous can redeem the sins of others. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines the word redemption (*redemptio* in Latin) as an act of buying back, saving a person’s life or freedom by ransom. In theological parlance, redemption comes to mean human deliverance from sin and damnation. This does not seem to be a prevailing view in the Jewish Scriptures even though one can see some allusions to it in *Isaiah 40-55*. However, it is these passages that apparently inspired the writers of the New Testament in

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<sup>162</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 899.

understanding the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the redemptive theory is also extended to all the suffering redeeming any individual as well as community from sin.

The writers of the New Testament depict that Jesus knew that he would suffer and that his suffering is purposeful. We learn from the biblical passages called the "Passion predictions" that Jesus was aware of the course of his life taking him to the cross. He prophesises that one of the Twelve in the Last Supper would betray him (*Mark* 14:17-21, *Matt.* 26:20-4 and *Luke* 22:14-22). According to *John* 13:18, Jesus himself chose Judas in order that his betrayal can fulfil *Psalms* 41:9, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." Furthermore, Jesus conquered suffering in his life many times as he did in his crucifixion with the resurrection. As it is recorded in the New Testament, Jesus healed many sick through his power and authority.<sup>163</sup>

The suffering of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross was as perplexing for the first Christians as for the Jews. According to the Jewish expectations then, the Messiah was supposed to usher a new age and to destroy suffering and injustices forever. In contrast to the Jewish expectations, Jesus had come as a humble person, endured the sufferings of many kinds and, finally, died on the cross, apparently without bringing the New World promised. With the exception of the Docetics,<sup>164</sup> the mainstream Christianity through the ages has understood the New Testament accounts of Jesus' suffering and

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<sup>163</sup> Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 46-8.

<sup>164</sup> Docetics (Phantomists in English) were an early Gnostic group that believed that Jesus was divine only, and that his suffering, death and resurrection were mere illusion. See, W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press, 1980), 134.

death in the way that they were genuine, not an illusion.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, it was a very difficult challenge for the early Christians to face the Jews and others who made mockery of Jesus and his crucifixion. This challenge led the followers of the Jesus to develop what Simundson calls the “theology of the church.”<sup>166</sup> There had to be an explanation for Jesus’ suffering and death.

First of all, Jesus corrects the misconception that the Messiah would not suffer. In *Luke 24:26*, the apparition of Jesus after his crucifixion rebukes the travellers to Emmaus with not believing what the prophet said: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Peter also has the same view, “In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that His Messiah would suffer” (*Acts 3:18*). If the Messiah would suffer as foretold, for what purpose would it be? The answer to this question is explicitly given in *John 3:16* as follows: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Commenting on *John 3:16*, Marilyn McCord Adams, a contemporary Christian philosopher of religion, writes, “God was so eager to win our love that he became incarnate and volunteered for martyrdom himself.”<sup>167</sup> Therefore, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was no accident, but it was for a purpose. Christ died in order to redeem human beings.

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<sup>165</sup> Ferguson, *The Place of Suffering*, 80.

<sup>166</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 130.

<sup>167</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, “Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil,” in R. Audi and W. Wainwright, *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 259.

A similar thought finds its expression especially in the writings of Jürgen Moltmann. Since it is regarded as closely connected with the biblical teaching, I shall briefly mention the idea of the suffering of God here. Moltmann argues that God suffers with human beings, and the death of Jesus on the cross is the beginning of “the Trinitarian history of the suffering of God.” What happened on the cross was that God suffered for the sins and afflictions of humankind. In this sense, the suffering of Christ is divine expression of sorrow for the whole human suffering. Moltmann writes, “There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death in the history on Golgotha.”<sup>168</sup>

How can the idea of the suffering of God offer a solution to the problem of evil? It has been argued that in order to succeed, the Free-Will Explanation needs the “affirmation that God suffers.”<sup>169</sup> It is not enough to say that God limits himself by creating free creatures. “He should also limit himself by sharing that suffering.”<sup>170</sup> Only by this way it makes sense to talk about the free-will as a cause of suffering. In order to give chance to human beings, God has limited himself; as a result he has chosen to suffer for the sufferings of humankind.

The closest parallel to this New Testament conception from the Jewish Scriptures is, as mentioned above, the Suffering Servant passages in *Isaiah* 40-55, particularly the Servant Songs, and especially *Isaiah* 53. As the Suffering Servant in

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<sup>168</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *the Crucified God*, 255 as quoted in Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 6.

<sup>169</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 33.

<sup>170</sup> Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 33.



*Isaiah* 40-55, Jesus, too, suffered for the redemption and salvation of humanity. *Mark* 10:45 and *Luke* 22:17 talk about Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God who suffers and dies vicariously for the sake of others. Later in Christian history, different theories of atonement have been formulated to explain this view intellectually. In essence, Jesus' suffering and death on the cross was the redemptive work of God for the sake of human beings.<sup>171</sup> God incarnate entered into human dimension, and took suffering and death of humanity upon himself in order to show that He cares and loves His children.

In some other passages in the New Testament, suffering is seen as a prerequisite to taking up the responsibility to spread the gospel and following the example of Jesus Christ. This is aimed at saving the rest of humankind. Here suffering is not a punishment for sins, but it is "a direct consequence of bringing the message of Christ to a sinful world."<sup>172</sup> Jesus tells his disciples "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (*Matt.* 16:24-25; cf. *Luke* 9:23-24). In the words of Schmid, "just as suffering belongs to Jesus' own fate, so too it belongs to the life of his disciples."<sup>173</sup>

In *Matthew* 10:16-23, Jesus also heralds that suffering and persecution may visit them during their mission of spreading the Good News. Taking up the cross after Jesus, as a result, will bring hatred, suffering or, even in some cases, death (*Mark* 13:1-13). Therefore, suffering is a natural consequence of spreading Jesus' message, which the

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<sup>171</sup> Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 39.

<sup>172</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 131.

<sup>173</sup> Schmid, "Suffering: Later Judaism and the New Testament," 894.

established authority must have seen a threat to its existence. In this sense suffering and martyrdom are not something to be shun, but something to be rejoiced (*Col.* 1:24).

In *2 Corinthians* 11:23-12:10, Paul boasts with the kinds of sufferings he was subjected to for the cause of Christ, and urges his followers to do so. He concludes, "Therefore, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (*2 Cor.* 12:10). It is, for Paul, a privilege to have the opportunity to suffer for Jesus Christ, and others are advised to do the same (1:29-30). In this sense, his sufferings are, Paul believes, "the suffering of Christ" (*2 Cor.* 1:5; *Phil.* 3:10; *Col.* 1:24).<sup>174</sup> As Ronald Green points out, "The emphasis on Christ's fellow-suffering is a constant theme in Paul's letters."<sup>175</sup> In a similar manner, Paul writes in *the Letter to the Philippians* 1:12-14 that his experience of suffering in prison has been useful in helping others and in spreading the gospel.

This is the dominant explanation for the meaning of suffering in the New Testament. It must have been comforting for the early Christians who were subjected to physical and mental torture for what they believed. However, "most of our sufferings, as unlike those of first century Christians," as Simundson rightly points out, "have nothing to do with our commitment to the faith."<sup>176</sup> Consequently, the idea of suffering as redemption does not seem to offer any convincing answer to the unexpected afflictions that shattered the lives of ordinary people.

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<sup>174</sup> The same advice is reiterated in *2 Timothy*, *Hebrew* 12, and also *1 Peter* 2.

<sup>175</sup> Ronald M. Green, "Theodicy," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade, 14, 436.

<sup>176</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 132.

#### 4. The Eschatological Resolution

The Jewish idea of life after death emerged towards the end of the Old Testament period when there was a great deal of suffering and death. This form of explanation is seen as an extension of the idea of divine retribution. The emphasis here is on a future state, not on present. A time will come in which all the injustices and sufferings experienced in this life will be recompensed, and there will be no more evil. In addition, those who escape God's judgement in this world will be chastened in the life to come.

In *Luke* 18:28-9, Peter seeks a confirmation from Jesus that the hardships he and the other apostles undergo for the sake of Jesus are not in vain. Jesus responds, "there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life." Here Jesus promises in general terms reward in this life and in the hereafter in return for suffering.

The Book of Revelation, for instance, suggests that God has the right to judge human beings in the Judgement Day. "Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail" (*Rev.* 1:7). Therefore, God is thought to have the rights and the means to reward the righteous and to punish the wicked in the life to come. Those who are suffering innocently in this world will get their rewards and the prosperous wicked will be chastised in the next life.

In addition, there is the expectation of "face-to-face" encounter with God in the hereafter. Those who believe will rejoice in this overwhelming experience. For Paul, this

intimacy with the glory of God is so priceless so that suffering loses its significance. He writes, "I consider that sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (*Rom. 8:18*). Therefore, suffering is the price one must pay in this world to know and see God in the afterlife. Considering the value he or she will get at the end of the day, suffering is worth paying for.

Simundson suggests that there are basically two slightly different conceptions at work in the New Testament. Some passages like Matthew and Revelation emphasise that human willingness to obey God's will is the criterion on which individuals will be judged. The other texts like Paul and John see that faith in Jesus is the only hope humanity has. While the former requires good deeds, the latter focuses on God's grace.<sup>177</sup> The former passages in the New Testament suggest that there will be a judgement day in which people will see the result of what they have done in this world. Among these texts are *Matthew 5:17-20, 6:3-4, and 7:21-24*. The book of *Revelation* in 29:13-15, 22:12 too clearly reiterates the same view.

The latter view, namely, justification by faith in Jesus, is advocated by Paul *Romans 2:1-11; 3:1-23* and *John 3:36; 12:44-50*. Accordingly, they affirm that salvation is not by deeds but by faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus will have no fear in the day of judgement. Simundson thinks that the eschatological answers also raise many theological questions. For instance, the sufferer may need to be assured that he or she is one of those on whom God bestows his grace. In order that life after death can be a solution to human suffering, Simundson argues, "We need God's assurance, through his

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<sup>177</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 135.

Son, that our sins are forgiven and we do not have to fear either death or what comes after.”<sup>178</sup>

Although this explanation comforts the sufferer in the midst of suffering, the possibility of suffering in the hereafter as well as in this world makes it problematic. In Simundson’s words, “If there is a hell, then someone is probably going to be sent there, and since no one is perfect, we are all in danger of burning in an eternal fire.”<sup>179</sup> This idea can be clearly seen in the book of *Revelation* 20:12-15.

John Hick argues, the warnings of Jesus in the gospels about the danger of eternal condemnation are ‘existential’ statements, designed not to propound a theological theory but to urge his hearers to change the direction of their lives. Jesus was warning of the real danger that anyone who does not repent will come to total misery, “But it does not follow from the fact of this danger that you or I or anyone else is in fact never going to repent and be saved.”<sup>180</sup>

One eschatological answer that is peculiar to Christian tradition is the vindication of suffering by Jesus Christ in his second coming to the world. The early Christians expected that Jesus would return immediately after his resurrection and make the wrong right in the world. This eschatological anticipation is prevalent in *Revelation*, *Matthew* 24, *Mark* 13, and *Luke* 21. The suffering of the faithful is one of the signs of the

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<sup>178</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 137.

<sup>179</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 134.

<sup>180</sup> Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 250. See the whole chapter, 242-261.

Second Coming of Jesus. In the words of Simundson, “the more we suffer the closer we are to final deliverance.”<sup>181</sup>

Surely, this must have been comforting to the early Christians in dealing with their suffering. However, it is not the case today. Most of the Christians today do not think that the Second Coming of Jesus is close, and they also believe that humankind will reach the perfect state in the hereafter, not in this world. Simundson's final remarks are, “Perhaps if things get bad enough (air pollution, no more oil, terrorism, corrupt politicians, declining morality, and so on), we may have more and more people finding comfort again in this apocalyptic vision of the final days.”<sup>182</sup>

To sum up, the foundation of the New Testament answers to the problem of suffering lies in the works, suffering, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he conquered suffering in this world, Christians, too, can defeat suffering and evil forces through imitating him. The relationship with Christ is the door to the conquest of evil in this world as well as in the hereafter. A Christian in Christ may feel fulfilled and happy even in the midst of afflictions. After death, he or she expects to realise the ultimate unity with God through Jesus' redemptive work. Considering this whole picture presented in the New Testament, the Christian can endure his or her suffering even rejoice with hope.

From a religious standpoint, the scriptural answers provide a great deal of comfort and hope for the believer in the midst of their afflictions. The sufferer knows that God is with him or her because he or she believes in Christ. The person compassionately

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<sup>181</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 137.

<sup>182</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 138.

waits to unite with God. Although the religious account of suffering may be satisfactory in practical terms for a Christian, it is difficult for someone outside the Christian tradition to find an ultimate solution to the problem of evil in the New Testament.

In philosophical terms, however, the New Testament responses to human suffering do not offer a fully satisfactory explanation. Strictly speaking, neither the retributive theory nor the redemptive account of suffering nor the others seems to solve the problem of suffering adequately. This is because the New Testament does not seek to justify God in the face of evil. The New Testament is not a book of systematic theology. That is not the aim of the writers of the New Testament. They appear to have submitted God's infinite wisdom and good will. That is the true attitude expected from the faithful.

## **H. The Christian Theological And Philosophical Theodicies**

The seeming inconsistency between the belief in God and the reality of evil has puzzled the minds of the New Testament writers and subsequent Christian scholars throughout ages as their Jewish predecessors did. As we have seen in the previous section, the New Testament emphasis like Tanakh is to a great extent on the practical aspect of suffering. For the New Testament in general is the story of Christ's life and death on the cross.

The responses to the problem of evil offered by Christian theologians and philosophers are often classified in terms of traditional theodicies and modern theodicies. John Hick in his influential book *Evil and the God of Love* traces two major theodicies within Christian tradition; namely, the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy. In modern times, Christian theologians and philosophers have followed one of these two

great traditions in essence while putting emphasis usually on particular problems. As a result, the responses to evil have come to be known in modern times with the names indicating the theoretical explanation offered such as the Soul-Making Theodicy or Process Theodicy.

Since I am exploring here the Christian attempts at a solution to the problem of evil, it appears to be more appropriate and convenient to limit myself with the major responses traditional as well as modern. The Traditional Christian theodicies to be explored in this chapter are the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy. Under the heading of the Modern Theodicies, I shall focus on four significant theodicies and defences: Process Theodicy, the Free-Will Defence, the Natural Law Theodicy, and the Soul-Making Theodicy. Let me start with the traditional theodicies, and first of all with the Augustinian Theodicy.

## **1. The Traditional Theodicies**

### **a. The Augustinian Theodicy**

Augustine (354-430), the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, is usually regarded as the first Christian theologian and philosopher who formulated a fully developed Christian theodicy. The Augustinian approach has been one of the most, if not the most, influential response to the problem of evil in the entire Christian history. Hence, Charles Journet, a contemporary Thomist-Catholic theologian, describes Augustine as “the Doctor of the problem of evil.”<sup>183</sup> Indeed, the Augustinian Theodicy has been continuously inspiring

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<sup>183</sup> Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Evil*, trans. by Michael Barry, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), 34.



the Christian theologians and philosophers, mainly from the Catholic, Thomist and Calvinist circles of academia, throughout the Christian era.

Augustine was persistently concerned with the nature and source of evil from the beginning of his intellectual life. Even prior to his conversion to Christianity, he had found hard to believe that God was responsible for the evils of the world. Instead Augustine the Manichee preferred to believe that there was a cosmic principle of evil in fight with the power of good.<sup>184</sup> Manichaean dualism, founded by Mani (217-c. 277), held that there was a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, namely, “the Father of Light,” God, and “the Principle of Darkness,” the Devil. This conflict brought about the creation of the evil material world in which good was trapped by darkness.<sup>185</sup> Augustine is believed to have followed the Manichaean dualism until he converted to Christianity.

We understand from one of his principal works, namely, *Confessions*, that Augustine’s trouble with the question as to the source of evil continued even after he became a Christian. Although he preserved his old belief that God would not be a malevolent deity, yet he still could not understand “readily and clearly what was the cause of evil.”<sup>186</sup> Eventually, he came to believe that evil is the privation of good since the creation is good as the manifestation of God’s goodness. Another notable characteristic of the Augustinian Theodicy is the aesthetic concept of evil. That is to say,

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<sup>184</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.10. The quotations from the Church Fathers at the rest of the work are taken, unless specified, from Maged N. Kamel (ed.), *The Early Church Fathers Series*, /, 1996.

<sup>185</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1995), 223.

<sup>186</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 7. 3.

evil is a necessary component of the good creation in its totality. Following Augustine's order of the investigation,<sup>187</sup> I shall explore the Augustinian Theodicy starting from the nature of evil first, and then the source of evil.

Augustine describes evil as privation of good, *privatio boni* if I may cite the Latin expression he often uses. Evil is a corruption, a loss, a lack, an absence and the like. In his celebrated book the *City of God*, Augustine describes his theory of privation as follows: "evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name 'evil'."<sup>188</sup> Hence, evil is and has not independent existence in contrast to good, which the latter has alone actual entity, and is only nature.

In terms of its origin, it is suggested that Augustine's privative theory is either "adapted" from Plotinus<sup>189</sup> or is adopted from the Christian Platonist theologians such as Ambrose, who was the mentor of Augustine.<sup>190</sup> I think it is safe to say for our purposes here that whether Augustine borrowed directly from the writings of Plotinus or from the Christian Platonists is in a sense irrelevant because the privative theory is Plotinian in origin. According to Augustine, nature is good, and good is nature. This is also consistent with the biblical doctrine of creation that God himself described what He has made as "good" in Genesis 3. On the other hand, evil is corruption, and so corruption is not nature; more precisely it is corrupted nature. That is to say, there is no such a substantial

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<sup>187</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans*, ch. 4.

<sup>188</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 11. 9.

<sup>189</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 52.

<sup>190</sup> Rowan A. Greer, "Augustine's Transformation of the Free Will Defence," *Faith and Philosophy*, 13, no. 4, October 1996, 471.

being or entity as evil, but only “degrees of good”.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, a being, however imperfect it is, is good, not evil, as long as it remains an entity.

Augustine affirms that “measure,” “form” and “order” are the three basic characteristics of nature or being. Thus, evil consists in the privation or corruption of “either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature.”<sup>192</sup> The conventional language of humankind may have different names for different kinds of evils in the world; but they are, at the bottom-line, the corruption of good. Augustine illustrates this point as follows: “the corruption of health is pain and disease; the corruption of strength is exhaustion; the corruption of rest is toil.”<sup>193</sup> In other words, health is good or nature, sickness of any kind is evil, a corrupted nature.

If only good is from God, what is the source of evil in the universe then? God cannot possibly create an incorruptible being since this means the creation of the second deity by God, which is contradictory by definition. According to Augustine, since God created the universe out of nothing, nature has tendency towards nothingness. Therefore, the possibility for privation or corruption is an innate feature of nature.<sup>194</sup> This is even true for the highest level of created beings such as the human souls and angels. As nature cannot be supremely and immutably good, it cannot be wholly evil as well. For the complete disappearance of goodness signifies the termination of being.

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<sup>191</sup> Michael Haren, *Medieval Thought: The Western Intellectual Tradition from Antiquity to the Thirteenth Century*, Second Edition, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1992), 51.

<sup>192</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans*, ch. 4.

<sup>193</sup> Augustine, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental*, ch. 35.

<sup>194</sup> Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans*, ch. 10.

Having explained the nature of evil as privation, Augustine focuses on the question whence comes evil. What is the cause of the privation or corruption of being? Following the biblical teaching, Augustine holds that evil is brought into the world through the sin committed by free agents, namely the original sin. Before the original sin, there was no evil in the universe. As God's creation is good, evil was initially introduced into the universe through the misuse of free-will firstly by rebellious angels and then by human ancestors, namely Adam and Eve. In Augustine's words, "the only cause of evil is the failing away from the unchangeable good of a being made good but changeable, first in the case of an angel, and afterwards in the case of man."<sup>195</sup>

Evil in the world was originated from the "turning away" of the fallen angels and then Adam and Eve from God, the highest good, to themselves.<sup>196</sup> This brought about the "falling away" from God of the angels and human beings in question respectively. Augustine contends that the cause of evil willing is not an "efficient cause" in Aristotelian terms, but it is a "deficient cause." That is to say, there is no external cause that brings about the evil will in person's mind, but only a deficiency. For Augustine, in John Hick's words,

"evil willing is a self-originating act, and is as such not explicable in terms of causes that are distinguishable from the agent himself. Thus the origin of evil lies for ever hidden within the mystery of finite freedom; for 'what cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing?'"<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 23.

<sup>196</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 12. 6.

<sup>197</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 66-7.

In this sense, the first sins were not positive in nature since evil was only privation. What constituted the privation of good was the will of turning away from God rather than submitting to divine will, which was good.

As Adam and Eve sinned with their free-will, human beings now have to bear the consequences of their sin. Because the original sin corrupted the original perfection of human beings prior to the Fall. Consequently, Adam's progeny have inherited the corrupt sinful nature from their ancestors, and deserved to be punished in this world and in the hereafter. According to Augustine, "there are two kinds of evil, sin and the penalty of sin."<sup>198</sup> While the former is brought about by human free-will, the latter pertains to "the avenger," the just God. Therefore, the original sin of Adam and Eve generated the suffering and other states of evil affairs in the world affecting the following generations of humankind. In short, according to the Augustinian Theodicy, suffering and death of humankind are God's punishment for sin.

Therefore, Augustine does not believe that eternal damnation of some is a threat to God's goodness and justice. He says that "the whole human race was condemned in its apostate head by a divine judgment so just that not even if a single member of the race were ever saved from it (*sic*), no one could rail against God's justice."<sup>199</sup> He goes as far as to content that God's condemnation of infants who dies in infancy is possible as "they

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<sup>198</sup> Augustine, *Acts or Disputation Against Fortunatus, The Manichaeon*, 15.

<sup>199</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 25.

are all drawn from a corrupt mass.”<sup>200</sup> In this sense, Augustine conception of divine love is limited with a part of humankind. The rest is justly condemned to hell forever.

The last major theme of the Augustinian Theodicy that I shall explore here is the aesthetic notion of evil. Augustine asserts that the universe is perfect in its totality when it is seen from God’s standpoint. Although we describe some parts of the universe as imperfect, it is perfect as a whole. Augustine explains, “God, in whom are all things, to whom nevertheless neither the vileness of any creature is vile, nor its wickedness harmful, nor its error erroneous.”<sup>201</sup> What is evil from a limited position is the necessary constituent of the perfect and beautiful universe in its totality from God’s viewpoint.

Augustine utilises the aesthetic theme in explaining the place of sin in the universe as well. Accordingly, the universe that contains sin and its punishment from God’s viewpoint is a better universe than the one in which there is neither of them. Augustine’s states, “Since there is happiness for those who do not sin, the universe is perfect; and it is no less perfect because there is misery or sinners.”<sup>202</sup> It is because God sustains the moral order of the universe with the infliction of just punishment. In Augustine’s own words, “the penalty of sin corrects the dishonour of sin.”<sup>203</sup> This does not mean that Augustine sees sin as a necessary component of the perfect universe. In fact, it is an undesired by-product of the necessary human quality; that is, free-will.

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<sup>200</sup> Thomas Talbot, “The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 7, no. 1, January 1990, 22.

<sup>201</sup> Augustine, *Two Books Of Soliloquies*, 1. 2.

<sup>202</sup> Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3. 9. 26-27.

<sup>203</sup> Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3. 9. 26.

The basis of Augustine's aesthetic conception of evil is often seen in the Neo-Platonic idea of which the modern American philosopher Arthur Lovejoy (1873-1962) calls "the principle of plenitude."<sup>204</sup> Plotinus originally depicted the creation as a series of emanation flowing out from "the First-Good" like light radiating from the sun. The unconscious emanation of the One actualises every possibilities of existence until it exhausts and comes to the border of non-being. Augustine replaces Plotinus' idea of the unconscious emanation of the One, or the First, with the biblical doctrine of creation as "conscious divine volition."<sup>205</sup>

On the other hand, Augustine deploys the Plotinian principle of plenitude in explaining the universe with its hierarchical structure from higher nature such as archangels to lower nature.<sup>206</sup> Accordingly, there is no evil being but lesser goods in comparison to higher goods. The universe with lesser goods as well as higher goods is a better universe from the one that only has the highest nature of creatures. It is because the variety and abundance in creation is the manifestation of the perfect Creator. For Augustine, the desire to add a quality to a higher being already perfect is tantamount to injustice, and to terminate the less good is "wicked and grudging."<sup>207</sup> Therefore, every being, regardless of their lesser or higher nature, is good so long as the order of the universe is not disturbed. The Augustinian Theodicy has remained as the most influential Christian answer to the problem of evil throughout ages. As John Hick rightly notes,

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<sup>204</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 78.

<sup>205</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 82.

<sup>206</sup> See, for Augustine's basic classification of being, Augustine, *the City of God*, 11. 16.

<sup>207</sup> Hick, *Evil and the Love of God*, 51.

“Augustine’s theodicy has continued substantially unchanged with the Roman Catholic Church to the present day. It was adopted also by the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century and has been virtually unquestioned as Protestant doctrine until within approximately the last 100 years.”<sup>208</sup>

Two modern Augustinian theodacists Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) and Brian Davies point<sup>209</sup> that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) adopts an Augustinian approach to the problem of evil. Aquinas does, as Augustine does, affirm that evil is the deprivation or defect of a good. Since only being or nature is good, evil is not being or a property of being.<sup>210</sup> However, this does not mean that there is no evil occurrences in the world. It exists as a subjective conception, but not as an objective fact. That is, no being is evil in itself, but by reason of its relation to other things. For instance, while mental deficiency is evil for human beings as the deprivation of rationality; it is not so for subordinal creatures such as plants because rationality is not the latter’s property. All things are, therefore, in themselves good, and evil is a defect of good. Evil in itself is not a cause. It can, according to Aquinas, only operate through the good of which it is a deprivation.<sup>211</sup> That is to say, evil emerges out of good only incidentally or through some defection in being. Therefore, God is not responsible for evil, which is something non-being in origin.

According to Aquinas, there are two kinds of evil in the universe. One has its essential features in “the loss of a form or part required for a thing’s integrity.” The other

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<sup>208</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 246.

<sup>209</sup> See, for their exposition of Aquinas’ treatment of evil, B. Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and J. Maritain, *Saint Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942).

<sup>210</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p. I, Q. 48, art. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 9, 10.

<sup>211</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, iii. 10.



is “the evil of withdrawal in activity that is due, either by its omission or by its malfunctioning according to manner and measure.”<sup>212</sup> Brian Davies, a contemporary Dominican Friar, translates from Aquinas the first one as “evil suffered,” Jacques Maritain prefers to call it “evil of action.”<sup>213</sup> In modern discussions of evil, the first one is, as Davies points, commonly named “natural evil,” the latter “moral evil.”

As a response to natural evil, Aquinas, following Augustine, offers the aesthetic conception of the universe. He believes that the creation is the manifestation of God’s goodness. He, further, writes “because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the Divine goodness might be supplied by another.”<sup>214</sup> Therefore, one has to be less good, not evil, than another. According to Aquinas, this universe in its totality is a perfect one even though we see some imperfections in particular things. He argues, “God could make other things, or add something to the present creation; and then there would be another and a better universe.”<sup>215</sup> However, that would destroy the order and balance in this universe. Therefore, this universe in its totality is perfect with its variety and diversity, with its rational and subordinal creatures.

Another cause of natural evil is that a particular goodness desired might accidentally bring about an evil suffered. Since God does not create evil, when he causes a good, that may stand in the way of another good resulting with the emergence of evil.

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<sup>212</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 48. 5 as quoted in Davies, *the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 92.

<sup>213</sup> Davies, *the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 92 and Maritain, *Saint Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, 20.

<sup>214</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 47. 1 as quoted in Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 101.

<sup>215</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 25. 6, as quoted in Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 101.

In Aquinas' words, "in causing the common good of the ordered universe, he causes loss in particular things as a consequence and, as it were, indirectly."<sup>216</sup> For instance, while it is good for a lion to hunt and eat a hare, it is certainly evil for the hare. Therefore, God is not the cause of evil, but it occurs accidentally from the clash with other goods.

Concerning to moral evil, Aquinas refers to the idea of evil as absence of good. While natural evil arises out of nature, which is good, as its depravation or defect, moral evil ensues from, Aquinas writes, "an actually deficient will, that is a will not submitted to its rule and measure."<sup>217</sup> In simple terms, human beings cause evil and sin because they do not properly use their free-will. Therefore, moral evil is the consequence of either a person's ignorance or negligence.

As far as spiritual beings concerned, evil is, for Aquinas, as for Augustine, either sin or the punishment of sin. According to Aquinas, the universe as a whole is "all the better and more perfect if some things in it can fail in goodness, and do sometimes fail, God nor preventing this..."<sup>218</sup> If God would have prevented evils happening, a great deal of good would disappear. Instead, God balances the corruption and deprivation in the universe punishing the guilty and sinners. This is closely related to Aquinas' conception of the order of the universe. He states, "the order of justice belongs to the order of the universe; and this requires that penalty should be dealt out to sinners."<sup>219</sup> In this sense, God is not the cause of defect, but he is the author of evil that is punishment.

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<sup>216</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 49. 2 as quoted in Davies, *the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94.

<sup>217</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 49. 1-3 as quoted by Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 95.

<sup>218</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 48. 2 as quoted in Hick, *Evil*, 103.

<sup>219</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 49. 2 as quoted in Hick, *Evil*, 103.

Like Augustine, Aquinas also affirms that God will consign some human beings to hell and some to heaven in the Judgement Day. This is a necessary consequence of God's being just. Although God, for Aquinas, loves every human being in the sense that He bestows "some" good for them in this life, "he does not," Aquinas writes, "will every good for every one, and is said to hate some in so far as he does not will for them the good of eternal life."<sup>220</sup> Therefore, for Aquinas as Augustine, God's love seems to exclude some of His creatures eternally.

The theologians of the Reformation such as Calvin revitalised the Augustinian theological approach in the sixteenth century. Although the Reformers were not very much interested in developing philosophical theodicy at all, they developed the theological accounts of Augustine further such as the Fall and predestination. John Hick explains its reason as follows, "the theology of the Reformers, faithfully built upon the *sola Scriptura* principle, reminds us by its silence that the Augustinian philosophy of evil is a work of human analysis and speculation, and that it should not be accorded the status of revealed truth."<sup>221</sup> The philosophical themes of the Augustinian Theodicy are given a central place in Gottfried Leibniz's theodicy.

I shall now examine Augustinian themes in Calvin because of his notable place among the Reformers and of his influence on later Calvinist theologians. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French Protestant theologian, followed closely Augustine in explaining the cause of evil in terms of the Fall from a heavenly condition to an earthly imperfect

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<sup>220</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 23. 3 as quoted in Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy*, 7, no. 1, January 1990.

<sup>221</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 122.

state. Calvin sees the Fall of Adam as a punishment from God as described in Genesis 3 meted out not only to Adam but also to all humanity.<sup>222</sup> Therefore, evil in the world is the legacy of the original sin committed by the first human beings and passed down to their offspring.

Moreover, Calvin goes far beyond what Augustine taught concerning to divine predestination. The latter held that God “foresaw” that human beings would choose with their free-will good or evil; and he, accordingly, consigned some to hell others to heaven. On the other hand, the former develops a rigid doctrine of divine predestination. For Calvin, Predestination is God’s will and absolute decree that ordains the destiny of every single person. Accordingly, some is predestined to “eternal life,” some to “eternal damnation.”<sup>223</sup> Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, also known as “double predestination,” declares that the elected people to salvation by divine mercy will be saved, and the others will be condemned.

This is not Augustine’s divine foreknowledge or divine “permission” to human beings to choose freely as Aquinas seems to have understood it, but it is God’s “will” and its execution. Calvin states, “God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and thereby the ruin of all his posterity, but he also willed it.”<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin believes that human beings are free and responsible for their actions. Although God predestined everything beforehand, human beings freely and voluntarily follow the course

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<sup>222</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. 15. 8.

<sup>223</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 21. 5.

<sup>224</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 23. 7.

foreordained for them without any coercion from outside.<sup>225</sup> Hence, Calvin affirms that human beings are accountable for their sins and that God is justified by punishing them for their wrong doings.

Among others, the Best-Possible-World Theodicy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) has been one of the most profound and influential Augustinian approach to the problem of evil. Leibniz for the first time introduced the term “theodicy” to theological and philosophical parlance in the sense of justification of God’s ways to humankind. Subsequently, theodicy has become the rubric under which attempts at solution to the whole problem of evil are offered and discussed along with its literal meaning.

The main argument of Leibniz in his *Theodicy* is that the good and powerful God creates only the best among all possible worlds and events when he wills to do so. Divine will to create comes forth naturally out of God’s goodness for “the purpose of communicating himself.”<sup>226</sup> When God willed to create a universe, there must have been a great deal of possible worlds in his mind. He could have created any one of these options in front of him. God contemplates and compares all the possible universes with their perfections and imperfections.<sup>227</sup> As God who is omnipotent and good, he must have chosen the best among all possible worlds. In Leibniz’s words, “this supreme wisdom, united to a goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen any other world than

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<sup>225</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II. 3. 5.

<sup>226</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, sixth printing, ed. by Austin Farrer and trans. by E. M. Huggard, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1997), 269.

<sup>227</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 267.

the best.”<sup>228</sup> For Leibniz, this is because of God’s own nature. Otherwise, he would not be a powerful and wholly good God. Consequently, this world must be the best of all possible worlds, which presents “most reality, most perfection, most significance.”<sup>229</sup>

If God elects the best, whence come irregularities in the world? The answer to this question lies in Leibniz’s classification of evil. He recognises three kinds of evil: metaphysical, physical, and moral evil. “*Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, *moral evil* in sin.”<sup>230</sup> At the last resort, the last two, too, are the result of the first one since all evil essentially stems from the limited nature of the creation.

Leibniz argues that “imperfections” and “defects” in the world are due to the limited “receptivity” of the creature. That is to say, it is not God but the “original limitations” arising from the state of createdness that causes flaw in the universe. The creation cannot be possibly thought wholly perfect, “For God could not give the creature all without making of it a God.”<sup>231</sup> Thus, deficiencies and defects in the created universe are, according to Leibniz, the natural outcome of being finite and inferior to God. In this sense evil is, when we turn to the question asked at the beginning, nothing but finiteness or privation of perfect goodness.

The Best-Possible-World Theodicy is seen as a teleological as well as aesthetic account for evil. God is justified in tolerating evil because every defect has its aesthetic

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<sup>228</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 128.

<sup>229</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 253.

<sup>230</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 136.

<sup>231</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 141-2.

value within the wholeness of the universe, and because evil is a means to achieve the best possible world. "If the smallest evil that comes to pass in the world," Leibniz writes, "were missing in it, it would no longer be this world; which, with nothing omitted and all allowance made, was found the best by the Creator who chose it."<sup>232</sup> In addition, some human suffering is divine punishment for sins and wicked deeds.<sup>233</sup> In short, Leibniz believes that God is justified as long as evil of any kind contributes to the best possible whole.

John Hick criticises the Best-Possible-World Theodicy because of the dilemma it faces: God is either not powerful or not good enough to create a world with less evil.<sup>234</sup> Surely the omnipotent and the most benevolent God must be able to make a better world than the extant one. The contemporary exponent of the Augustinian Theodicy Alvin Plantinga joins Hick in charging Leibniz. He calls this dilemma or weakness "Leibniz's Lapse." According to Plantinga, Leibniz is mistaken because "it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil."<sup>235</sup> This is seen as a serious blow to Leibniz's theodicy of the best possible world.

The idea of evil as privation or a lack of being can also be traced in the writings of modern theologians and philosophers. Martin Heidegger's *das Nichts*, Paul Tillich's "Non-being," and Karl Barth's *das Nichtige* ("nothingness") describes the negative

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<sup>232</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 129.

<sup>233</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 190, 200.

<sup>234</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 172.

<sup>235</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom," in M. M. Adams and R. M. Adams, (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 99-101.

aspect of human life.<sup>236</sup> For instance, Barth asserts that evil is *das Nichtige*, nothingness, which inevitably accompanies the creation.<sup>237</sup>

To sum up, the Augustinian approach to evil can be characterised with its identification of evil as the privation of good, and with its emphasis on the Fall of human beings into the world due to the original sin. As the extension of the first theme, Augustinian writers asserted that the created universe is good, evil is a lack of goodness. Aesthetic conception of evil is most often employed to explain natural evil in the world. In addition to the aesthetic theme, the principle of plenitude is referred to in emphasising the goodness of the universe as a whole. However, this goodness is not same with divine perfection since the creation is dependent on God for its existence. Later Leibniz calls this intrinsic finitude and imperfection of the creation “metaphysical evil.”

The main Augustinian theme in explaining moral evil is the Fall of Adam and Eve in consequence of their disobedience to divine command misusing their free-will. Through this original sin and the Fall, evil has entered into the world passing the sin to the subsequent generations. Consequently, no one is innocent in regard to the original sin. Moreover, all the afflictions that befall on humankind is seen either sin or its penalty. The misuse of human free-will is the cause of sin. Therefore, God is not accountable for the malfunction of human freedom. On the other hand, God with his grace chooses to save some from eternal damnation leaving others outside of his grace since salvation is impossibility for sinful humanity. Calvin goes further and formulates a more rigid

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<sup>236</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 189.

<sup>237</sup> See, for Barth's discussion of evil, Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Barth on Evil,” in *Faith and Philosophy*, 13, no. 4 (October 1996), 584-608.



doctrine of predestination. According to this, God foreordains the future states of every human being in terms of heaven or hell even before their creation.

A number of objections are raised against the Augustinian type of theodicy. I shall suffice to explore the major criticisms here. Friedrich Schleiermacher points to the logical impossibility of Augustine's interpretation of the Fall. He believes that it is self-contradictory and unintelligible to assume that a person of original righteousness could wilfully commit sin. Because a perfect being would not sin even though he or she is free to do so.

It appears that there is a further discrepancy between the Augustinian doctrine of the Fall and of predestination. While the Fall is explained in terms of failure of free-will, the doctrine of predestination, on the other hand, sees the source of moral evil within the purpose of God. If God foreordained everything in detail including the Fall, how is it possible that human beings could be accused of committing the original sin?

Moreover, the traditional Augustinian Theodicy is also charged with causing further problems in spite of its initial objective to justify evil. The best possible world explanation of Leibniz is one of them. It is urged that if this is the best of all possible worlds, God is either not powerful or not good to make a better world. In addition, Augustinian theologians', most strikingly Calvin's, view of divine election of some human beings to eternal happiness and of the others to eternal damnation cause further problems. If this is true, either God does not wish to save all, in that case He is not all-good, or God desires but is not able to do so, in that case He is not all-powerful.

Finally, the principle of plenitude is also criticised in the way that it gives a limited significance to the existence of humankind within the structure of the universe.

As Hick points, humankind is not “valued and loved for his own sake as finite personal life capable of personal relationship with the infinite divine Person.”<sup>238</sup> Instead, humanity is considered a being filling the gap in “the great chain of being.” Therefore, the triviality of human existence in the Augustinian Theodicy seems to reduce the significance of the Augustinian approach to evil.

To conclude, the Augustinian Theodicy has been, and in certain circles still is, an influential approach to evil in Christian tradition. Today one can see the defenders of the Free-Will Defence and, to a lesser degree, of the Best-Possible-World Theodicy in the face of evil in the world. The employment of free-will theme in explaining moral evil can be seen a positive contribution of the Augustinian Theodicy. On the other hand, the views of predestination and of the original sin particularly seem to overshadow this contribution causing some problems. I shall explore the major Augustinian approaches to evil in modern literature later in the chapter on the Modern Theodicies.

The reason for its persistence through ages is not because the Augustinian Theodicy offers an adequate and satisfying account for evil. This is, as Hick suggests, “because the Christian mind was for so long content to refrain from examining it critically.”<sup>239</sup> Perhaps with Hick’s formulation of the Irenaean Theodicy, namely, the Soul-Making Theodicy, the Augustinian approach to evil has been called into question. I shall now explore the other traditional Christian response, the Irenaean Theodicy.

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<sup>238</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 200.

<sup>239</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 61.

### b. The Irenaean Theodicy

The second type of traditional Christian theodicy has its origin in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-c. 200), a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Greek father. Although Irenaeus, unlike Augustine, did not develop a full-blown theodicy, John Hick asserts that he laid the foundations of a distinct Christian theodicy. In contrast to the Augustinian view of Adam and Eve as perfect before and sinful after the Fall, Irenaeus considered them as infants growing towards maturity. In this context, evil was a necessary element of this process so that human beings could develop high moral and spiritual qualities.

At the centre of Irenaeus' explanation lies the biblical description of "man" as "the image of God" and "the likeness of God" (e.g. *Genesis* 1:26).<sup>240</sup> According to Irenaeus, the "image" symbolises human intellectual potentiality of entering into a personal relationship with the Creator. In this sense, the creation of human beings in the image of God suggests that free beings have the capacity in essence to unite in God. Moreover, the "likeness" of God characterises the perfection of human beings by the Holy Spirit and "the fulfilment of God's purpose for humanity."<sup>241</sup> Therefore, the likeness of God is the ultimate point in human spiritual development.

In Hick's words, "whilst the image of God is man's nature as personal, the divine likeness will be a quality of personal existence which reflects finitely the life of the Creator Himself."<sup>242</sup> This likeness is, Irenaeus contends, achieved through the

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<sup>240</sup> "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;...(1:26).

<sup>241</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 290.

<sup>242</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 218.

struggle of humankind in the world.<sup>243</sup> In this sense, the Fall is nothing else than a deception of God's little ones whose "discretion" is still under development.<sup>244</sup> Accordingly, in order to develop this primordial discretion, the world, as it was, is a necessary instrument for God's purpose so that humankind attains the likeness of God.

Why did God, then, not bestow upon humankind His likeness from the beginning? Having affirmed that God is powerful to do anything possible, Irenaeus' answer to this question is that "man could not receive this, being as yet an infant."<sup>245</sup> He explains this view referring to a mother's attitude towards her baby. While the mother is capable of giving solid food to the new-born immediately after the birth, the infant is not able to take it in and to digest it.

As all creatures have to be subordinate to the perfect Creator by definition, human beings, too, have to be imperfect and lacking perfect knowledge to prevent them from deception. Therefore, since Adam and Eve were the infants in heaven "calling forth God's compassion on account of their weakness and vulnerability," the deceiver easily deceived them.<sup>246</sup> According to Irenaeus, the purpose of Jesus' suffering also lies here. "In order that man might be able to receive Him,"<sup>247</sup> Christ struggled and suffered like any other person even though he was perfect.

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<sup>243</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 290.

<sup>244</sup> Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, ch. 12. See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 218, n. 4.

<sup>245</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3. 20. 1.

<sup>246</sup> Irenaeus, *Proofs of the Apostolic Preaching*, ch. 12 as quoted in Hick, *Evil and the Love of God*, 218.

<sup>247</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 38.2.

In another passage, Irenaeus describes the spiritual growth of humankind in this world in Trinitarian terms. The Father arranges everything and gives the commands, the Son executes the plans, and the Spirit elaborates what is created. The responsibility of human person here is to seek perfection so that he or she may come closer to God and become immortal. Irenaeus elaborates,

“Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord.”<sup>248</sup>

Therefore, human beings are expected to make right choices between good and evil, right and wrong, righteousness and wickedness in order to receive the likeness of God. To fulfil this divine purpose, Irenaeus believed that the world with its evils and goods was a divinely arranged environment providing the means for human spiritual maturity. In addition, human beings were equipped with the faculty of knowing good and evil.<sup>249</sup> However we distinguish sweet from bitter with our sense of taste, in the same way the mind recognises good and evil. If this recognition leads the person to accept the former and renounce the latter, that individual is in the right direction towards the likeness of God. In order to make correct choices, human beings must have faith in God

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<sup>248</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 38. 3.

<sup>249</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 39. 1.

offering to Him their hearts in pure state. In Irenaeus' words, "by preserving the framework thou shalt ascend to that which is perfect."<sup>250</sup>

Thus, Irenaeus' account of evil is original in the sense that it is different from Augustine's approach, and that it was, as Hick remarks, "the first great Christian theologian to think at all systematically along these lines."<sup>251</sup> Although it has not been so comprehensive and popular as the latter has, Irenaeus' approach represents another type of justification of God in the face of evil within Christian tradition. While Augustine views that the first human beings were created in a perfect fashion and then they sinned and fallen into the world as their punishment, Irenaeus holds that God purposefully made human beings in his "image," immature like infants so that they can grow into His likeness. Accordingly, adversities, afflictions and sufferings in the world are not punishment for the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve, but divinely arranged means for the fulfilment of God's plan for humankind.

Following his predecessor Irenaeus,<sup>252</sup> Clement of Alexandria (150?-215?), too, thinks of human being as the 'image' and 'likeness' of God. The latter thought that Adam was created in the image of God since he was bestowed with the intellectual and physical faculties. However, he was not the likeness of God since he was short of virtue.<sup>253</sup> In fact, he was a child of God, a divine creation. Accordingly, Adam's sin was "a childish

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<sup>250</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 39.2.

<sup>251</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 221.

<sup>252</sup> W. E. G. Floyd notes that Clement drew this interpretation from religious and philosophical speculations before himself. Irenaeus was one of them. See, Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 51.

<sup>253</sup> Clement, *Str.* 6. 96 in Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 45-6.

blunder” because of his imperfection and infancy rather than “an adult crime” caused by ill will. Clement, further, held that the Original Sin and the Fall made the child-Adam abandon his immature ways and attain adulthood.<sup>254</sup> However, Clement does not go further than that and does not offer any new answer to the problem of evil.

The Irenaean Theodicy could not find a fertile soil to develop even in the Eastern Orthodox thought in contrast to the Augustinian Theodicy until the nineteenth century. The influence of Augustine was overwhelming in the Western Christianity. The Irenaean themes made a comeback in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern theology. F. R. Tennant (1866-1957), and, most importantly, John Hick are, among others, the theologians and philosophers that Irenaean approach is traceable. I shall explore Schleiermacher’s and Tennant’s treatment of evil here. John Hick’s Soul-Making Theodicy will be explored in the chapter on the modern Christian theodicies because of Hick’s comprehensive and unique formulation of the Irenaean approach to evil. Let us now turn to Schleiermacher’s approach to the problem of evil.

Schleiermacher’s treatment of the problem of evil stems out of his views on the nature of religion, particularly Christianity, God, and redemption. In his influential book *the Christian Faith* Schleiermacher describes religion as “the pious self-consciousness.” The basis of this religious consciousness is neither reason nor morality, but of “the feeling of absolute dependence.”<sup>255</sup> This is a feeling in relation to outward as well as inward world of individuals.

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<sup>254</sup> *Protr.* 111. 1, Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria’s Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, 51.

<sup>255</sup> Keith W. Clements, *F. Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology, Selected Texts* (London: Collins, 1987), 103-4.

This is because “the entire system of nature, comprehending all times and spaces, is,” according to Schleiermacher, “grounded in the divine causality.”<sup>256</sup> Therefore, the consciousness of absolute dependence means the consciousness of everything actual in nature including evil as well as good. In this sense, all things are valuable for a Christian as long as they contribute to his or her feeling of absolute dependence on God. In Schleiermacher’s words, “To a pious mind, religion makes everything holy and valuable, even unholiness and commonness itself.”<sup>257</sup>

According to Schleiermacher, sin is the only intrinsically evil phenomenon for it obstructs human development of the God-consciousness. Sin is regarded as the cause behind all evils, natural as well as moral. Although Schleiermacher adapts the Augustinian theme of evil as limitation of good,<sup>258</sup> he believes that it is not a conclusive solution to the problem of evil. Because he is well aware that “the limitation as well as impartation can be grounded in the same divine will.”<sup>259</sup> Moreover, Schleiermacher ascribes sin to God “only as related to redemption.”<sup>260</sup> That is to say, God has ordained sin to play its part in the process of human redemption.

Schleiermacher, in contrast to Augustine, does not consider human history in terms of fall into and then rise from sin. Historical character of humanity from religious standpoint is one of gradual growth from very limited self-consciousness to the

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<sup>256</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *the Christian Faith*, 54, 211 quoted in Adams, “Schleiermacher on Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 13, no. 4 October 1994, 577.

<sup>257</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, as quoted in Adams, “Schleiermacher on Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 13, no. 4, October 1996, 577.

<sup>258</sup> He says, “in relation to God evil is not” as quoted in Adams, “Schleiermacher on Evil, 569.

<sup>259</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 81.1, 332; Adams, “Schleiermacher on Evil,” 569.

<sup>260</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 80.2, 328; Adams, “Schleiermacher on Evil,” 570.



continuous consciousness of God. Connected with this Irenaean theme, Schleiermacher, as John Hick points,<sup>261</sup> appears to follow Irenaeus' theory of two-stage creation of human beings. While Irenaeus sees humankind growing from the "image of God" towards the "likeness of God," Schleiermacher uses the terminology of "the first" and "the second Adam." The latter maintains that the perfect God-consciousness that potentially existed in the first Adam has reached actuality in the second Adam, namely, Jesus Christ. Schleiermacher connects this theme with Jesus' salvific mission. Christ brings humankind into a state of God-consciousness with himself through his redemptive work.

Furthermore, Schleiermacher rejects the Augustinian idea, which later appears in Calvin's theology as well, of divine predestination of some to heavenly bliss, some to eternal damnation. It is his strong feeling that Christ's redeeming work will eventually save all human beings without exception. In his own words, "through the power of redemption there will one day be a universal restoration of all souls."<sup>262</sup> Consequently, Schleiermacher's theology contains the main features of the Irenaean Theodicy. That is the gradual human growth from an undeveloped state towards a perfect God-consciousness regardless whether the individual is a Christian or not.

F. R. Tennant, a modern natural theologian, offers a nineteenth-century version of the Irenaean Theodicy to the problem of evil. He offers a teleological theodicy for moral evil as well as for natural evils of the world. Ninian Smart, a contemporary British scholar of religion, sees Tennant's treatment of the problem of evil as an attempt to

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<sup>261</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 240.

<sup>262</sup> Schleiermacher, *the Christian Faith*, 722; Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 241.

defend Christian faith in the face of the evolutionary theory.<sup>263</sup> Tennant's beginning point of the problem of moral evil is his conception of human being still in the process of creation. He rejects Augustine's interpretation of Adam and Eve, who were created finitely perfect and then fell into a sinful state disobeying God's prohibition. Tennant's reason for the rejection is that moral goodness is not something that can be created by God; but it is the acquisition of human free-will. Tennant writes, "We cannot imagine a living world, in which truly ethical values are to be actualized, save as an evolutionary cosmos in which free agents live and learn, make choices and build characters."<sup>264</sup>

Therefore, freedom to choose is, to Tennant, an essential character of the ongoing process of human creation. This is also the basis of Tennant's attempt at a theodicy in respect of moral evil. The hypothetical case of lack of free-will reduces human beings into sentient robots ripping them of their moral quality.<sup>265</sup> This is not a better world than we live in now. Tennant writes, "To preclude moral evil would be to preclude moral goodness, to do evil, to prefer a worse to a better world."<sup>266</sup> He believes that good will eventually prevail over evil even though the latter may not vanish permanently. For Tennant the last point, that is, the extinction of moral evil finally, is "irrelevant to theodicy."<sup>267</sup> Hick criticises Tennant "with a lack of thoroughness and

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<sup>263</sup> N. Smart, *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, second edition (London: SCM Press, 1969), 139.

<sup>264</sup> F. R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 2, 185.

<sup>265</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 188.

<sup>266</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 191.

<sup>267</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 197.

consistency in working out the basic principle of teleological theodicy.”<sup>268</sup> According to this principle, good will be eventually brought out of evil.

The teleological thinking of the nineteenth-century is reflected in Tennant’s treatment of the problem of natural evil as well. Following Irenaean approach to evil, Tennant argues that human suffering in the world is “a necessary by-product of an order of things requisite for the emergence of the higher goods,” and animal pain is “an essential instrument to organic evolution, or both.”<sup>269</sup> If the purpose of the evolutionary process is the moral goodness of humankind, then, Tennant states, “the reign of law is *sine qua non*.”<sup>270</sup> Since natural evils arise out of the law and regularity of the world, that does not mean that they are absolute evils, but “they are good for good.”<sup>271</sup> Therefore, natural evils are “accompaniments or by-product of the world order”<sup>272</sup> designed to develop moral character of human beings. In spite of its tentativeness, Tennant points out the possibility of life after death. Even though this idea is not so important for his theodicy, Tennant, nevertheless, contends that the earthly life “cannot safely be regarded as realising a divine purpose unless man’s life continues after death.”<sup>273</sup> John Hick charges Tennant with ignoring the idea of life after death, which is, for Hick, “absolutely essential for the theodicy that he has offered.”<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, Hick does not regard

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<sup>268</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 252-3.

<sup>269</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 198.

<sup>270</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 199-200.

<sup>271</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 201-202.

<sup>272</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 204.

<sup>273</sup> Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 272.

<sup>274</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 255.

Tennant's answer to evil as "a distinctively Christian theodicy" for he does not mention the significance of Christ's life and death in respect of the problem of evil.

To sum up, the Irenaean approach regards the Augustinian interpretation of the human Fall as a myth. That is to say, there was no human being in "original righteousness" before the so-called "original sin." In fact, the first humans were infants developing into maturity. The biblical story of the Fall, for Irenaean theodocists, signifies a spiritual estrangement of the first human beings, who were in a childlike situation standing at the beginning of their long development. It was not considered as a dramatic event ruining the whole humankind; but it was a stage in the long process of human spiritual growth. In that sense, the Fall is thought to be a human stumble in the way to divine likeness.

The Irenaean approach considers the evils of the world as necessary means of the growing process through which human beings can develop high moral and spiritual qualities. In order to receive the likeness of God, human beings must choose good against evil, right against wrong, and so on. As the world has been designed with the necessary means for that purpose, humankind, too, has been provided with the faculty of distinguishing good from evil. In addition, God's grace has been manifested to human race in Jesus' suffering and death "in order that man might be able to receive Him."<sup>275</sup> This is the meaning of redemption. Consequently, the Irenaean Theodicy affirms that evil is a necessary instrument for human spiritual development from the image of God to the

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<sup>275</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4. 38.2.

likeness. From Schleiermacher onwards, Irenaean theologians seem to be tending towards a universal salvation of humankind eventually.

On the other hand, some Irenaean thinkers have been criticised for their contention that evil has a positive role in human spiritual development. Among the critics is the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). Barth protests against Schleiermacher's what he calls "positive" conception of sin. Barth writes, "When sin is understood positively, ...it is not real sin. For real sin cannot be vindicated in this way. We cannot say of it that it is in any sense necessary to a stage of human existence and therefore willed and posited by God."<sup>276</sup> Hick responds to Barth's criticism arguing that sin is evil; but that should not be exaggerated so as to create a "final dualism," on the one hand God, on the other a negative power. He writes, "Ultimately God alone is sovereign, and evil can exist only by his permission."<sup>277</sup> Then the only option left is that God allowed evil for a good purpose since God cannot be thought to be evil.

The Irenaean approach to evil and suffering seems to be more realistic than the Augustinian Theodicy. It is urged that the Irenaean Theodicy, in contrast to the Augustinian one, does not fall into the dilemmas of predestination and free-will, God's goodness and eternal damnation. Moreover, the former is a future oriented theodicy while the latter is relying into the past. In that sense, the Augustinian approach to evil has not showed much difference from Augustine's formulation down to its modern types. On the other hand, the Irenaean position appears to be dynamic and taking on board of recent

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<sup>276</sup> Karl Barth, *Types of Modern Theology*, (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1937), 84 as quoted in Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 239.

<sup>277</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 239.

developments in science such as Tennant's use of the evolutionary theory. Therefore, the Irenaean Theodicy seems to have a lot to say in the future.

To sum up, the main characteristics of the Augustinian Theodicy are its description or identification of evil as the privation or defection of good, and its emphasis on the human Fall into the world due to the original sin they committed. The natural imperfections in the universe are explained in terms of aesthetic conception of evil and the principle of plenitude. The creation is good with its variety and gradation. However, this goodness cannot reach divine perfection since the creation is dependent on God. Later Leibniz calls this intrinsic finitude of the creation "metaphysical evil," which will cause serious problems. The cause of sin is seen in the misuse of human free-will. Therefore, God is not responsible for the consequences of human freedom. God adjusts this imbalance by inflicting punishment on the sinner. On the other hand, God consigns some human beings to eternal damnation, some to heaven with His grace. According to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, God foreordains the eternal destiny of every human individual in terms of heaven or hell even before their creation.

The Augustinian Theodicy has been an influential approach to evil in Christian tradition. Today it is common mainly among the defenders of the Free-Will Defence and of the Best-Possible-World Theodicy. Perhaps the employment of free-will theme in explaining moral evil can be seen to a certain extent a positive contribution of the Augustinian Theodicy. On the other hand, the views of predestination and of the original sin particularly seem to overshadow this contribution and damage its significance causing weighty problems. Additionally, its nature of past-centredness seems to be a stumbling block in front of the future of the Augustinian Theodicy. In the chapter of modern

Christian theodicies and defences, I shall explore the contemporary state of the Augustinian Theodicy.

The Irenaean Theodicy affirms that this is a purposeful world designed by God so that human beings can build spiritual qualities towards the “likeness of God.” In this context, evil is the means of this process. To achieve this aim, human beings must find their way making good and right choices. However, God does not leave humankind alone in their struggle. God’s grace has been manifested to humanity in the suffering and death of Jesus so that human beings could receive Him. Furthermore, Irenaean theologians from Schleiermacher onwards tend to believe that humanity as a whole will eventually be saved.

## **2. The Modern Theodicies**

### **a. Process Theodicy**

Process Theodicy, along with The Soul-Making Theodicy, has emerged in modern times as an important alternative to the Augustinian approach to the problem of evil. It is essentially grounded on the writings of the British process philosopher A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947) and his follower Charles Hartshorne (1897-). Although they did not construct a full-fledged theodicy, their writings inspired the subsequent process thinkers such as David Griffin (1939-), John Cobb, and Lewis S. Ford. The distinctive assertion of Process Theodicy is that God has no “coercive” power to prevent evil. Therefore, he cannot be blamed for something over which he has no power.

Process theologians and philosophers argue that the reality of evil in the world is not a threat to the existence of God at all. Evil is a problem only for traditional or

classical theism. Charles Hartshorne, a fervent defender of the ontological argument, asserts that *a posteriori* and contingent truth "evil exists" does not disprove of *a priori* and necessary truth "God exists." God's existence of is a logical problem. His existence is either logically necessary or logically impossible. In either case, the problem of evil is, for Hartshorne, "a mistake, a pseudoproblem."<sup>278</sup> For process philosophers, the problem of evil arises out of the so-called inadequate traditional concept of God. When it is replaced with dipolar deity of process theology, the problem of evil will then be evaded.

Process notion of bipolar deity indicates that God has two natures; one is the "primordial nature," the other is the "consequent nature;" or as Hartshorne prefers to call, the "abstract side" and the "concrete side" respectively. According to this "dual transcendence," if we may use Hartshorne's phrase, the former is God's constant and unchanging side, which includes all the possibilities that the creation could possibly shape. The latter, on the other hand, is his changeable side, which is within the actualised creation. Hartshorne argues that this is not illogical "for its a logical truism that S is P and P is not S can be consistent if they apply to A in different respects or aspects."<sup>279</sup> Therefore, God in one of His nature is in process in accordance with the happenings in the world. In a similar fashion, the creation is in the process of "becoming" rather than of

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<sup>278</sup> C. Hartshorne, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," in F. C. Dommeyer, (ed.), *Current Philosophical Issues: Essays in Honour of C. J. Ducasse* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1966), 202. See also Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophical Method* (London: SCM, 1970), 258.

<sup>279</sup> Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead's Revolutionary Concept of Prehension," in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1979), 261-2.



“being.” Because the creation of finite creatures is not complete, but is still changing and developing.<sup>280</sup>

David Griffin, one of the foremost and influential process theodicians, argues that Process Theodicy “dissolves the problem of evil by denying the doctrine of omnipotence.”<sup>281</sup> To deny divine omnipotence, the process theologian denies the creation *ex nihilo*, the creation out of nothing. He did not create the universe out of nothing; but he did, as the theory of evolution suggests, mould the creation from a “pre-existing chaos,” and the creation is still continuing. As Griffin points out, the process God is very similar to Plato’s Demiurge in the *Timaeus* who works with “elements of necessity” and creates as good a world as possible out of the chaos.<sup>282</sup> The existence of pre-existing chaos suggests that God worked with limited pre-existing actualities in bringing about the world. In this sense, process theologians, as distinct from some traditional theists, affirm that God did not give up his power for a purpose, but he is “essentially” limited. That is to say, the essential limitation is, contrary to the traditional theist’s claim, not a consequence of God’s will, but it is in God’s nature. In Griffin’s own words, “there might be some eternal, uncreated, necessary principles (beyond purely logical truths) about the way these actualities can be ordered which limit the sorts of situations that are really

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<sup>280</sup> Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109-10.

<sup>281</sup> David R. Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 105.

<sup>282</sup> David R. Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 101-2.

possible.”<sup>283</sup> Therefore, God does not hold the whole power but shares it with eternal actualities. Consequently, he cannot be responsible for the way things are in the universe.

The limitedness of God’s power is not confined to the creation of the world out of chaos only. The process theologian contends that God is not in complete control of what is going on in the world as well. He has no “monopoly on power.” Finite creatures share power with God in bringing about some state of affairs themselves and in influencing other creatures in the same way.<sup>284</sup> In order to explain this, process theologians often make distinction between “coercive” and “persuasive” power. While divine coercive power suggests that God can do anything he wishes, his persuasive power seeks to bring about desired end states by persuading free agents. In this sense, God’s creative power is not coercive but persuasive. He actualises possibilities by persuading actualities through a long evolutionary process. This is also the basis of process version of the Free-Will Defence.

The solution of process theology to the problems of both moral evil and natural evil is based on the same principle. That is, all creatures, human and non-human or animate and non-animate, have certain degree of “creative power” along with God’s power. As Michael Peterson points out, “Process thinkers typically speak of this creaturely power in terms of ‘freedom.’”<sup>285</sup> In addition, they extend this creative power or the power of self-determination to all creatures. In Griffin’s words, “the beings making up our world, including the most primitive ones (such as quarks and electrons) are

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<sup>283</sup> Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 104-5.

<sup>284</sup> Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 105.

<sup>285</sup> Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief*, 110.

contingent.”<sup>286</sup> Although the present form of the world is the product of God’s “creative providential activity,” every single creature, non-human as well as human, has a certain degree of power independent of God to cause some state of affairs.

In Process Theodicy, as perhaps different from other Free-Will Defences, God does not concern with promoting freedom. Instead, “creatures with more and more freedom are evoked because increased freedom is part and parcel of the increased enjoyment.”<sup>287</sup> This is a metaphysical principle intrinsic to the nature of the creation. The greater freedom brings along the possibility of greater enjoyments. On the other hand, greater enjoyments become possible only with the possibility of greater evils. Griffin explains, “A world with creatures such as Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus...is simply not possible without the possibility of...beings who would seek to destroy the entire Jewish population in Europe.”<sup>288</sup> God is not able to coerce creatures to prevent such evils occur. He could only try to persuade creatures not to commit evil actions. The creature is free to follow or not to follow divine persuasion. Therefore, the relation between God’s persuasive power and other creatures’ power is one of mutual dependence. For God’s power is not “coercive” as he is not able to force anything from outside.

God has only “persuasive” power to urge his creatures to choose good and avoid evil. Either creatures are persuaded and follow God’s wish or they bring about what they desire. “Accordingly,” John Cobb and David Griffin write, “the divine creative activity

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<sup>286</sup> Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 105.

<sup>287</sup> David R. Griffin, “Process Theodicy, Christology, and the *Imitatio Dei*,” in Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin (eds.), *Jewish Theology and Process Thought* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 102.

<sup>288</sup> Griffin, “Process Theodicy, Christology, and the *Imitatio Dei*,” 103.

involves risk. The obvious point is that, since God is not in complete control of the events of the world, the occurrence of genuine evil is not incompatible with God's beneficence towards all his creatures."<sup>289</sup> What is "genuine evil"? Griffin describes "genuine evil" as "anything that makes the world worse than it could have otherwise been."<sup>290</sup>

Griffin affirms that God is responsible for evil in the world in the sense that if His persuasive power had not created animate as well as inanimate organisms, there would not be any suffering in the world. However, Griffin believes that this does not mean that God is blameworthy for the evils in the world. Both good and evil exists intrinsically in every state of affairs. God always seeks persuasively the best possible good in each state of affair, but cannot force it.

If a lesser good or an evil state of affair emerges as a result, it is the failure of the creature's misuse or inadequate use of power. God is morally good because he seeks to bring about less evil and greater good. God would have been blameworthy if he had "failed to bring forth beings capable of experiencing significant value when this was possible."<sup>291</sup> Since God is not able to intervene in human history, he cannot be indicted for the evils occurring in the world.

To sum up, Process Theodicy is largely based on the denial of divine omnipotence of classical theism. God has no monopoly on power. Other creatures, non-humans as well as humans, share power with God. They are able to bring about states of

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<sup>289</sup> John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1977), 53.

<sup>290</sup> Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," 103.

<sup>291</sup> Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," 110.

affairs independently from God and to influence other creatures to do so. God has only persuasive power by which he seeks to persuade creatures to adopt certain course of actions, which is purely good. However, he is not able to bring about a state of affairs by forcing a creature against its wish. In this context, natural as well as moral evil, then, are negative actions of creatures, which are beyond God's control. Therefore, he is not to be blamed for the evils of the world.

Process Theodicy has been one of the most discussed responses to the problem of evil in recent years. These discussions have turned around and brought about a considerable number of objections to process approach to evil. I shall discuss here some of what I consider the significant ones. John Hick, for instance, denies that Process Theodicy offers a solution to the problem of evil. He asserts that the problem is no more the discrepancy between the existence of omnipotent, omniscient and good God and the occurrence of evil. It is the limitedness of God with "eternal material." God, then, Hick writes, "exists in ultimate duality with an alien realm which partially thwarts the divine goodness."<sup>292</sup> Consequently, the process conception of God, who is limited in power and goodness, becomes the problem itself.

Griffin, in response, says that the process God is "limited" and "finite in the sense that he is not the only reality. There are other beings possessing creative power that God cannot totally control. However, "My God is," Griffin writes, "not finite or limited if

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<sup>292</sup> John Hick, "Critique by John Hick," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 122.

this means that God's power is imperfect in comparison with that of some other conceivable deity."<sup>293</sup> In this sense, God has all the power possible for a deity.

Therefore, for the process theologian God is more powerful than any other creature, but he is not the only powerful being. Is the process God really more powerful than other creatures? We observe in our life that human beings prevent many evils to occur, heal a great deal of suffering, of animal as well as human, and so on. Most strikingly perhaps, it was human beings who managed to stop Hitler from exterminating the European Jews. Does this not mean that human creative power surpasses God's power?

The objections to Process Theodicy is largely associated with the process conception of God. Christian theologians and philosophers object that God is limited in power.<sup>294</sup> For example, Mark W. Worthing, a Christian theologian, criticises the process conception of God saying that "God...is maintained by Christian theology to be the conductor of the final act (if indeed our universe has a final act), not just a spectator with better than average chances of finding a way to survive the consummation of the universe."<sup>295</sup> Similar charges against Process Theodicy are not rare in the literature of the philosophy of religion.

In the light of modern biblical scholarship, and with the authority of being a Christian theologian by profession, Griffin responds to these kinds of criticisms saying

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<sup>293</sup> Griffin, "Response to Critics," in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 133.

<sup>294</sup> See, for instance, J. Hick, "Critique," F. Sontag, "Critique," and S. T. Davis, "Critique," in S. T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 122-8.

<sup>295</sup> Mark W. Worthing, *Worthing, God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics*, 196.

that the Bible is not the word of God in the sense that he revealed it to certain human beings word by word. It is an account of human conception of God within certain historical context. Therefore, that biblical account of God is not conclusive, but “ambiguous.”<sup>296</sup>

In support of this claim, Griffin argues that the Christian creeds, including the belief in the Trinity, formulated in subsequent years are nothing but a “fallible” human endeavour. In this sense, a process theologian is not compelled to follow his or her predecessors’ interpretation. The theologian, too, must attempt to understand God in the light of modern developments in knowledge. This is what process theology and theodicy is all about. Therefore, this charge brought about against process God is not a viable charge.

Furthermore, Process Theodicy has been criticised for lacking an eschatological dimension as well. The suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked in this life seem to require some sort of life after death in which good will prevail. That is a future hope providing a personal meaning in one’s life and a certain amount of assurance that the future will be far better than this life. Yet, as Nancy Frankenberry states, in process thinking, “the basis for hope seems to amount to nothing more than the notion that new possibilities are always being offered and that sheer drift is avoided.”<sup>297</sup> Although process theology affirms a weak sense of immortality, that is, everything will live in God’s mind, this does not seem to provide the future hope that the sufferer needs.

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<sup>296</sup> Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” 102.

<sup>297</sup> Nancy Frankenberry, “Some Problems in Process Theodicy,” *Religious Studies*, 17 (1981), 194.

The last criticism to bring up, it has been argued that the process God is not worthy of worship since he is not powerful and good enough to prevent evils. Classical theist philosophers and theologians generally see a close relationship between worshipworthiness of God and divine omnipotence. If God lacks power to bring about what he wishes best or to prevent evil, then he is not worshipworthy. Reichenbach maintains, "A being which is finite in power cannot merit worship." He also writes, "A being which merits worship must be omnipotent"<sup>298</sup> Therefore, if there is such a God with limited power and there is no afterlife, then what is the purpose in worshipping him?

In conclusion, I believe that Process Theodicy does not succeed solving the problem of evil. Although the process theologian's conception of the world as an arena of struggle, challenge and human role in determining the future of the world is novel, the same novelty cannot be shown in dealing with the problem of evil. The process theologians only jettison omnipotence to get rid of the atheistic argument from evil. However, this leads us to a more serious problem such as duality of God and pre-existent element, God's limitedness in power and goodness, and annihilation of humankind.

#### **b. The Free-Will Defence**

The Free-Will Defence is one of the enduring and effective answers to the problem of evil. It still enjoys a substantial support in contemporary Christian theology as well as philosophy. The writings of Augustine are often seen as the philosophical origin of Free-Will Explanation in Christian tradition. Among the contemporary defenders of the Free-Will Defence are Stephen T. Davis, G. Stanley Kane, and Alvin Plantinga

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<sup>298</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 188.



(1932-). In addition, most of the theistic theodicies today such as *The Soul-Making Theodicy* and *The Natural Law Theodicy* seem to resort to a version of Free-Will Explanation especially as a response to the problem of moral evil. Barry L. Whitney states, "There is, as far as I can ascertain, no explanation for moral evil other than that of the misuse of human free will."<sup>299</sup> However, it would be wrong to talk about a single form of Free-Will Defence since it shows some differences from philosopher to philosopher and theologian to theologian. Here I shall mainly focus on Plantinga's formulation of Free-Will Defence as one of the most widely discussed version.

Plantinga's objective is to develop a "defence" from free-will in order to rebut the atheist's logical argument from evil against the existence of God. H. J. McCloskey (1925-), for instance, states the atheological argument from evil in a logical form. He argues, "Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other."<sup>300</sup> J. L. Mackie (1917-1981) also argues for the logical inconsistency in theistic doctrines. Mackie writes, "religious beliefs lack rational support... the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another."<sup>301</sup> Therefore, the problem of evil is a crucial argument in pointing to the inconsistency of the belief in God.

Plantinga attempts to demonstrate that the two propositions that there is omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good God and that there is evil, are logically consistent. He contends that a third proposition is required for the purpose that these two

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<sup>299</sup> Barry L. Whitney, *Theodicy* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 16.

<sup>300</sup> H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1960), 97.

<sup>301</sup> J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, 64 (1955), 200.

propositions are in fact consistent with each other. It does not need to be that the third proposition must be “true” or “plausible.”<sup>302</sup> Because this is the responsibility of the theodist, not of the defender. The latter’s task is only to find a logically possible third proposition that is consistent with God’s existence and entailing the reality of evil. The third proposition and the backbone of Free-Will Defence Plantinga offers, is that it is logically impossible for God to create a world with free creatures that contains moral good without at least one moral evil.<sup>303</sup> Therefore, moral evil is necessary if there are to be free moral beings and moral good.

Plantinga first attempts to show that that some creatures have free-will is a logical possibility. Following this line of logical possibility, he seems to seek to avoid the objection whether humans are free in its full sense. Hence, he does not embark on proving that human beings are free agents; but he points that human freedom is logically possible. He explains,

“If a person S is free with respect to a given actions, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not. It is within his power, at the same time in question, to perform the action, and within his power to refrain.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975), 28; and Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 165

<sup>303</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 29; *The Nature of Necessity*, 167; *God and Other Minds*, second printing (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 132.

<sup>304</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 165-6.

Therefore, it is logically possible that a free agent is able to decide between right and wrong, good and bad, beneficial and harmful and so on.

The Free-Will Defence takes two forms in accordance with the kind of evil it is dealing with. The first form of the argument offers a solution to the problem of moral evil, which designates ill human behaviours such as Hitler's execution of the Jews.<sup>305</sup> Plantinga argues that moral evils such as adultery, theft, murder are human actions brought about by human free decisions. A person has a choice to steal or not; but he or she opts for stealing. God who foreknows with certainty what humans will choose and bring about or refrain in the future, and who is omnipotent, would have determined the person not to steal before the creation, or intervened and prevented him or her from stealing. This would rupture the human condition of free-will. Human beings would not be meaningfully free. They would not have a choice to do moral evil, but to obey God. In any possible world, that is, in any "state of affairs" God could have actualised,<sup>306</sup> he could not bring about something logically impossible. Although, God's omniscience has foreknowledge of future human choices, he is not able to create free creatures and, at the same time, determine their choices and actions.

Moreover, Plantinga contends, "A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all."<sup>307</sup> Consequently, the creation of free agents capable of moral good necessarily involves free

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<sup>305</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166.

<sup>306</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 34.

<sup>307</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166.

agents' being capable of doing moral evil as well. In order to make room for free-will, God limits his power despite his knowledge as to what a person will choose. Therefore, it is logically impossible for God to create free beings that always choose good.

The second form of Plantinga's defence is offered to explain natural evils in the world. Human free-will cannot be the cause of such natural calamities as earthquakes, droughts, and floods. Our knowledge is that these kinds of phenomena occur independently from human involvement. Plantinga extends the Free-Will Defence against moral evil to natural evil. Inspired from the Christian story of the Fall of the rebellious angels, which is pursued by Augustine as well, Plantinga, along with some others,<sup>308</sup> attributes the source of natural evils to the fallen angels, namely, Satan and his cohorts. According to the traditional Christian doctrine, long before the creation of human beings, God created angels, which Satan was one of them. He revolted against God causing a great deal of natural disasters on earth such as earthquakes, fires and floods. Plantinga in his *God, Freedom and Evil* writes that it is possible that

“natural evil is due to the free actions of nonhuman persons; there is a balance of good over evils with respect to the actions of these nonhuman persons; and it was not within the power of God to create a world that contains a more favourable balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of the nonhuman persons it contains.”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> See, for instance, Stephen T. Davis, “Free Will and Evil,” 79, and C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fount, 1977), 107.

<sup>309</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 58.

The non-human persons that are responsible for natural evils are, following the Christian tradition, called "Satan and his cohorts."<sup>310</sup> Consequently, Plantinga's Free-Will Defence affirms that free-will of humans and non-humans is the source of moral and natural evils. The philosopher reduces natural evil into a form of moral evil; and he calls both kinds of evil "broadly moral evil."<sup>311</sup> What is called natural evil from the perspective of destruction in nature is moral evil from the standpoint of the source of these evils. They are, it is argued, the ill actions of the devil. It ought to be noted here that Plantinga points out that "the Satan hypothesis" does not have to be true. "The Free Will Defender...need not assert that this is *true*; he says only that it is *possible*."<sup>312</sup> Consequently, it suffices to be logically possible that such demonic creatures cause natural evils.

However, would not God have created a better possible world with less evil than this one? Would not he create less evil non-human creatures? According to Plantinga, it is logically possible that God could not have actualised a world with less evil or non-human creatures with less evil actions. "It is possible that," Plantinga writes, "there is no world God could have created which contains a more favourable balance of good over evil with respect to the free activity of the non-human persons it contains."<sup>313</sup>

Moreover, a possible world containing free creatures that bring about good and evil, perhaps more good than evil, is more valuable than a possible world with non-free

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<sup>310</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 192; *God and Other Minds*, 149.

<sup>311</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 193.

<sup>312</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 192.

<sup>313</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 192.

creatures who are programmed to act properly only. In addition, God cannot create free beings that always do good. In order that there exist free creatures that bring about good, he must allow or not prevent the possibility of evil. Therefore, Plantinga concludes, "The fact that free creatures sometimes err, however, in no way tells against God's omnipotence or against His goodness; for He could forestall the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good."<sup>314</sup>

Furthermore, Plantinga initially contends that "there is no good atheological argument from evil."<sup>315</sup> Later in his article "Epistemic Probability and Evil" he looks at the problem of evil from the major probabilistic perspectives and concludes, "we find little hope for the atheologist; on each of the current views of probability, the prospectus for an atheological argument from evil are at best bleak."<sup>316</sup> The Free-Will Defence shows that the reality of evil in the world does not constitute any logical problem against God's existence. In other words, the existence of God is compatible with evil. If there is any problem at all, it is not of philosophical but of religious or pastoral problem of evil. Plantinga concurs that the believer may have a "religious" problem in the face of personal suffering and disaster resulting with the failure to maintain belief in God. However, "this is a problem of a different dimension. Such a problem calls for pastoral rather than philosophical counsel."<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 132.

<sup>315</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 195.

<sup>316</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," in Daniel Howard-Synder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press, 1996), 93.

<sup>317</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 195.

There have been several objections to Plantinga's Free-Will Defence in recent years. The atheist philosophers Antony Flew (1923-) and J. L. Mackie are among the foremost critics of Plantinga's Free-Will Defence. They argue that the omnipotent God must be able to actualise a possible world in which free agents always choose good with their free-will. According to this "compatibilist" critic, God, if he exists and if he is omnipotent, must be able to create a possible world containing free creatures who always choose right avoiding evil. John Mackie writes, "if there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely doing the good on every occasion."<sup>318</sup> Antony Flew adds,

"if it is really logically possible for an action to be both freely chosen and yet fully determined by caused causes, then the keystone argument of the Free Will Defence, that there is contradiction in speaking of God so arranging the laws of nature that all men always as a matter of fact freely choose to do right, cannot hold."<sup>319</sup>

As a response to Flew and Mackie's charge, Plantinga appeals to the idea of what he calls "transworld depravity." Accordingly, it is possible that every person is subject to some sort of depravity of doing freely wrong on at least one occasion in any possible world. Hence, free creatures are depraved in every possible world they exist. Plantinga concludes, "Under these conditions, God could have created a world containing

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<sup>318</sup> John L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, 64, no. 254, (April 1955), 209. See also John L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 164.

<sup>319</sup> Antony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 153.

no moral evil only by creating one without significantly free persons.”<sup>320</sup> Since transworld depravity is logically coherent, then God, although he is omnipotent and omniscient, cannot possibly actualise a possible world containing free beings without evil. It seems that Kenneth Surin concurs with Plantinga at this point. Surin writes, “Plantinga, it would seem, has succeeded in showing that an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect God will not necessarily prevent all evil.”<sup>321</sup>

On the other hand, John Hick questions the truth of Plantinga’s response to the compatibilist objection, and he finds it unsuccessful. Contrary to Plantinga, Hick argues that “human freedom...does not occur in vacuum; it is always the freedom of a particular person endowed with a particular nature.”<sup>322</sup> That is to say, “causal laws” and “antecedent conditions” play an important role in the formation of the person to be and of the use of his or her freedom. God could have created human beings with wholly good nature within a good environment so that they would always choose the good freely. In such a condition, humans would not suffer from transworld depravity; they would not choose evil. Hick further suggests that the proper response to the objection raised by the atheist such as Mackie and Flew is proposed by the Irenaean Theodicy. According to the Irenaean approach, moral evil is “an inevitable result of God’s creation of man as an immature creature, at the beginning of a long process of moral and spiritual development.”<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 189.

<sup>321</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 73.

<sup>322</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 368.

<sup>323</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 369.



I believe Hick has a point here. Although what Plantinga argues appears to be logically possible, it is not necessarily true. If God conditions human free-will with causal laws and antecedent conditions shaping the human action to proceed in this world, God could have equally created good human nature within a setting leading him or her always to choose right freely. However, it is not the case. Consequently, there are two possibilities. Either God, without any reason, wants human beings to commit evil and suffer the consequences or he has a purpose in creating humans in such a fashion and in designing the conditions in this way. Since a good God would not possibly want the former, Hick's theodicy seems to be more reasonable.

Another significant criticism against Plantinga's Free-Will Defence, as against other theodicies and defences, is that the vast amount and diversity of evil in the world is inconsistent with the existence of a good and omnipotent God. The question simply is whether God could have created a possible world in which less evil than the existing one occurs. Plantinga asserts that what is usually called the irregular distribution of evil and its enormity do not disprove theism, "provided there is no possible world God could have created that contains a better balance of broadly moral good with respect to broadly moral evil."<sup>324</sup>

If God wants to give significant freedom to humankind, they must be capable of bringing about the great goods along with the severe evils. In any possible world, the elimination of a bad state of affairs leads to the limitation of a greater good. Plantinga states, "an omnipotent and omniscient being could permit as much evil as he pleased,

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<sup>324</sup> Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 63.

without...forfeiting his claim to omnibenevolence, so long as for every evil state of affairs he permits, there is a greater good.”<sup>325</sup> Consequently, this world is such a possible world that there is a balance of good over evil as a whole.

Moreover, the Free-Will Defence appears to lead to a series of problems. One is the possibility of the mass destruction of the whole creation by evil actions of free creatures. Surin states this view as follows, “It is logically possible...for human agents to exercise their freedom in ways that will ultimately frustrate God’s design for his creation.”<sup>326</sup> That will certainly result with outweighing of evil over good, which is, according to the free-will defender, a threat to the existence of God. If it is said that God would not allow that happen, has God a purpose in allowing or directing certain amount of evil in the world? Then he is responsible for the evil states of the world.

As we have seen, excessive evil, both moral and natural, is, for Plantinga, not a threat to God’s existence because evil does not outweigh good at the bottom of the line. The atheist presses on criticising this line of argumentation. Referring to Ivan Karamazov’s protest to his brother Alyosha in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s (1821-1881) *the Brothers Karamazov*, Kenneth Surin writes, “it was (morally) unacceptable that any alleged good should be seen as recompense for a single tear of the innocent child who had been tortured.”<sup>327</sup> How could one weigh the total amount of good with the total amount of evil in the face of the suffering of an innocent child?

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<sup>325</sup> Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 120.

<sup>326</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 75-6.

<sup>327</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 75.

Plantinga's response to this sort of objection can be seen in his dealing with the atheological proposition that "No case of severe, protracted, involuntary human pain is ever outweighed by any good state of affairs."<sup>328</sup> Plantinga takes this proposition as a value judgement and concludes that it is a matter of opinion, not an argument. While that proposition may provide the atheologian a reason not to believe that God exists, he cannot expect that the theist must follow his or her moral judgement. A distinctive characteristic of moral judgements such as this one is that "reasonable persons can and sometimes do disagree about them."<sup>329</sup> Hence, this, according to Plantinga, is an "impasse" for both the atheist and the theist.

Some Christian thinkers have criticised Plantinga's minimisation of evil, his overemphasis of human freedom and the remoteness of the free-will God to the Christian God. Robert Ackermann, a free-will defender himself, writes, "on Plantinga's creation account, evil has already been minimized in the actual world, and so the wholly good God would never have any reason to act again in the course of the actual world."<sup>330</sup> If evil is not so much significant as Plantinga argues, why did then God intervene in human history? The traditional Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus and the following events seem to lose its significance to a great extent.

Kenneth Surin also criticises Plantinga with minimalism. Surin writes, "Plantinga's deity, in contrast [to the God of salvation], seems to have detached himself from the world and left its inhabitants to work out their own moral and spiritual

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<sup>328</sup> Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 130.

<sup>329</sup> Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 130. See, for a similar position, Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 44.

<sup>330</sup> Robert Ackermann, "An Alternative Free Will Defence," *Religious Studies*, 18 (1982), 369.

destinies.”<sup>331</sup> Because there is no place in the Free-Will Defence to God who sustains human needs, concerns about their state of sinfulness and intervenes to reconcile them into himself. This appears to be a sound objection to Plantinga’s Free-Will Defence.

In conclusion, Plantinga argues that God is not responsible for the evils of the world. It is logically possible that God allows and does not prevent evil, moral as well natural, in order that there be free moral beings. He could not have actualised a world with less evil or free creatures, human as well non-human, with less evil actions. It is possible that a possible world containing free creatures that bring about good and evil, perhaps more good than evil, is more valuable than a possible world with non-free creatures who are programmed to act rightly. Therefore, the failure of free creatures at times cannot possibly be an argument against the existence of God.

Overall, I think that Plantinga seems to succeed showing that despite the claim of the atheological argument, there is no logical inconsistency between the reality of evil and the existence of God. As pointed out, this is only a logical solution to the problem of evil; that is, it is logically possible. However, he does not go further and explore whether what he argues is true, probable or plausible. Therefore, although “the logical problem has been laid to rest”<sup>332</sup> the Free-Will Defence does not have much to say about the truth of what is argued. For instance, Plantinga cannot prove that there are such non-human creatures as Satan and his hosts, and they are responsible for the devastation in nature.

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<sup>331</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 76.

<sup>332</sup> Michael L. Peterson, “The Problem of Evil,” in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 395.

He cannot substantiate his claim that human beings are completely free because the free-will defender is under no obligation to show the truth of what is logically possible. They are all logically possible. As Hick points out, "to establish this logical possibility is to leave the substantial problem as it was."<sup>333</sup> Consequently, I believe that it is a shortcoming of the Free-Will Defence to avoid from the attempts of explaining the facts of evil in the world, namely, the evidential problem of evil. Perhaps in this way the free-will defender thinks he or she avoids further criticisms, but the problems do not go away. The evidential problem of evil continues to challenge the existence of God.

### c. The Natural Law Theodicy

The existence of natural evils such as earthquakes, floods, famine, and diseases has been a subject to a serious argument against the theistic concept of God. The theist argues that if there is an all-powerful and all-good God as the theistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, proclaim, why are there natural evils as well as moral evil in the world causing a great deal of pain and suffering to humans and animals? Even if we assume that not God but humans are responsible for moral evil, is God not supposed to prevent or eliminate natural evils, at least some of them? In this context, the chief task of a theodicy is often seen as to give adequate reason to the questions "why a God might bring about some natural evil" and "why a God might bring about natural evil of the quantity and intensity which this world contains."<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 371.

<sup>334</sup> Richard Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," in W. J. Abraham and S. W. Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 165.

The British philosopher of religion Richard Swinburne (1934-) and his American counterpart Bruce R. Reichenbach have separately developed two forms of The Natural Law Theodicy in order to justify physical or natural evils in the world. However, they are not the only responses to the problem of natural evil. For instance, process and soul-making theodicies along with Plantinga's Free-Will Defence include responses to the problem of natural evil.

Nevertheless, the theodicies of Swinburne and Reichenbach have achieved a great prominence in recent discussions of the problem of natural evil. Both philosophers, as being the defenders of free-will, base their justification of natural evil on the concept of human freedom and of natural law. Swinburne's theodicy<sup>335</sup> emphasises the need for natural evil in order to have "the choice of whether to acquire knowledge of the good and bad effects our actions, and indeed in order to allow us to have very well-justified knowledge at all."<sup>336</sup> Reichenbach, on the other hand, contends that the possibility of natural evil is inherent in a natural world, which provides the conditions for human beings to become moral agents.

To start with, Swinburne in his recent book *Providence and the Problem of Evil* argues that natural evil is needed in order for human beings to acquire "very well-justified knowledge." This is the knowledge of the nature and consequences of human actions such as suffering leading to compassion and sorrow for others and so on. Without

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<sup>335</sup> Swinburne's conception of "theodicy" is closer to what Plantinga calls "defence." While the latter means by "theodicy" an account of God's "actual" reasons for allowing or not preventing evil, Swinburne understands it as "an account of his [God's] possible reasons." See R. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 15, n. 8.

<sup>336</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 178, n. 1.

the existence of natural processes, which are strictly deterministic in terms of cause-effect relationship, humans could not possibly know the results of their actions. If there were no suffering in the world, one would not have any idea about compassion towards sufferers or a need for solidarity at times of disasters. Therefore, natural processes are needed to produce bad as well as good states of affairs so that human beings can learn to make meaningful choices. Swinburne explains,

“while God might be able to give moderately well-justified knowledge of the effects of our actions, good and bad, without too great a cost, he could not allow us to learn what the effects are, let alone to choose to seek such knowledge, without providing natural processes (in which humans are not involved) whereby those effects (good and bad) are produced in a regular way.”<sup>337</sup>

Consequently, if human beings are to have the knowledge of the results of their actions, to make proper choices between good and evil, and to form character and improve the conditions in the world accordingly, natural evil is inevitable. God could not do it otherwise without impairing human freedom.

Swinburne postulates certain criteria for a hypothesis to become a very well-justified knowledge. These are what Swinburne calls “true criteria” that determines what is evidential or probable hypothesis. He summarises some of these true criteria as follows:

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<sup>337</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 179.

“First, a hypothesis is more likely to be true, in so far as it renders probable what we observe... Secondly, the probability given to a hypothesis by the fact that it makes it probable that we will observe what we do is diminished in so far as those observations are ones which are fairly probable anyway... Thirdly, a hypothesis is more likely to be true in so far as it is simple... Other important evidential criteria which I believe to be a priori include criteria for inferring to people’s thoughts and feelings from the way they behave, and to their beliefs from what they say; and a criterion to the effect that...we should believe what people tell us about what they themselves believe.”<sup>338</sup>

Swinburne extends the scope of Free-Will Defence to the extent that it can also explain some natural evil as well as moral evil.<sup>339</sup> Here comes to mind Plantinga’s proposal of the actions of Satan and his hosts as the cause of natural evils.<sup>340</sup>

However, Swinburne rejects Plantinga’s solution on theological, evidential and logical grounds. He, firstly, asserts that Plantinga’s proposal is not theologically correct because the Christian tradition has not granted to “bad angels” any direct power to cause evil, but a limited influence to tempt human beings to wickedness. Secondly, it is evidentially objectionable for “there is not enough independent evidence” to support this claim. Finally, it is logically inconsistent because the bad choice and action of Satan presupposes the pre-existence of bad desires and options prior to Satan’s temptation.

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<sup>338</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 59-61.

<sup>339</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 98.

<sup>340</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 192.



Thus, the theory of Satan cannot explain the cause of natural evil.<sup>341</sup> Instead, Swinburne maintains, "For humans to have a choice between doing good and doing bad, we need to have true beliefs about the effects of our actions, for the goodness or badness of an action is so often a matter of it having good and bad effects."<sup>342</sup>

However, it is questionable that Swinburne is right in arguing that Christian theology does not ascribe to the devils a power to cause suffering. As I have pointed out in *the Major Responses of the New Testament* of the study, evils of the world, and especially illnesses, were attributed to demonic forces such as Satan. For a remedy from these so-called demonic possessions, exorcism has been one of the important occupations of the priests throughout Christian history. It is often argued that the healing miracles of Jesus in the New Testament suggest that he also shared this belief.

Nevertheless, Swinburne is right in holding that the theory of Satan does not solve the question of evil, but raises other problems that are more important. If God is a sovereign deity, why does he allow the devil to operate against himself and his children? One could ask, for instance, what would stop one to call these forces gods as well if they are so independent?

How could God disclose these true beliefs or knowledge of the nature and consequences of their actions to human beings? Swinburne, like Reichenbach,<sup>343</sup> argues that this knowledge could be passed from God either directly to humans or inductively

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<sup>341</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 108. See also Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," 148-9.

<sup>342</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 176.

<sup>343</sup> Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 103-6.

from “past experiences.” God could “whisper in our ears” or write on the screen the consequences of our actions. If God had disclosed this knowledge to humans directly, the belief in God would be no more a matter of belief, but it would be the knowledge of God “with real certainty.”<sup>344</sup> In addition, the presence of God would have overwhelmed human consciousness so much so that “That...would make the choice between good and bad impossible.”<sup>345</sup> God would not choose to create such a world.

Therefore, in order that humans can be free and bring about good or evil, Swinburne contends, “God must implant in nature a system of natural causal processes and let us learn what they are.”<sup>346</sup> Swinburne’s world of natural processes or of natural laws is, as is very similar to Reichenbach’s conception of the world,<sup>347</sup> a deterministic system in which a cause either necessarily or probably brings about an effect regularly. When this cause-effect relationship is established, natural processes provide human beings the ability to predict future states of affairs, good or bad. Observing and studying natural processes and learning from past experiences of others as well as from personal experiences, humans come to know how to bring about good or evil. For example, a study and experience of earthquake produces knowledge regarding to its nature and consequences. This knowledge provides people with the opportunity either to cause suffering by building houses within the earthquake line or to prevent possible pain and death by deterring people from settling around the volcano. Consequently, Swinburne

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<sup>344</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 108.

<sup>345</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 185.

<sup>346</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 185.

<sup>347</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 106.

writes, "These opportunities would not have been available without the knowledge; observation of natural processes producing pain provides that knowledge."<sup>348</sup>

In addition, one's proximity to experience, according to Swinburne, determines the power of the knowledge. The closer one is to an experience of a natural process the surer knowledge he or she could get from an experience. Although the experience of others, too, provides strong knowledge, "One knows best just what it feels like to be burnt by having been burnt oneself in the past."<sup>349</sup> In short, the world of natural laws provides free agents with opportunities to seek and learn knowledge and to develop personality.

Moreover, Swinburne contends that natural evils provide humans opportunities to acquire "high order goods." He writes, "It is good...that we should have the opportunity over time freely to form our characters, to determine the kind of people we are to be."<sup>350</sup> In this sense, suffering is necessary in order to have endurance; plagues in order to learn to help one another and so on. Swinburne finds a support from the spiritual writings of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, namely the *Philokalia*. He quotes a passage from St Peter of Damascus, "Through what we are regarded as hardships we attain a state of patience, humility and hope of blessings in the age to be... Indeed, not only in the age to be, but even in this present age these things are a source of great blessing to us."<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 187; see also Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 202-3.

<sup>349</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 188.

<sup>350</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 167-8.

<sup>351</sup> G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (ed. and trans.), *Philokalia*, iii (Faber & Faber, 1984), 172-7 quoted in Swinburne, *Providence*, 160.

Therefore, through natural evils human beings freely achieve higher goods otherwise not possible to do so.

However, Swinburne denies that this is the best of all possible worlds. In fact, he believes that the idea of best possible world is logically impossible<sup>352</sup> and conceptually absurd.<sup>353</sup> It is wrong to say that God has to create the best possible world. God may have had reason to bring about some possible worlds and not to bring about other possible worlds. Swinburne further argues that even if we assume that there is a single best possible world, "it is highly dubious to suppose that God is under any moral obligation to create such a world."<sup>354</sup> Because God has no moral obligation to non-existent possibilities. Instead, God would bring about the sort of world which he had reason to bring about. Swinburne believes that this world is of that kind. The question why this world, not another one of similar kind, was brought about, cannot be known.

Furthermore, a world with less pain and suffering would be less good than the present one. In Swinburne's words, "A world in which humans (and animals) lacked much natural affection for parents, children, neighbours, etc. would be a horrible place."<sup>355</sup> Without a significant amount of natural evil such as danger, pain and death, "Many of us would then have such an easy life that we simply would not have much

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<sup>352</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 8.

<sup>353</sup> Swinburne, *the Existence of God*, 113.

<sup>354</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 114.

<sup>355</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 167.

opportunity to show courage or, indeed, manifest much in the way of great goodness at all.”<sup>356</sup>

However, this does not mean for Swinburne that to acquire more opportunity to show courage God must multiply disasters. There is a limit to natural evils, which God allows to occur. This limit is human condition. That is to say, humans can bear certain amount and intensity of pain. When this amount is exceeded, human life with pain ends at death.<sup>357</sup> In this sense, death is not a bad state of affairs; but it is only a limit to the suffering endured and the end of a good state of human life. “A natural death after a certain small finite number of years provides the limit to the period of suffering.”<sup>358</sup> It is, for Swinburne, logically not possible and morally wrong that a good God leaves human beings in the hands of other fellow humans who may inflict pain on them more than a limited time. Because limitless suffering in the world would annul God’s purpose of greater good.

If God, if he exists, seeks to bring about greater good out of natural evil through meaningful human choices, how could the natural law theodocist explain the instances of animal suffering? Is it not right that the world would be better off without animal sufferings at least? Swinburne firstly asserts that animal suffering is not as serious a problem as that of human suffering. Therefore, “One only needs reasons adequate to account for God allowing an amount of suffering much less than that of humans.”<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 110; see also Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 219.

<sup>357</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 213; *The Existence of God*, 219.

<sup>358</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 213-4.

<sup>359</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 102.

Although animals do not have free-will, animal life involves “many serious significant intentional actions” such as looking for a mate, building nests, exploring and preying upon others and so on. All these necessarily bring about animal pain and suffering out of natural processes. Swinburne concludes that it is worthwhile that animals feed their offsprings, fight for other members of the flock despite the sufferings they have to endure.

Moreover, Swinburne maintains that animal suffering provides humankind with very important information. Through observing animals in natural and artificial conditions, humans come to know and benefit from many natural phenomena. This knowledge covers a wide range of information ranging from knowing the nature of other animals to discovering “very long-term consequences of changes of circumstances, environment, or climate.” Consequently, Swinburne writes, “All past and present human and animal natural evils of which we know thus contribute to the widening of human choice when we learn about them. And (except at an undesirable cost) we could not learn, and especially choose to learn, without them.”<sup>360</sup>

Having outlined Swinburne’s theodicy, I ought to note that there seems to be a slight change in Swinburne’s account of evil in terms of certain religious notions from his previous position. Swinburne previously held in *The Existence of God* that there was no need in a theodicy for religious doctrines such as “redemptive incarnation” and life after death. The reason for such a position is not that they are unreasonable, but that they are

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<sup>360</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 192.

“to complicate theism so that it needs more in the way of confirming evidence.”<sup>361</sup> It seems now he modified his position regarding to the Christian doctrines in question. In his most recent book *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Swinburne states, “In any case most other contemporary humans are a lot more likely to be convinced if theodicy does bring in such doctrines.”<sup>362</sup> Accordingly, he reinforces his theodicy with such Christian doctrines as life after death and incarnation.

Swinburne offers what he calls in his book *Is There A God?* a “fall-back” position for those who find his theodicy unconvincing. He asserts that his argument may be accepted as convincing “if and only if God also provided compensation in the form of happiness after death to the victims whose sufferings make possible the goods.”<sup>363</sup> Swinburne maintains that the notion of eschatology is not crucial for his theodicy although he believes that God provides post-mortem existence for many human beings. However, he is sympathetic towards a person who thinks in the face of the “worst evils” that human survival from death is necessary.

The mainstream religious traditions teaches that there is, on the one hand, Heaven, the abode of the blessed, who are in pursuit and adoration of good there. On the other hand, there is Hell for those who choose no to repent for their sins and reform their attitude. Swinburne writes, “A good God...will respect a considered choice of destiny.”<sup>364</sup> The inhabitants of Hell are punished for their bad actions and are deprived of the Beatific

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<sup>361</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 222.

<sup>362</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, xi.

<sup>363</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 113.

<sup>364</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 198.

Vision of God. In between these two, there is the intermediate state, Catholics call Purgatory, for the wrongdoers who inadequately repented. The temporal punishment of the intermediate state “would provide the opportunity for the sinner to choose to reform.”<sup>365</sup>

Furthermore, Swinburne takes on board the Christian doctrines of the atonement and the incarnation in justifying the evils of the world. The life and death of God in Christ on the cross is seen as an atonement for human wickedness and sins. Human beings must be grateful to God for this and turn to him “in baptism and the Eucharist and other church ceremonies we can plead in atonement for our sins, the sacrifice of Christ’s life and death.”<sup>366</sup> In addition, Swinburne finds the doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus Christ as God incarnate, relevant for the problem of human suffering. This is because he argues that God allows pain and suffering for the sake of high order goods. Swinburne states, “If God shares the pain and other suffering to which he subjects us for the sake of greater goods, that indeed reduces the badness of the suffering.”<sup>367</sup> Therefore, the doctrine of the Incarnation, in a sense, becomes an expression of God’s sorrow for human suffering.

The other proponent of The Natural Law Theodicy Reichenbach argues that God does not will natural evils, but they are “the consequences of the outworking upon sentient creatures of the natural laws according to which God’s creation operates.”<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 202.

<sup>366</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 215.

<sup>367</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 216.

<sup>368</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 101.



Reichenbach asserts that a natural world governed by natural laws is necessary for the creation of moral beings. He explains,

“Since a world with free persons making choices between moral good and evil and choosing a significant amount of moral good is better than a world without free persons and moral good and evil, God in creating had to create a world which operated according to natural laws to achieve this higher good. Thus, his action of creation of a natural world and a natural order, along with the resulting pain and pleasure which we experience, is justified.”<sup>369</sup>

Therefore, for Reichenbach as well as Swinburne natural evils are brought about by a natural world, which accommodates necessary conditions for the greater good.

In formulating his argument, Reichenbach in a very similar fashion with Swinburne asserts that God could have created two different kinds of possible worlds. A possible world would have been operated either by “natural laws” or by “divine miraculous intervention.” Reichenbach argues that the latter is not a “viable alternative for God” for three reasons.<sup>370</sup> Firstly, there would be no regular and natural cause-effect relation in a world of miracles. It would make human rational action impossible, which is essential for becoming a moral being. Secondly, to develop a moral nature human freedom is necessary. In such a world God would not allow people to choose evil preventing them being fully free agents. Thirdly, although it sounds paradisaical, a miracle-operated world would have led to conflicting situations. “The very thing which would be good for or bring pleasure to one person might not be good for or bring

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<sup>369</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 101-2.

<sup>370</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 103.

pleasure to another.”<sup>371</sup> Consequently, a miraculous world is incompatible with the existence of moral agents.

Then, Reichenbach asserts that it is necessary for God to create a world functioning according to natural laws. Here the phrase natural law is a generic term describing how nature, its objects and as a whole, works under certain circumstances. In such a world, natural evils such as diseases, hungers and other disorders in nature are the operations of natural objects and conditions causing “sentient” creatures suffering and death. Hence, the existence of world of natural laws and the presence of animate life on earth makes possible the occurrence of natural evils.

However, a world of natural law is necessary for the existence of moral beings, which is “greater good.” Besides, a person cannot be “blameworthy” for something he or she could not have done otherwise. Consequently, “God,” Reichenbach argues, “cannot be held morally accountable or blameworthy for natural evils. Thus we have a morally sufficient reason for the existence of natural evil.”<sup>372</sup> God has a sufficient reason to create human beings, and he cannot do it in any other way than he has done. Therefore, he is not responsible for natural evils in the world.

To sum up, Swinburne and Reichenbach attempt to justify natural evils in the world resorting to the phenomenon of natural law and human free-will. The former seems to put a considerable emphasis also on the greater good explanation in addition. Both seem to approach to the problem of natural evil from different angles. Swinburne finds

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<sup>371</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 103-6.

<sup>372</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 106-7.

the existence of natural evils necessary in order that human beings may know them and use their free-will properly. The latter holds that the possibility of natural evil is inherent in a natural system," and is necessary for human moral development.<sup>373</sup>

Moreover, Swinburne appears to base his theodicy on the grounds of probability. That is, high order goods or greater goods outweigh the evils of the world with a tiny bit. Therefore, on the basis of probability The Natural Law Theodicy justifies natural evils. In addition, Swinburne, contrary to Reichenbach, seems to claim that his version of The Natural Law Theodicy explains not all but some of natural evils. The former takes on board the Christian doctrines such as life after death, the atonement and the incarnation as God's intervention to human suffering. Overall, Swinburne and Reichenbach have offered a significant answer to the question why God allow or not prevent natural evil occur. Both have argued that God is not responsible for natural evils as well as moral evils in the world. However, there are objections against both theodicies to be met.

One of the most crucial objections raised against the Natural Law Theodicy is that there are a lot more suffering in the world than normally needed in order to use free-will and to have moral beings. If the suffering in the world were proportioned, then the theist would be right in his claim that suffering is necessary for being free and moral. Eleonore Stump, the Christian philosopher of religion, contends, "countless injuries and deaths are still unjustified on his account, namely, all those which men could not have prevented and whose occurrence is not necessary to produce or stimulate new

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<sup>373</sup> Michael L. Peterson, "Recent Work on the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 4, (October 1983), 330.

knowledge.”<sup>374</sup> Is it not the existence of pain too much and meaningless to justify God in permitting natural evil? Would it not be better if God had not allowed the destruction of Pompeii, the Lisbon earthquake and the Black Death? According to Swinburne, God set a limit to pain and suffering in the world, which are death and the limited construction of human brain. If it is still objected saying that the limit set is too wide, then, what is asked is incompatible with human freedom and responsibility. Swinburne writes,

“What in effect the objection is asking is that a God should make a toy-world, a world where things matter, but not very much; where we can choose and our choices remain God’s. For he simply would not allow us the choice of doing real harm, or through our negligence allowing real harm to occur. He would be like the over-protective parent who will not let his child out of his sight for a moment.”<sup>375</sup>

Swinburne’s response to this objection is based on the correlation between natural evils and the opportunity they provide for humans to know and to act responsibly.

However, Stump objects this correlation because “there is something frustratingly circular in such an explanation.”<sup>376</sup> It does not make much sense to say that natural evils are good because they provide us knowledge so that we may avoid from evils. It is true that they provide knowledge; but if there were no natural evils, we would not need to know and avoid from them. She concludes, “the value of knowledge gained from natural evils cannot be used as a justification of God’s actions in allowing natural

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<sup>374</sup> Eleonore Stump, “Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983), 54.

<sup>375</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 219-20.

<sup>376</sup> Stump, “Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil,” 56.

evils to occur.<sup>377</sup> Although Stump describes the relation between natural evils and knowledge as circular, she seems to ignore the part human freedom plays in the argument, which depends on the knowledge about the consequences of our actions. However, for Swinburne, the real problem is that “the fewer natural evils a God provides, the less opportunity he provides for man to exercise responsibility.”<sup>378</sup> For the elimination of some natural evils would have meant less knowledge and less serious choices.

Reichenbach, on the other hand, contends that the theodist is under no obligation to show that there is a better or the best world. Since he or she objects the conditions of this world, it is the atheologian’s task, first, to make a list of other possible worlds governed by natural laws. Secondly, the atheologian must show that one of these possible worlds would have less evil than this world has. For Reichenbach, this is an impossible thing to do because it is “a task suited only for an omniscient mind.”<sup>379</sup> I agree with Reichenbach so far. Human mind can not possibly know at present every single initial condition causing the world and how it would have resulted if each and/or every one of these conditions were different from the actual ones. However, Reichenbach goes as far as to say that

“Given a change in initial conditions, it is possible that this world would not have any less natural evil while not preserving moral activity. Therefore, this

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<sup>377</sup> Stump, “Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil,” 57.

<sup>378</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 219.

<sup>379</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 116.

argument, which appeals to the unknown as evidence against the theist's argument, cannot be successful."<sup>380</sup>

It seems to me that Reichenbach swiftly jumps to the conclusion disregarding the other side of the possibility. It must have escaped from his notice that it is also logically possible that the world would have had less natural evils than the present ones.

The involuntary and innocent pain and death resulted from natural disasters, too, raises serious problems against The Natural Law Theodicy. Kenneth Surin criticises Swinburne with the charge of reducing the pressing reality of human death and suffering to an abstract problem. Whatever the reason may be, how a just God permits suffering and death of the innocent so that other fellow human beings might have knowledge as to what evil is? "For this reason," Surin contends, "the 'natural law' theodicy will almost certainly be rejected by the 'protest' atheist."<sup>381</sup> Why should I be a "victim of the system" so that others may know and bring about good and evil freely?<sup>382</sup> At least, should I not be asked whether I want to sacrifice my life or to endure pain for a good purpose? Swinburne and Reichenbach both might say that to get the consent of the person to suffer involves the violation of natural processes and of the meaningful use of free-will. It is because not certain people only but every human being has to be warned out of God's goodness before every single instance of natural evils. That would amount to the cancellation of natural laws and consequently of free-will.

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<sup>380</sup> Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, 114.

<sup>381</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 81.

<sup>382</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 210.

However, this does not seem to provide a solution to the problem of individual instances of involuntary suffering. It is because if I am not willing to accept any kind of pain or death, but I am inflicted with it anyway, then I am done wrong, which is something that one does not expect from a good God. Swinburne assumes that to endure pain for the sake of others to come “will make *your* own life the best life for *you* to have led.”<sup>383</sup> I am not sure if it will be the best thing to do; but one might object saying that such behaviour is meaningful as long as it is brought about by my moral choice. Otherwise, there is little, if any, meaning in such attitude.

For those who are unconvinced for this sort of answer, Swinburne appeals to what he calls the “fall-back position.”<sup>384</sup> That is, God will compensate the sufferers who endured pain for the sake of the goods in life after death. However, Swinburne contends that only those who seek good in this world are to be rewarded in the afterlife. Concerning the destiny of non-believers who reject good, he is committed to the view that some will freely choose not to be with God. Swinburne writes, “firm and continued wrong acts and lack of any regret for them will get us into the condition of incorrigibly rejecting the good,” which is the Beatific Vision.<sup>385</sup> However, this is not an eternal punishment in the flames of hell as the traditional teaching claims it. “[F]or God to subject them to literally endless physical pain (*poena sensus* in medieval terminology) does seem to me to be incompatible with the goodness of God.”<sup>386</sup> It is simply the

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<sup>383</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 112.

<sup>384</sup> Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, 112-3.

<sup>385</sup> Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 197.

<sup>386</sup> Swinburne, “A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell,” in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 51.

depravation of eternal happiness, which might be in various forms. It could be annihilation after death or eternal pursuit of trivial things. This is not a bad thing so long as the people in this condition have no desire to have eternal happiness.

To conclude, the theodicies of Swinburne and Reichenbach offer a partial and limited response to natural evils. Such a world as ours may be necessary for human freedom and moral growth. We cannot be sure of this since we are not able to know what other possibilities we would have. However, it appears to be wrong to argue that The Natural Law Theodicy justifies God in allowing or not preventing all natural evils. The biggest obstacle in front of this sort of theodicy is, as is with other theistic theodicies, the excessive and pointless suffering occurring in the world. All-wise God must be able to produce a world in which human beings could be free with significantly less natural evil and less suffering.

#### **d. The Soul-Making Theodicy**

The Soul-Making Theodicy<sup>387</sup> of John Hick (1922-) is one of the most comprehensive theodicies of contemporary Christian thought. In his celebrated book *Evil and the God of Love* he inquires, "Can the presence of evil in the world be reconciled with the existence of a God who is unlimited both in goodness and in power?"<sup>388</sup> Hick seeks a rational answer to this question within the framework of Christian theology. The writings of the second century Greek father Irenaeus, as opposed to Augustine, and of

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<sup>387</sup> It is also called "Person-Making" Theodicy, and an "Irenaean Theodicy" with reference to Irenaeus, by whom Hick was inspired a great deal.

<sup>388</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 3.



Friedrich Schleiermacher have been the essential sources of Hick's inspiration within Christian tradition.

The Soul-Making Theodicy<sup>389</sup> is a "metaphysical" hypothesis drawing on the data of Christian tradition and the world. For the project of theodicy is, for Hick, "an exercise in metaphysical construction, in the sense that it consists in the formation and criticism of large-scale hypotheses concerning the nature and process of the universe."<sup>390</sup> Thus, Hick's Irenaean Theodicy is set to give a consistent account of the Christian God with the reality of evil in the world. However, he does not claim that his hypothesis explains every instance of evil in the world. His aim is, he states, "to point to certain considerations that prevent the fact of evil (largely incomprehensible though it remains) from constituting a final and insuperable bar to rational belief in God."<sup>391</sup> Consequently, The Soul-Making Theodicy has a negative function in the sense that it claims not to formulate a new faith but to "preserve" Christian faith in the face of evil.

The Soul-Making Theodicy briefly argues that the world governed by physical laws provides a suitable environment for free beings to develop perfect morality and spirituality in their journey towards God. Only in such an environment with real challenges, threats and sufferings, people could freely enrich their personality with such ethical characteristics as fortitude, generosity, prudence and love. However, Hick denies

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<sup>389</sup> Hick adopts the phrase "soul-making" from a letter of the British poet John Keats who describes the world as "the vale of soul-making." See M. B. Forman, *The Letters of John Keats*, fourth edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 334-5 in Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first ed., 295.

<sup>390</sup> John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in S. T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 39.

<sup>391</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 38. See also Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first ed., 280-1.

that there is a rigid cause-effect relation between suffering and person-making. Because the evidence from the world shows that afflictions do not always bring about the desired consequences. Hick explains,

“What was necessary was a world which contains real contingencies, real dangers, real problems and tasks and real possibilities of failure and tragedy as well as of triumph and success, because only in a world having this general character could human animals begin their free development into ‘children of God’.”<sup>392</sup>

In exploring the Soul-Making Theodicy further, I shall follow the traditional division of the problem of evil. Accordingly, there is, on the one hand, the problem of moral evil, human wickedness. On the other hand, there is the problem of natural, or physical, evil arising out of earthquakes, floods, famines, and diseases in the world. Why has an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God caused and permitted human vices and natural disasters? To justify God, the theist must show that the supreme being has a purpose for doing so.

Hick offers a version of Free-Will Defence as an answer to the problem of moral evil. The core of this defence is the condition of “human freedom and responsibility,” which is the bases of decision-making process. That is to say, human beings are free and responsible for their decisions and actions. They can decide and execute whatever they choose. Therefore, human misuse or abuse of freedom is the origin of human vices. Hick states,

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<sup>392</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition (London: Macmillan, 1977), 375.

“an enormous amount of human pain arises either from the inhumanity or the culpable incompetence of mankind. This includes such major scourges as poverty, oppression and persecution, war, all the injustice, indignity that occur even in the most advanced societies.”<sup>393</sup>

As Hick points out, both the Irenaean Theodicy and the Augustinian Theodicy share a similar view in terms of human freedom as the origin of moral evil.<sup>394</sup> However, Hick criticises the original sin and the Fall as the origin of evil, which has a central place in Augustinian version of Free-Will Defence, with the charge that it is “open to insuperable scientific, moral, and logical objections.”<sup>395</sup> Firstly, scientific data points that the disorder and waste in nature precede the emergence of humankind on earth. Therefore, as Holmes Rolston states, “Suffering in an harsh world did not enter chronologically after sin and on account of it.”<sup>396</sup> Secondly, it is morally repugnant that a good and just God could punish the whole human race for the sin of Adam and Eve. Finally, there is logical incoherency in the conception of “wholly good beings in a wholly good world becoming sinful.”<sup>397</sup>

Instead of the Augustinian creation-Fall “myth,” Hick argues for gradual human creation from infant-like state, or from the “image” as Irenaeus called it, to the “likeness” of God in an epistemic distance from God. With the help of modern anthropological

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<sup>393</sup> Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, second edition, 38-9.

<sup>394</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 301.

<sup>395</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 285.

<sup>396</sup> Holmes Rolston, III, “Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?” *Zygon* 29, no. 2 (June 1994), 205 as quoted in Nancy Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 245.

<sup>397</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 286.

findings, particularly the theory of evolution, Hick asserts that the creation of humanity has been taking place in two stages. The first stage of the creation of humanity was resulted out of the evolutionary process with the emergence of *homo sapiens* as “intelligent ethical and religious animals.” Human “self-centredness” is thought to have played a crucial role at this stage in human survival. In the second stage, which we are in, free human beings have been transforming into the state of divine likeness or of “children of God.”<sup>398</sup> Here the condition of “self-transcendence” as opposed to “self-centredness” is the source of human spiritual development to perfection. The latter is, on the other hand, the cause of moral evil.<sup>399</sup> The second stage of human creation is not a finished state; but it is an ongoing process.

Hick argues that the creation of human beings in an “epistemic distance” from God is an essential requirement for the defence of human free-will. He states, “In order to be a person, exercising some measure of genuine freedom, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but a ‘distance’ from God.”<sup>400</sup> This is not a spatial distance since God is omnipresent; but it is a “cognitive” distance in relation to God. He hides himself behind the immediate reality of the universe leaving room for human freedom to act autonomously. Hick explains, “The world must be to man, to some extent at least, *etsi deus non daretur*, ‘as if there were no God’... Thus the

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<sup>398</sup> Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” 41-2.

<sup>399</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 119.

<sup>400</sup> Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” 43.

world, as the environment of man's life, will be religiously ambiguous, both veiling God and revealing him."<sup>401</sup>

It appears that some have misunderstood Hick's notion of epistemic distance. G. Stanley Kane, for instance, assumes that the "soul-making theodicy seeks to justify the existence of evil...by holding that the existence of evil is logically necessary to the establishment of epistemic distance between men and God."<sup>402</sup> He contends that there is no logical necessity between epistemic distance and evil since the omnipotent God could have created human beings in an epistemic distance without any evil at all. Hick responds that Kane's objection rests on the misconception of Hick's idea of epistemic distance. He writes, "both natural and moral evil does, contingently, reinforce man's epistemic distance from God even though it is not logically necessary to it."<sup>403</sup> If human beings had constantly felt the immediate presence of God, they would have no choice but know and love their Maker. Therefore, this environment in which human beings are located will necessarily include evils and threats to human life since God wishes that human beings must freely develop into a perfect being. In the words of Hick, "for some forms of environmental challenge and danger are needed if the world is to function as a place of person-making for morally and spiritually immature creatures."<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first ed., 317-8, and also Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 43. As Hick notes, the phrase *etsi deus non daretur* originally belong to the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945).

<sup>402</sup> G. Stanley Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, no. 1, (Spring 1975), 4.

<sup>403</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 380.

<sup>404</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 380.

Hick's solution for natural evils such as floods, droughts, plagues, and earthquakes is that they provide an ideal environment for the development of human moral qualities such as goodness, righteousness, and generosity. In the words of A. R. Peacocke, a physical chemist and theologian, "death, pain, and the risk of suffering are intimately connected with the possibilities of new life, in general, and of the emergence of conscious, and especially human, life, in particular."<sup>405</sup> This is what Hick calls "soul-making" or "person-making." He believes that without challenges, dangers and evils one cannot possibly talk about soul-making.

In this sense, natural evil serves for a purpose. Therefore, one can safely say that there is a close relation between Hick's theodicy and God's ultimate aim in creating humankind, which is to bring "many children to glory" (*Hebrews 2:10*).<sup>406</sup> He believes that this purpose can only be realised through the process of soul-making. "God's purpose for man is," Hick writes, "to lead him from human *Bios*, or the biological life of man, to that quality of *Zoe*, or the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ."<sup>407</sup> The nature of Jesus represents the end sought for and by all human beings.

It is here, too, that the justification of animal pain finds its place in Hick's theodicy. He argues that "The justification of animal pain is identical with the justification of animal existence."<sup>408</sup> In order that soul-making process worked there had to be human life. Since human life emerged out of animal life through evolutionary

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<sup>405</sup> A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 166.

<sup>406</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 292.

<sup>407</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 293.

<sup>408</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 352.

process, it was necessary that animals existed and were subjected to dangers and evils in a harsh environment. Therefore, animal suffering indirectly contributed to the emergence of humankind and the realisation of soul-making process, which will lead to know God. In this sense, suffering and pain is a means to survive for animals as well as human beings. Hick writes, "The pain mechanism is necessary to the survival of organisms inhabiting a world with a fixed structure."<sup>409</sup> By this mechanism, animals has managed to survive and led to the evolution of human beings, and in the same way human beings survive.

However, Hick is very well aware of the fact that the process of soul-making is not fully completed during human life span on earth. "Instead of ennobling, affliction may crush the character and wrest from it whatever virtues it possesses."<sup>410</sup> That is to say, each evil does not bring about the expected positive results in every person all the time. Hence, it is necessary that the process of person-making must continue in another possible world after death. In Hick's words, "it would seem that any divine purpose of soul-making that is at work in earthly history must continue beyond this life if it is ever to achieve more than a very partial and fragmentary success."<sup>411</sup> Therefore, life after death has an important place in Hick's soul-making process.

Hick's theodicy concludes with "a triumphant resolution in the eventual perfect fulfilment of God's good purpose."<sup>412</sup> That is, every man and woman without exception

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<sup>409</sup> Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 68.

<sup>410</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 367.

<sup>411</sup> Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 43.

<sup>412</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 376.

will eventually come to know and worship God. They will enjoy eternal rest, peace and happiness in God. However, it ought to be noted that this end-state is not a result of retributive judgement. Hick writes, "The 'good eschaton' will not be a reward or a compensation proportioned to each individual's trials, but an infinite good that would render worth while any finite suffering endured in the course of attaining to it."<sup>413</sup> Therefore, Hick, as distinct from Augustine, rejects the idea of eschatological retribution as a compensation for the sufferings endured.

Even if we accept Hick's eschatological resolution, we could still ask: Does eternal joy justify God in the face of evil? Hick asserts that God is justified allowing for evil and suffering in the light of the end-state, eternal joy, of human beings. He writes, "it is an ethically reasonable judgement...that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process."<sup>414</sup> Therefore, the final joyous state achieved after death will, for Hick, prevail over the afflictions people endured on the way to the "likeness" of God.

There has been a few objections raised against the Soul-Making Theodicy in recent years. I shall discuss some of the significant ones here. Some critics ask why God did not create human beings from the start in "divine likeness" in which they are supposed to achieve eventually. For instance, C. Robert Mesle, a process philosopher of religion, argues that "a good and omnipotent God should have created us with such a

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<sup>413</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 377.

<sup>414</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 292.



nature and in such an environment that we were free only to choose between goods.”<sup>415</sup> That is what is expected from an all-powerful and all-good God.

Hick’s response is that we are not automata like robots that have to do whatever they are pre-programmed to do. Neither this world is a hedonist’s paradise in which pleasure is the main aim of human life. Instead, human beings are free rational beings on the becoming of “children of God” by their own choices in a harsh environment.<sup>416</sup> In addition, Hick writes, “only in such an unparadisaal world can moral distinctions have any meaning and moral life develop.”<sup>417</sup> In a world in which there is no evil and no suffering, there would be no such thing as good because people would not have such concepts. If we were programmed to behave always rightly, it would not be possible to talk about any kind of moral and spiritual development of humankind.

In response, it is said that if there were no evil, there would be no need to the process of soul-making. God could have created us all with the desired moral characteristics, and people would only choose between goods. Hick’s response to this objection is that an environment providing a real situation to grow from immaturity to moral perfection is “far greater moral value than doing an objectively right act which we are programmed to do.”<sup>418</sup> To develop righteousness autonomously is more valuable than being created and sustained as righteous. On what authority does Hick base this

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<sup>415</sup> C. Robert Mesle, *John Hick’s Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 31. A similar objection has been raised by the atheist philosophers E. H. Madden and P. H. Hare in *Evil and the Concept of God* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 70.

<sup>416</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 291.

<sup>417</sup> Hick, “Response to Mesle,” in C. R. Mesle, *John Hick’s Theodicy*, 126.

<sup>418</sup> Hick, “Response to Mesle,” in C. R. Mesle, *John Hick’s Theodicy*, 125-6.

judgement? He admits that this principle is only a "value judgement," which cannot be verified by argument. He hopes that it will be "more plausible" and "compelling" when many others adhere to it.<sup>419</sup> If one can manage to isolate himself or herself from the pressing reality of practical instances of suffering, he, then, may concur with Hick that a moral character acquired through struggle has a greater value than ready-given qualities.

Moreover, even if one accepts that hard-earned morality is better than ready-given character, the failure of many people in the world to acquire moral character appears to raise a strong objection. The contemporary Augustinian theodicit Stephen T. Davis asserts that "the evidence of how people behave here and now does not give me much hope that the human race will gradually improve till all are the God-conscious 'persons' God intended."<sup>420</sup> Davis believes that God will intervene and show His favour to the faithful in the future. In response, Hick contends that "the hypothesis of an ascent towards God through many lives in many worlds does not entail that successive generations in this world should show a moral and spiritual advance."<sup>421</sup> Instead, the development occurs on the personal level through "many worlds," not only in this world. To illustrate this point Hick appeals to the evolution of humankind from moral immaturity with "inadequate conceptions of God" to a creature with "higher moral values and higher understandings of deity."<sup>422</sup> Therefore, the process of soul-making is for Hick

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<sup>419</sup> Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 44. See also Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 130.

<sup>420</sup> Stephen T. Davis, "Critique," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 59. See also, for a similar critique, Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 94; G. Stanley Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," 7.

<sup>421</sup> Hick, "Response," in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 66.

<sup>422</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, 381.

more “probable” than Davis’ idea of a dramatic divine intervention because God does not have to delay to perfect human beings until they are dead.

It seems to me that both Davis and Hick are missing an important point here. It is the possible impact that awakening into a new life will leave on a person. That is, both philosophers believe that personal survival from death involves getting back the person’s whole memory and personality. Then, life after death will be a partial justification or divine glimpse that contributes to the person’s soul-making process. Judging from our present condition, today we regret many decisions and actions we favoured in the past, and say that “I wish I had (not) done that.”

Analogously, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the person who gain his or her memory of this life back after death, will most likely avoid the mistakes that he or she committed in this life. I believe that this could provide to the person the impetus necessary for the completion, or at least considerable progression, of soul-making process in post-mortem without any need of divine intervention; that is, if God permits.

One of the most, if not the most, incisive objections raised against Hick’s Irenaean Theodicy is of excessive, pointless, and random suffering in the world. Kenneth Surin, a British theologian, argues that the variety and amount of suffering that is present in the world cannot be justified even if there is eternal bliss.<sup>423</sup> In this context, Surin quotes Dorothee Soelle saying, “The God who causes suffering is not to be justified even

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<sup>423</sup> Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 95. See, for a similar objection, W. Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” in H. Hewitt (ed.), *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 117-8.

by lifting the suffering later. No heaven can rectify Auschwitz."<sup>424</sup> The horrible tragedy of the holocaust seems to make this problem more serious than ever. Hick is aware of the problem that what he calls "dysteleological," or pointless, excessive, and random sufferings are perhaps the most threatening challenge to any kind of theodicy. For such afflictions, he admits that he has no rational theory to offer. Hence, he appeals to the concept of "mystery." Although Hick's mystery signifies that he has no theory to explain such evils, it may well be the case that the mysteriousness itself is another dimension of the soul-making process. That is to say, even dysteleological suffering may have a "positive value" in the sense that it may contribute to the soul-making process. In Hick's words,

"Such suffering remains unjust and inexplicable, haphazard and cruelly excessive. The mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery...And yet at the same time, detached theological reflection can note that this very irrationality and this lack of ethical meaning contribute to the character of the world as a place in which true human goodness can occur and in which loving sympathy and compassionate self-sacrifice can take place."<sup>425</sup>

Hick attempts to reconcile the two horns of the problem of excessive suffering; the intensity of excessive human suffering on the one hand, the ambiguity of the world and the role of this ambiguity in soul-making on the other. As he confirms in his *An Interpretation of Religion*, "A theodicy is an abstract scheme of thought, and as such it

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<sup>424</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 149 as quoted in Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 95.

<sup>425</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, first edition, 371-2.

can never match the felt intensity of the problem.”<sup>426</sup> I believe Hick’s approach to what he calls “dysteleological” suffering is one of the most constructive and reasonable explanation despite its limited nature.

Furthermore, Hick’s exclusion of natural theology has been a matter of objection. R. Douglas Geivett, a fervent exponent of natural theology as a “prolegomenon to theodicy”<sup>427</sup> criticises Hick as follows,

“We cannot rely on Hick’s anthropocentric category of the personal for a full determination of the divine purposes for humans, for in doing so the best that we could hope to construct is an anthropodicy (a defense of human autonomy with respect to God) rather than a theodicy...”<sup>428</sup>

I agree with Geivett that Hick needs to show with the help of natural theology that this is a purposeful universe and that God has a plan in creating humankind and the universe. The Soul-Making Theodicy lacks the support of theological interpretation of nature. The recent developments in physics and cosmology meet this need. They indicate that the Soul-Making Theodicy is better off with taking on board the theological explanations of scientific data.

The physical chemist Ilya Prigogine, for instance, appears to illustrate this point very well. He maintains that irreversibility of time in thermodynamics in relation to human existence suggests that there is “an evolutionary, and teleological paradigm”

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<sup>426</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 120.

<sup>427</sup> R. Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick’s Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 67.

<sup>428</sup> Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, 169.

working in the universe. Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers write, “the perception of oriented time increases as the level of biological organization increases and probably reaches its culminating point in human consciousness.”<sup>429</sup> Perhaps this is the point that the process of soul-making reaches its consummation. Along with Prigogine and Stengers, it is possible to see other scientists as well as theologians in the line with the Irenaean Theodicy. Therefore, it seems to me that The Soul-Making Theodicy would be more intelligible and reasonable with the support of natural theology.

Some philosophers and theologians, chiefly conservative Christians, criticise Hick’s view of universal salvation. Geivett objects, “Perhaps Hick realizes that a loving God could justifiably allow an unrepentant person to descend to a hellish state of eternal duration.”<sup>430</sup> Hick views the traditional doctrine of hell as “one aspect of conservative Christianity.” He believes that “It seems morally incredible that a perfectly loving Creator should devise a situation in which millions of men and women suffer eternally.” The alternative to hell, according to Hick, “may be that God has initially formed us as “religious animals,” our hearts set, in Augustine’s famous phrase, *ad te domine*, “towards you, Lord.”<sup>431</sup> Since the responsibility for evil, according to Hick, lies with God, he must give to human beings further opportunities to develop and purify themselves. Otherwise, the problem of suffering in this world changes its nature and becomes a problem of suffering in the afterlife.

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<sup>429</sup> Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature* (Boulder, Colorado: New Science Library, 1984), 297f. as quoted in Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics*, 151.

<sup>430</sup> Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, 215.

<sup>431</sup> John Hick, “Afterword,” in Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, 236.

However, it is still logically possible that there may be some individuals who will continue doing wrong. Since salvation is not wrought by divine intervention but contingently, it is possible that some people will remain in epistemic distance from God throughout their lives. The only realistic hope for the salvation of all might be perhaps the survival of human beings from death, which will make them realise human condition more clearly, and accelerate and complete the soul-making process.

Accordingly, some critics find Hick's universalism inconsistent with his affirmation that a theodicy must be consistent with the data of Christian tradition. Stephen T. Davis, for instance, writes, "I do not believe universalism is consistent with the data of the Christian tradition."<sup>432</sup> He then supports his argument with some biblical passages that apparently teach eternal condemnation such as *Matthew* 7:32; 25:41; *2 Corinthians* 5:10; and *2 Thessalonians* 1:8-9. However, Hick acknowledges, "there are both universalist and non-universalist strands within the diverse literature of the New Testament."<sup>433</sup> In this sense, it is not right to treat these different passages as if a single author wrote them and to impose a non-universalist interpretation on universalist passages.<sup>434</sup>

In addition, Hick is not the first universalist theologian. As Paul Badham pointed out, the early church father Origen (c. 185-c. 254) and his followers such as the Cappadocian father Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395) hoped that all humankind would

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<sup>432</sup> Stephen T. Davis, "Critique," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 59.

<sup>433</sup> Hick, "Response to Critiques," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 67.

<sup>434</sup> Hick is talking about such biblical passages of universalist nature as *1 Corinthians* 15:22; *Ephesians* 1:10; and *Timothy* 2:3-4. See, for Hick's exposition of universal salvation in the New Testament, Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 243-250.

come to know and worship God eventually after they purified themselves in the world and in the afterlife.<sup>435</sup> Therefore, Hick does not invent the notion of universalism himself or import it into Christian faith; but he supports and clarifies a stream of thought within Christian tradition although it has never been a dominant one. Therefore, Davis' charge of The Soul-Making Theodicy with inconsistency in terms of the Christian tradition does not seem to do justice to Hick.

To conclude, Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy maintains that human beings live in an "epistemic distance" from God so that they can autonomously build a perfect spirituality through which the true knowledge and love of God are realised. It is a long and travail process from moral immaturity to a spiritual perfection in God. Eventually, every human being will complete the process of soul-making, and they will know and worship God. Could we say that Hick's Irenaean Theodicy solves to the problem of evil once and for all? It is difficult to answer this question affirmatively.

As the exponent of the Soul-Making Theodicy Paul Badham affirms, "Hick's argument does not 'solve' the problem of evil" completely.<sup>436</sup> This is not because the Soul-Making Theodicy is inconsistent with Christian tradition and evil, but because it does not, first, offer any conclusive response to the problem of dysteleological and excessive suffering in the world. In addition, the need for the support of natural theology is felt throughout the Soul-Making Theodicy.

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<sup>435</sup> Paul Badham, *Christian Beliefs About Life After Death* (London: SPCK, 1978), 63-4. See also John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 200; and Hans Kung, *Eternal Life?* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 136.

<sup>436</sup> Paul Badham, "Philosophical Theology of John Hick," in Paul Badham (ed.), *A John Hick Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 7.



On the other hand, it has to be noted that Hick's theodicy is to a great degree successful overall in demonstrating that belief in God is still rational in the face of evil. Its emphasis on the positive meaning of human life has to be credited particularly. Perhaps most importantly, Hick's eschatological resolution provides a powerful answer to the problem of evil. Moreover, as Paul Badham shows in his "global" approach to *The Soul-Making Theodicy*,<sup>437</sup> Hick's theodicy contains certain common features of major world religions. With this characteristic, *The Soul-Making Theodicy*, in practical terms, seems to be a strong candidate to bring together major religions and their followers in creating a better world in the future.

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<sup>437</sup> Paul Badham, "Towards A Global Theodicy," in William Cenkner (ed.), *Evil and the Response of World Religion* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1997), 250.

#### IV. THE MUSLIM THEODICIES

The significance of the problem of evil and theodicy in Islamic tradition has been a matter of controversy especially in Western writings. It is often argued that theodicy has little significance in Islam in contrast to Jewish and Christian traditions. It is alleged that Muslim theologians have not dealt with the problem of evil and offered convincing responses as their Christian counterparts have. For instance, Kenneth Cragg (1913-), an English scholar of religion, argues, "It [Islam] does not find a theodicy necessary either for its theology or its worship."<sup>438</sup> The contemporary British Orientalist W. Montgomery Watt concurs with this view. Further, he asserts that if there is any attempt at theodicy in Islamic tradition, it can be found not among Sunnite Muslims, the majority group of Muslims, but among what Watt calls "heretical Muslims" such as the Mu'tazilites, the rational theologians.<sup>439</sup>

On the other hand, some Muslim thinkers argue that there has been extensive discussions amongst Muslim theologians and philosophers of the issues involved in what Western scholars tackle under the rubric of the problem of evil. For instance, the Shī'ī Muslim theologian Murtazā Mutahharī (1921-1979) discussing divine justice and evil ("shar"), advocates this view enthusiastically. He writes, "Although western and eastern philosophers have dealt with this question and attempted to explain evil, as far as I can see western philosophers could not solve the problem. It is Muslim philosophers and

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<sup>438</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam*, second edition, (Encino, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), 16.

<sup>439</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, "Suffering in Sunnite Islam," *Studia Islamica* 50 (1979), 5-6.

sages that have overcome this difficulty and solved one of the most important mysteries.”<sup>440</sup>

I cannot be so sure as Mutahharī is about this. I believe that, as the contemporary Turkish philosopher of religion Cafer S. Yaran (1964-) notes,<sup>441</sup> the problem of evil has not been so serious a problem in Islamic faith and theology as it has been in her Christian and Jewish counterparts. To put it bluntly, the existence of the God of Islam has never come under a severe attack in the face of suffering and death to the extent that Jewish and Christian traditions faced.

In my opinion, the reason for this may be seen in two facts. One is that there is not such a catastrophic event in Islamic tradition as the crucifixion of Jesus in Christian tradition. Neither was the Muslim sanctuary, the *Ka'ba*, destroyed by non-Muslims in contrast to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem twice and the enormous pogroms in Jewish history. If Muhammad had been put to death as Christians believe that Jesus was, Muslim theologians, too, would have, I suspect, developed a defence similar to that of their Christian counterparts. The other reason may be seen in the fact that the core of Islamic faith is thought to be a total submission to God's will in any circumstances. The term Islam itself is often defined as “voluntary subordination of human discretion to the will of God.”<sup>442</sup> In this sense, Muslims have been advised through the ages humbly to

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<sup>440</sup> Murtaza Mutahharī, *Adl-i İlahi*, translated from Persian to Turkish by Hüseyin Hatemī, (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 1988), 107.

<sup>441</sup> Cafer S. Yaran, *Kötülük ve Theodise* (Konya: Vadi Yayınları, 1997), 111.

<sup>442</sup> Muhammad al-Ghazali, “The Problem of Evil: An Islamic Approach,” William Cenkner (ed.), *Evil and the Response of World Religion* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1997), 70.

accept whatever happens as divine providence. This has been seen as a true, or more accurately, a pious Muslim attitude to afflictions and sufferings from within the faith.

However, this does not mean that the occurrences of evil in this world do not pose any problem to Islamic conception of God. Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) from Pakistan affirms that the existence of physical and moral evil in the world raise a significant problem since "the Qur'an conceives God as 'holding all goodness in His hand.'"<sup>443</sup> Being aware of this, Muslim theologians have discussed the crucial questions such as those of divine justice and wisdom embedded in the problem of evil. Even though it is in a lesser degree than Christian and Jewish theologies, the problems of evil have been to some extent discussed in Islamic theology and philosophy. The basic human instinct of curiosity and some external criticism of the Islamic faith must have led Muslim theologians to discuss and offer answers to the issues involved. In fact, the problems of evil such as divine justice and goodness, and free-will and determination played an important part in the formation of the dialectic Islamic theology called the *Kalām* with such schools as *Mu'tazila*, *Ash'ariyya*, *Māturīdiyya* and *Shī'a*.

Moreover, the problem of evil seems to have attracted various Muslim theologians and philosophers in modern times as well. The influence of Western theological and philosophical discussions on this cannot be ignored. A characteristic of these discussions is that the Qur'ān, as the divine word revealing God's ways to humankind, has been at the centre of the whole endeavour. The theologians have

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<sup>443</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1988); 80.

explained the verses of the Qur'ān from the perspective of their schools to reconcile God's justice and goodness with the occurrences of evil. This is true for both the two major schools of Islamic thought, namely, Sunnī and Shī'a. John Bowker, a professor of religious studies, observes, "in both expressions of Islam, the far more general response to suffering has been to reiterate the Quran and apply it to whatever new circumstances of suffering arise, and that has remained true down to the present day."<sup>444</sup>

The contemporary Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub, who is trying to bring closer Sunnī and Shī'ī schools in Muslim tradition as well as Muslims, Christians and Jews, presents a striking example of a Qur'ān based approach towards the problem of evil. For Ayoub the Qur'ān is "crucial to the Islamic understanding of human suffering,"<sup>445</sup> because Muslim Scripture is seen as God's account of human situation. In addition, as most Islamic writings on the problem of evil revolves around the Qur'anic view of suffering and evil, it is inevitable to start with what the Qur'ān says on evil and how Muslims read it.

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<sup>444</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 133.

<sup>445</sup> Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," *Journal of Dharma*, 2, no. 3, (July 1977), 267.

## I. The Major Responses of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān affirms that Allah is the ultimate creator of everything in the world, evil as well as good. The cause of the whole creation is none but Allah. Hence, Muslim Scripture realises the reality of evil in the world whether it is taken in real or figurative sense. Some of the terms designating evil in the Qur'ān are *shar* (evil), *munkar* (abominable), and *alam* (suffering and pain). Only the first term *shar* occurs twenty five times. For instance, there are some things that people consider evil, but, in fact, they are good (*al-Nūr*, "the Light," 24:11) and that people consider good, but, in fact, they are evil (*Āl-i 'Imrān*, "the Family of 'Imrān," 3:180); that the worst evil being are those who do not understand (*al-Anfāl*, "the Spoils," 8:22); and that the evil whispers of Satan, *jinn* and human beings are something from which one must seek refuge in God (*al-Nās*, "the People," 114:1-6). Many more examples similar to these indicate that the Qur'ān recognises the reality of evil as well as good in the world.

It must be noted at the outset that there is no explicit theodicy in the Qur'ān.

There are some answers that may shed some light on the issues involved in the problem of evil. As Muslim Scripture is not a book of systematic theology, it does not give a formulated theodicy in response to the enigma of evil. The Qur'ān, like any other Scripture, gives more importance to the practical relationship between God and human beings rather than to explanations of theological puzzles in logical format. Ayoub summarises this feature as follows: "The Qur'ān is not interested in theodicy, but in

human attitudes or responses to God's acts in nature and history. The Qur'ān is not interested in logic and justification, but in the dynamic relationship between man and God."<sup>446</sup> Consequently, the phrase "the Qur'anic theodicy" could be used loosely only in the sense of the answers of the Qur'ān to evil.

What are the answers of the Qur'ān to the question of suffering? Different scholars of religion have arranged these answers under different rubrics. Although these responses to evil are to a great extent similar in substance, their arrangement shows difference from one scholar to another. The contemporary Turkish scholar of the Qur'ān Lütfullah Cebeci categorises the Qur'anic answers to evil in three groups. Suffering is either a test and education, or a result of the failure of human free-will, or a punishment for human moral evils committed. According to Mahmoud Ayoub, suffering is either a result of human wrong choice, or a lesson to following generations, or a test of faith, or a source of good human qualities such as patience and gratitude, or redemptive through which one's sins are expiated. The other answer of the Qur'ān is, to Ayoub, that there is a life after death in which every iniquity will be recompensed. According to Cafer Yaran, the Qur'anic answers to suffering are four: "Test and education, the failure of human free will, discipline and punishment, and the hereafter as a real justice abode."<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 276.

<sup>447</sup> Yaran, *Kötülük ve Theodise*, 114.

I believe that it is possible to categorise the answers under four main headings although the responses of the Qur'ān to suffering are interconnected. Firstly, suffering is a punishment for sin. Secondly, suffering is an outcome of the failure of human free-will. Thirdly, suffering in the Qur'ān is described as a test and a discipline. The fourth one is the eschatological resolution. That is to say, the iniquities and sufferings of this world will be recompensed in life after death. Let us see briefly now the answers of the Qur'ān to human suffering and death.

### **1. Suffering as Retribution**

The Qur'ān, like Jewish and Christian Scriptures, suggests that some natural evils such as flood, earthquake and drought are punishment for human sins. The failure to become a righteous person, and to follow God's commandments sometimes bring about suffering and disasters in this life. Although ultimate reward and punishment is in the hereafter (*"al-ākhirah"*), there are also references in the Qur'ān to suffering as a punishment for sin in this world. This notion is concisely expressed in the following verse, "But as for those who disbelieved, I will sternly punish them in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have no supporters" (*Āl-i 'Imrān* 3:55). The reason for the punishment of this kind is seen in terms of human failure in adopting a right attitude in the face of test. The Qur'ān expresses this notion as follows, "And We have not wronged them, but they wronged themselves..." (*Hūd*, 11:100).



Perhaps the most striking example of this kind of explanation comes in the Qur'ān's account of the destruction of people of old. The Qur'ān narrates that some past nations to whom such prophets as Nūḥ (Noah), Ḥūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lūṭ (Lot) were sent, had been destroyed because of their immoral acts and disbelief. Hence, the Qur'ān warns the unbeliever reminding them of the fate of the past nations, and calls them to "the true path." A half of the chapter *al-'Ankabūt* describes the destruction of some ancient people as divine punishment for their wickedness (29:11-40). For instance, "We sent Noah to his own people and he tarried among them a thousand years minus fifty years. Then the Deluge overtook them; for they were wrongdoers" (29:13). God punished the people to whom Noah was sent for they mocked and denied Noah and the divine message he conveyed.

An intriguing approach to the punishment of the unbelievers in this world comes from Sheikh Muhammad al-Sha'rawi. He contends that "Allah intervened to punish the unbelievers until the Message of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came and then the Divine punishment of unbelievers in this world ceased."<sup>448</sup> It is true that the Qur'ān reports that God intervened occasionally into human history and punished the unbeliever and the wicked for their sins and immoralities in the past (29:40). However, with the advent of Islam, al-Sha'rawi contends, divine intervention to punish the unbelievers in this world has been postponed until the Hereafter. He has no Qur'anic

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<sup>448</sup> Sheikh Mohammad M. al-Sha'rawi, *Good and Evil* (London: Dar Al Taqwa Ltd., 1995), 20.

proof to support the last claim. It must be noted that his is an exceptionally novel idea in Islamic tradition.

Having affirmed the Qur'anic account of the destruction of people of old, Mahmoud Ayoub asserts that the Qur'anic examples of the stern punishments of the past generations are not strictly retributive but they are "corrective" and disciplinary. Because "History is God's court of justice and the instrument of His discipline."<sup>449</sup> Therefore, the stories of the destruction of certain ancient people for their non-belief must be understood in the light of chapter 11 verse 100-1 of the Qur'ān. That is to say that God did not punish those people out of "frustration or capricious wrath;" but the people brought the punishments on themselves with the wrongs they committed. In addition, one must also bear in mind that God wills no injustice to human beings (*Āl-i 'Imrān* 3:182). Sometimes this punishment ends with death. In this case, the fate of the ancient people is made an example, and serves as a lesson to the following generations not to repeat the same mistakes, and accordingly not to be punished.<sup>450</sup>

How is one to explain the suffering of the innocent then? If God is omnipotent, omniscient, just and merciful, which the Qur'ān affirms, why does he allow the innocent suffer along with the wicked? More seriously, why does he let the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper at times? Perhaps a believer can manage to hold on to his or her faith with a pious manner. However, this is not something that an unbeliever would appreciate

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<sup>449</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 275.

<sup>450</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 275.

at all. As the Turkish philosopher of religion Mehmet Aydın states, “it cannot be defended from the standpoint of the objector that God punishes a community because of the wickedness of some other people in order that ‘let that be a lesson’ or that ‘let me to thank God’.”<sup>451</sup> Ayoub does not see a serious problem in “the question of undeserved suffering” as the real test.<sup>452</sup> I believe that while it makes sense to say that suffering is a test for someone who is alive after the test, but it is difficult to maintain the same position when that person’s suffering ends with death. In such a case, the sufferer is not alive to take a lesson from a situation. Here comes the significance of the eschatological response to human suffering.

There is one important point that must be made clear here. That is, the Qur’ān does not attribute all suffering and disaster to human immorality and unbelief. It is wrong to generalise the idea of suffering as a punishment for sin since this may insult the sufferer. It is only one explanation, among several, to human suffering from the standpoint of God. Only God knows whether a disaster is a punishment for sin. What the sufferer can do at most is a soul-searching in an effort to determine and correct his or her faults. This is only an inward looking into one's own mental and emotional states. The Qur’ān warns the faithful to avoid such an attitude as associating every blemish with a sin committed: “The blind are not at fault, the lame are not at fault, the sick are not at fault...” (*al-Nūr* 24:61). In another passage, “The blind are not to blame, nor the cripple

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<sup>451</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi* (in Turkish; “*The Philosophy of Religion*”), third edition, (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), 152.

<sup>452</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 276.

is to blame, nor the sick are to blame. Whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, He will admit him into gardens beneath which rivers flow; but he who turns away, He will inflict upon him a painful punishment" (*al-Fath*, "the Victory," 48:17).

## 2. The Free-Will Explanation

To start with, the Qur'ān, as Tanakh and the New Testament, views the cause of some suffering in human misuse of free-will ("*Ikhtiyār*" and "*Irāda*" in Arabic). The following verse of the Qur'ān succinctly describes this notion of freedom as a basis of the belief in life after death. "On that day, men shall emerge in clusters to see their works. Then whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall find it; and whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall find it" (*al-Zilzāl*, "the Earthquake," 99:7-8).<sup>453</sup> Without free-will, no human beings could be held responsible justly for the actions done.

Some exegetes of the Qur'ān (*al-mufasssirūn*) have interpreted this verse in such a way as to cover this world and the one to come. Al-Ālūsī, for instance, reports one interpretation that the unbeliever may be rewarded in this world for the good deeds he or she has done, and punished for his or her wickedness in the hereafter. The faithful person suffers here on earth for his or her sins, and is rewarded for his or her good deeds in the

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<sup>453</sup> The version of the Qur'ān translation used in this work, unless otherwise stated, is *The Qur'ān: A Modern English Translation*, translated by Majid Fakhry, (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1997).

afterlife.<sup>454</sup> In support of this interpretation, a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad is called into testimony. According to this tradition reported by the Prophet's companion Abū Ayyūb, the faithful shall see the reward of his good deeds in the hereafter. On the other hand, the faithful who has done something wrong shall see the recompense of his or her misdeeds in the guise of disasters and diseases in the world.<sup>455</sup>

Perhaps one of the most striking example of Free-Will Explanation in the Qur'ān is in the chapter *Āl-i 'Imrān* verse 165. This passage is also what can be called an instance of the Qur'anic expression of the problem of evil. When the Muslims were defeated at the Battle of Uḥud (3 AH - 625 CE), some, described by the Qur'ān as the hypocrites, questioned the cause of the defeat and the suffering that resulted. God responds to them as follows: "And when a misfortune befell you after you had inflicted twice as much, you said: 'Whence is this?'; say: 'It is from yourselves.' Surely Allah has power over everything!" The apparent cause of the suffering was the human beings themselves. They had relaxed after the victory of the previous combat, namely, the Battle of Badr (2 AH/624 CE); and also they did not have obeyed the orders given to them by the Prophet Muhammad before the Battle of Uḥud. It was not God but the hypocrites to be blamed for the defeat and for the resulting suffering and insult.

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<sup>454</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn Mahmūd al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī* (Bairūt: Dār Ihyā al-Turāth al-'Arabiyya, n.d.) 30, 212.

<sup>455</sup> Reported in al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, 30, 212.

The verse in question, as noted above, ends with the proclamation that “Surely, Allah has power over everything!” In addition, it is said in the following verse that “And what befell you on the day the two armies met was by Allah’s leave, that He might know the true believers” (*al-Nisā’*, “the Women,” 4:166). Clearly, the last passage suggests that human free-will is the source of their defeat and humiliation. Further, although God is all-powerful, he limits his power in order that human beings use their free-will. In the words of Ayoub, “God voluntarily, so to speak, limits His sovereignty by our actions.”<sup>456</sup> It is necessary that human beings must have free-will because without it there is no meaning in testing one’s faith and submission, which the Qur’ān repeats over and over again.

The emphasis of the Qur’ān on God’s absolute control over the creation is sometimes seen as an obstacle to the view of human free-will. Some Western scholars especially have emphasised that the Qur’ān strongly advocates a doctrine of divine predestination (“*Qadar*” and “*Taqdīr*”). Having discussed the Qur’anic passages on God’s sovereignty and free-will, A. J. Wensinck, for instance, concludes, “Yet, to all appearance, the main attitude of Islam was in favour of predestination.”<sup>457</sup> That is to say, God preordained everything in detail before their creation. It is true that God describes himself in the Qur’ān as the sole creator of everything in the creation evil as well as good. For instance, he proclaims, “No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in

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<sup>456</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 275.

<sup>457</sup> A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 51.

a Book, before We create it; that is easy for God..." (*al-Ḥadīd*, "the Iron," 57:22). In another verse, "Whomever Allah wants to guide, He opens his heart up to Islam, and whomever He wants to lead astray, He makes his heart extremely constricted, as though he were ascending to heaven..." (*al-An'ām*, "the Cattle," 6:125).<sup>458</sup>

On the other hand, the Qur'ān, as we have seen earlier, holds human beings responsible for their actions as they are their author. "Whatever calamity might hit you is due to what your hands have earned..." (*al-Shūrā*, "the Counsel," 42:28). There are also certain Qur'anic passages notifying that God will justly reward and punish people in the afterlife. For example, "We set up the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul shall be wronged a whit; and even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall produce it. We suffice as reckoners" (*al-Anbiyā*, "the Prophets, 21:48). Certainly, the idea of just reward and punishment presupposes the existence of certain actions committed by free creatures. God himself says that he shall do no wrong or injustice on the day of judgement. Instead of holding one of the views as Wensinck does, one needs to accept both notions as Qur'anic, because they are in the Qur'ān, and then to reconcile them.

I shall leave the complex theological attempts at reconciling these two notions to a later section of the work where I explore the Islamic theological and philosophical responses to evil. For now, it suffices to point that the occurrences of evil in the world do not nullify divine sovereignty. As Ayoub states, "Evil happens in the world, not in spite

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<sup>458</sup> See also *al-An'am* 6:102; *al-Ra'd* 13:16; *al-Zumar* 39:62; *Ghāfir* 40:62; *al-Ṣaff* 61:5, 7.

of the Divine Will, but because God allows it to happen.”<sup>459</sup> As Satan was given a respite “till the Appointed Day” (*al-Hijr*, “the Rock,” 15:37), the unbeliever and sinful was given a respite as well. That is why the Qur’ān warns people of the Day of Judgement in which “each soul shall know what it advanced and what it deferred” (*al-Infīṭār*, “the Cleaving Asunder,” 82:5).

In short, the Qur’ān spells out the source of some, not all, evils and sufferings as human free-will. The failure of human judgement between good and evil, right and wrong, and the negligence and breach of moral and religious duties bring about disastrous results at times. This is a prerequisite condition of human free-will. The possibility of choosing wrong and evil is necessary in order that human beings can also have the possibility to become a spiritual being higher than the angels. Without the possibility of and temptation to evil, doing good and becoming a righteous person does not make sense at all.

The Qur’ān informs that the angels, who had been created with only good nature, had foreseen the creation of free beings as a problem even before they were created. They expressed to God their concern about the negative effects of free creatures on earth. They said to God, “Will you place one who will make mischief in it and shed blood, while we sing Your praise and glorify Your sanctity?” (*al-Baqara*, “the Cow,” 2:30). This can be seen as an angelic expression of Free-Will Explanation in negative terms. In the last part of the passage, God rebukes the angels saying, “I know what you

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<sup>459</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 280.



do not know.” The story seems to point out, in Muhammad al-Ghazali words, “when a creature with both options pursues the path of good and shuns the avenues of evil by one’s own choice, such a person surpasses all angelic levels of spirituality.”<sup>460</sup> Human beings are expected to use their free-will in accordance with divine will so that the purpose of God in creating the universe and humanity is achieved. To open the doors of heavens by their own choices, human beings must also have the realistic choice of doing evil as well as good even though the former is not God’s wish.

### **3. Suffering as Discipline and Test**

Another answer of the Qur’ān to human suffering, which is closely related with Free-Will Explanation, is suffering as discipline and test of faith. One of the most important, if not the most, answers of the Qur’ān is that human struggle in life and sufferings may be an instrument of discipline and a test of faith.<sup>461</sup> The faith and deeds of a human being are tested both to discipline the individual and to expose his or her true character. The conditions of life provide individuals with opportunities to acquire or lose and to show personal belief or unbelief in God. In addition, moral qualities such as courage and generosity could only develop in real conditions of life. It seems true to say that suffering as a test and discipline is the gist of all the answers. The Qur’ān is full of references to this kind of explanation throughout. For instance, “We will certainly test you with some fear and hunger and with some loss of property, lives and crops.

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<sup>460</sup> Muhammad al-Ghazali, “The Problem of Evil: An Islamic Approach,” 71.

<sup>461</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 276.

Announce the good news to those who endure patiently” (*al-Baqara* 2:154). This is apparently a means to achieve divine purpose in creating human beings. “He who created death and life so as to test you as to whoever of you is fairer in action. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving” (*al-Mulk*, “the Sovereignty,” 67:2; cf. *Hūd*, 11:7). In this sense, human life including death is a stage of test and discipline providing humankind opportunities to realise the purpose of the creation, which is to know and worship God.

The terms the Qur’ān most often uses for test and trial are *miḥna* and *imtiḥān* (“trial”), *muṣībat* (“disaster”), *balā* (“affliction”) and, from the same root, *ibtilā*, and *fitna* (“temptation”). Each of these terms does not necessarily signify something evil in itself. Any aspect, condition of, or object in human life, good as well as evil, can be a matter of test. God says in the Qur’ān “Every living soul shall taste death, and We test you by evil and good as a temptation and unto us you shall be returned” (*al-Anbiyā’* 21:35). Having quoted this verse, al-Sha’rawi (d. 1998), an Egyptian scholar, maintains that what people believe as evil and good are test from God. He writes, “the life of this world is nothing but tests and trials for people.”<sup>462</sup> In this sense, prosperity and abundance of goodness are not the signs of God’s pleasure, but the test by honouring the individual (*al-Fajr*, “the Dawn,” 89:15-20). In addition, the chapter *al-Anfāl* verse 28, for instance, describes one’s wealth and children as a temptation or trial (*fitna*). In short, faith of human beings is put to test through the conditions and components of earthly life.

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<sup>462</sup> al-Sha’rawi, *Good and Evil*, 28.

Human beings are tested of their faith and actions along with other conditions of human life. The former seems to be the most important aspect of test, namely, a test of faith.<sup>463</sup> God has created humankind so that they can be, in the words of the Qur'ān, true servants to him. They are asked to behave according to the will of God. This is the principal condition for the realisation of this divine purpose. He did not create human beings and leave them to themselves. In the words of the Qur'ān, "Do the people reckon that they will be left to say 'We believe,' and will not be tried?" (*al-'Ankabūt*, "the Spider," 29:1).<sup>464</sup> What is expected from the people who are subjected to a test is to say that, "We are Allah's and to Him we shall return" (*al-Baqara* 2:155). Endurance and patience in the sufferer's trust in God is the only way one could succeed in a test.

Clearly, what is important for the Qur'ān is human reaction to these kinds of phenomena. This is because the whole purpose of human creation is described in the Qur'ān, as we pointed above, in terms of test and trial. As Bowker points out, "This at first sight rather casual phrase is in fact extremely important. It means that prosperity is as much a test as suffering."<sup>465</sup> As noted earlier, the Qur'ān gives precedence to human response to the situations and conditions of life. The following verse indicates this idea very well. "When an injury touches a man, He calls upon Us. Then if We accord him a bounty from Us, he says: 'I have been granted it on account of some knowledge.'

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<sup>463</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 276.

<sup>464</sup> See also *Āl-l 'Imrān* 3:135; *Ibrāhīm*, 14:6; *al-Baqara* 2:46.

<sup>465</sup> Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 110, n. 1.

However, it is a mere trial, but most of them do not know” (*al-Zumar*, “the Throngs,” 39:49).

Perhaps the most important question in this context is why does God resort to the method of test at all? If God is all-knowing, the Qur’ān affirms so, he must have known who is sincere or is not in their faith even before he put them into test. Surely, he is not a hedonist God who takes pleasure from the sufferings of human beings. There must be a purpose behind this. The following verses of the Qur’ān come closer in answering this question. “Or did you suppose that you will enter Paradise, before Allah has known who were those of you who have struggled, and those who are steadfast” (*Āl-i ‘Imrān* 3:141). “And We shall test you so as to know who are the fighters among you and who are the steadfast; and We shall test your news” (*Muhammad*, “the Prophet,” 47:31). In short, the literal meaning of these passages suggests that God tests human beings so that he can know who is the true believer. As pointed out, ignorance cannot be thought of God; he knows everything in the past, present, and future. So, what is the true meaning of “test so as to know”?

The exegetes of the Qur’ān (pl. *al-mufasssirūn*) interpret these passages in various ways. One of the most celebrated exegete (“*mufasssir*”) Fakhruddīn al-Rāzī, for instance, understands this verse in symbolic sense. That is to say, God uses a metaphorical language to describe a phenomenon that resembles the test human beings

do.<sup>466</sup> As humankind makes use of tests to know, God also uses a similar language to express his message. Another interpretation of “test so as to know” is to let the prophets and believers know who is a real believer.<sup>467</sup> Test is not for God to know, but God makes certain conditions known to other human beings.

The Qur’anic notion of test is aimed at producing moral features for the people who are tested and for others as well. As Cebeci points out, “since ignorance cannot be thought about God, who has the knowledge of the unseen (“*Ghayb*”), his test and trial is heavenly, general and educative in the sense that it invites people to a perfect future and happiness.”<sup>468</sup> The following verse of the Qur’ān seems to support this educative interpretation: “We did not send forth a prophet to any city but afflicted its people with distress and suffering, that perchance they might humble themselves” (*al-A’rāf*, “the Ramparts,” 7:93). Here suffering is described in positive terms as an instrument of divine discipline. It would seem that this is one way of putting the idea of suffering as a test in terms of its positive result. If one submits to divine will and makes right choices in the face of afflictions, then the so-called disasters will produce positive benefits such as humility, patience and gratitude as well as a true faith in God in this world and the one to come. Otherwise, the result is a total failure of the test, which the Qur’ān expresses in terms of punishment.

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<sup>466</sup> Fakhruddīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Maṣāʾih al-Ghayb)*, (Tahrān: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 30, 55.

<sup>467</sup> Muhammad al-Ṭabarī, *Cāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1978), 2, 9.

<sup>468</sup> Cebeci, *Kur’an’da Şer Kavramı*, 214.

As pointed out above, I believe that the notion of test and trial can be taken as a direct means to educate and discipline the individuals, who are experiencing the phenomenon, and the other people as well. Here the emphasis is on the purpose of test, which is to provide the opportunity to develop a good morality and righteousness in this world, salvation in the hereafter. As Austin writes,

“suffering may be seen as serving one overriding purpose in Islam and that is as a reminder of God’s reality and power and of man’s creatureliness, of God’s power to do anything He wishes and of man’s obligation to accept that will, of God’s demand that man should ever remember Him and of man’s frequent lapses from that awareness.”<sup>469</sup>

Consequently, the challenges and threats faced throughout life provide humankind the opportunity to build character freely and to recognise God’s reality. This is what God wants from human beings. The failure of the realisation of this purpose is expressed in the Qur’ān in terms of punishment.

#### 4. The Eschatological Response

Connected with the idea of test in this world, the Qur’ān affirms a future life after death in which all wrongs will be corrected. Those who behave in a desired fashion are rewarded if not here most certainly in the hereafter with bountiful blessings of God, most importantly with the beatific vision. For those who fail their tests, there is severe punishment in hell. It seems to me that the eschatological resolution the Qur’ān intensely

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<sup>469</sup> ‘Umar Austin, “Suffering in Muslim Religious Thought,” *The Islamic Quarterly*, 26 (1982), 34.

offers throughout, is prerequisite to the idea of test and trial in human's earthly life. The reason for this can be seen in the fact that such testing can sometimes bring about undeserved and untimely sufferings and death in this world. Here I explore the Qur'ān's eschatological resolution to suffering under a separate heading since it is distinctly another phase of human life, which is beyond our perception now. In addition, it deserves a special interest because the Qur'ān puts a great deal of emphasis on it.

The instances of suffering of the innocent and prosperity of the wicked are some realities of this world. Probably they are also an important part of the test to which human beings are subjected. Therefore, it becomes necessary, according to the Qur'ān, that the innocent and the faithful are rewarded, and the wicked and the disbeliever are punished. To illustrate this idea, the Qur'ān uses the analogy of the "records" of actions every individual conducted in this world. These records will be opened on the Day of Judgement (*Yawm al-Din, Yawm al-Qiyāma*). While the believer will be recompensed with the blessings of the Garden (*al-Janna*), the disbeliever will end up in the Fire, hell (*al-Nār, Jahannam*). The Qur'ān describes the blessings of Paradise and the punishments of hell very vividly in both spiritual as well as material terms.<sup>470</sup>

One of the names of the hereafter (*al-Ākhira*) in the Qur'ān is the Day of Judgement (*Yawm al-Qiyāma*) that designates the day of divine justice. The chapter *al-*

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<sup>470</sup> See, for instance, *al-Tawba* 9:74; *al-Tūr* 52:24; *al-Wāqī'a* 56:17f.; *al-Qiyāma* 75:23; *al-Insān* 76:11-21.

*Anbiyā* verse 47 emphasises the justice of God in the hereafter. The verse reads, “We set up the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul shall be wronged a whit; and even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall produce it. We suffice as reckoners” (*al-Anbiyā*’ 21:47). The exegete al-Rāzī spells out that be it a real or metaphorical, the scale of God measures correctly, and does justice properly.<sup>471</sup> According to al-Tabarī, God’s weighing the deeds of human beings openly might be for the purpose of removing any grounds of objection that might come from human beings.<sup>472</sup>

In practical terms, endurance in the face of suffering and submission to divine will make sense considering the belief in life after. One could ignore the disasters and injustices in this world hoping that they will be recompensed in the hereafter. This belief gives to the sufferer a certain degree of strength to endure pain and to hold onto his or her faith. For the unbeliever, sufferings in this world are only foretastes of the punishments in the afterlife. “We loosed upon them a roaring wind on inauspicious days, so as to make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the present life. However, the punishment of the Hereafter is more disgraceful and they shall not receive support” (*Fuṣṣilat*, “Well-expounded,” 41:15). The sufferings in the afterlife are not comparable with the ones in this world. “Indeed, whoever commits a sin and his sin takes complete hold of him is one

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<sup>471</sup> Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 22, 176.

<sup>472</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Cāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 8, 92.



of the people of Hell, wherein they will dwell forever (*al-Baqara* 2:80). "...Their punishment shall not be lightened, nor shall they be helped" (2:85).

Moreover, the Qur'ān seems to teach that God will redeem the sins of the believers as long as they endure suffering patiently holding onto their belief in God. In chapter 3 verses 139-40, for instance, God professes that he "might purify the believers and annihilate the unbelievers" because of their response to suffering. In this sense, the suffering of the believer becomes redemptive for the sufferer as long as he or she is faithful to God. In response to a question asked by the Prophet's companion 'Abū Waqqāṣ, the Prophet says, "the believer is inflicted with calamities until he is free from any sin clung to him."<sup>473</sup> The belief in life after death gives strength to the sufferer, who knows that the sufferings in this world will expiate his or her sins in the next.

To sum up, here the reason for the creation of human beings is to be true servants of God. The realisation of this purpose depends on whether human beings have acquired faithful dispositions. In this sense, the development of moral disposition is the true objective behind the idea of test and trial. Since human beings are not born with these desired qualities, they are expected to develop them along with their life experiences.

In other words, human beings experiences including suffering form character. As a person starts experiencing the good and evil of this life from his or her birth, then

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<sup>473</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1966), 174. See, also, Muslim bin Ḥaccāc al-Qushayrī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. by M. F. Abdulbāqī, (Egypt: 1955), *Birr wa al-Ṣila*, 14.

suffering and other conditions of human life serve the purpose of creating personal dispositions and, also, reviewing and disclosing the acquired ones together. At death, the desired personality and faithfulness is either acquired or not. If it is, God will reward the person recompensing his or her struggle, suffering and endurance on earth. If not, the punishment in hell is awaiting for the wicked.

In conclusion, could we say that Qur'ān solves the problem of evil? From a philosophical point of view, it seems to me that it is difficult to make that conclusion. The Qur'ān describes God as having power over everything and merciful on the one hand, it affirms the existence of evil on the other. Although a Muslim earnestly believes that whatever God wills is good, it is difficult especially for an atheist to accept that such sufferings as a birth of a handicapped baby, an instance of rape and extermination of countless people by plagues or any other disaster are good.

Why does God allow sufferings and death at all? He does not need to test people and, accordingly, reward or punish them. Besides, human beings do not come to this world as mature beings ready to be tested; they acquire certain qualities in the process of life here. The idea of test seems to overlook this notion. Moreover, God would have created, if he needed to create at all, humankind as free creatures choosing good in any occasion when they face to make a decision. The Qur'ān seems to be ambiguous concerning such questions.

A limited answer is from within the faith. The faithful always believe that human intellectual ability cannot understand divine wisdom. We cannot know what is in God's mind. In addition, there is a life after death in which all the sufferings endured in

the world will be recompensed in the hereafter. However, the notion of eternal damnation calls further problems about the nature of God. Many would find it difficult to accept that God punishes the wicked eternally. Consequently, the Qur'anic answers to evil do not seem to offer conclusive response to the problem of evil. They may alleviate to a certain degree the sufferings of the faithful providing the strength to hold on to his or her faith until the Day of Judgement.

## **J. The Muslim Theological And Philosophical Theodicies**

### **1. The Privation of Good**

Muslim philosophers such as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' ("Brethren of Purity"), al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) fully developed a philosophical system influenced by the thought of Plotinus (c. 204-270 CE). The problem of evil finds its expression in the theories of emanation or effusion (*fayḍ* or *ṣudūr*) in the writings of these Muslim Neoplatonists. The two general characteristics of this thinking are that evil is, firstly, accidental to good as all that exists has proceeded from the ultimate Good and the source of providence, namely, God. Secondly, evil serves for a good end in God's creation when it is seen from the totality of the creation.

Brethren of Purity, who were a group of Muslim intellectuals emerged in al-Baṣra in the second half of 4<sup>th</sup> AH/10<sup>th</sup> CE century, discussed some aspects of the problem of evil in their corpus of fifty-two *Epistles* known as *Rasā'il* in Arabic. They do not deny the existence of evil in the world, but what is essential is good in the totality of

the creation. The wise and omniscience God does not will anything evil. If something appears to us as evil, we must bear in mind that there is always a good purpose behind it.<sup>474</sup> In this sense, their view of evil can be described as consequential and instrumental in the sense that the instances of evil serve a good purpose even though human beings cannot always understand what that purpose might be. If this total picture is lost, one may easily lose his or her faith in the face of particular evils.<sup>475</sup> A similar view can also be found in the writings of al-Kindī (c. 185-260 AH/801-873 CE), who is known to be the first philosopher of Islam.<sup>476</sup> In short, according to Ikhwān as well as al-Kindī, the whole creation is the manifestation of divine wisdom, and, therefore, it cannot be evil. Individual sufferings administer a good purpose in the total picture of the creation. According to this instrumental view, God has created good and evil in the world in accordance with his wisdom.

The Turkish philosopher al-Fārābī (c. 256-339 AH/c. 870-950 CE), who is also called “the Second Master” (in Arabic *al-Ustāz al-Thānī*) after Aristotle, maintained that there is no evil (*shar*) in nature. He even went so far as to content that what is called evil in nature is good (*khayr*). While refusing to call natural calamities as evil, he concedes the reality of moral evil. He points out this distinction pointing that he is talking here

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<sup>474</sup> Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāder, n.d.), 4, 73-5.

<sup>475</sup> Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 3, 506-7.

<sup>476</sup> See, for instance, al-Kindī, *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyya*, ed. by M. A. Abū Riḍā, (Cairo: 1950), 1, 215.

about natural events which human free-will has nothing to do.<sup>477</sup> Such natural evils as earthquakes, floods and diseases are, for him, not evil but good. For they are, firstly, emanated from God; secondly, they are good in terms of their function from the standpoint of the totality of the creation.

As pointed out earlier, al-Fārābī grounds his view on the theory of emanation (*ḥayr* or *ḥudūr*). According to this theory, by contemplating himself God, who is the Necessary Being (*Wājib al-Wujūd*), emanates the first intellect (*al-'Aql al-Awwal*) from himself. The First Intellect, by contemplating himself, emanates the Second Intellect, and so forth until the emanation of the Tenth Intellect. The just and good God is the ultimate perfection from which only good emanates. The goodness decreases with each emanation since each Intellect from which the following Intellect emanates is more perfect than the emanated.<sup>478</sup> In this sense, the imperfection in matter is a natural result of successive emanations, of separation from the ultimate Good, namely, God.

According to al-Fārābī, the apparent evils have a purpose within the totality of the creation. They function for a good end. In addition, the amount of evil is less than the amount of good in the world. Therefore, they are good in terms of their function. Let us take fire as an example. No one doubts that fire is necessary for human survival. It is also a fact that the uncontrolled fire sometimes destroys human lives and livelihood. However,

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<sup>477</sup> Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, ed. by D. M. Dunlop, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 81.

<sup>478</sup> Necip Taylan, *İslam Düşüncesinde Din Felsefeleri* (İstanbul: M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 1994), 136.

to sustain life in the world the existence of fire is necessary with the possibility that it may cause disaster as well. Therefore, even the imperfections of the world manifest order in and purposefulness of the creation.

It seems that Ibn Sīnā (369-428 AH/979-1037 CE), one of the greatest Muslim philosophers, discusses the problem of evil more than any other Islamic philosopher does. Following his master al- Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā affirms that the creation is emanated from the good and providential God. Therefore, it is good when it is seen from the totality of the creation. In addition, the imperfections in the world are accidental to and necessary for good. In its ultimate sense, evil is privation of being. God cannot create a world free from imperfection.

One central point in Ibn Sīnā's dealing with evil as in al- Fārābī is that evil (*al-Shar bi'd-Dāt*) is privation (*'adam*) of being and of something natural. However, this privation is not to be understood in the sense of absolute negation (*'adam muṭlaq*) or non-being. It is a sort of privation that involves in the removal from the nature of the perfection that is fixed for its nature (*ṭabī'atih*).<sup>479</sup> This is a natural consequence of successive emanations from God, who is the ultimate Good. Ibn Sīnā gives the example of fire and water to explain his theory of privation. According to this, both fire and water are necessary elements for human life, therefore, they are good. Yet we also know that sometimes they both cause disasters and sufferings. It is then they are called evil.

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<sup>479</sup> Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā al-Ilāhiyyat*, edited by G. C Anawātī and S. Zāyed, (Cairo: 1960), 2, 416.

However, this is not a healthy judgement because their essential nature is good; the imperfections they cause are accidental to their essential nature. Therefore, the occurrences of such evils as fire and water cause cannot in any circumstances remove their true nature, which is good.<sup>480</sup> Therefore, evil has no autonomous existence in the universe; but it exists as a potential within being.

The traces of the privative theory of evil can be found in the thinking of Ibn al-‘Arabī, (560-638 AH/1165-1240 CE), who is known “the Greatest Master” (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*) among ṣūfīs, Muslim mystics. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, all that is called evil such as human and animal suffering, poverty and diseases is relative. That is to say, there is no evil in itself in the creation (*Khalq*) because God cannot be thought to have created any evil. He is Pure Being, the Good.

Ibn al-‘Arabī asserts that “essential evil (*al-shar al-mahḍ*) is essential nothingness and darkness (*al-‘adam al-mahḍ wa al-ḡulma al-mahḍa*), and essential being (*al-wujūd al-mahḍ*) is essential good and light (*al-khayr al-mahḍ wa al-nūr al-mahḍ*).”<sup>481</sup>

As A. E. Affifi pointed out, “darkness” and “light” in Ibn al-‘Arabī are not two autonomous principles as they are believed to be in Zoroastrian faith.<sup>482</sup> Instead, the former, to Ibn al-‘Arabī, designates non-existence, the latter existence. However, it must

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<sup>480</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā al-Ilāhiyyāt*, 2, 420-1.

<sup>481</sup> Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Cairo: AH 1293), I, 520.

<sup>482</sup> A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi* (Lahore, Pakistan: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1979), 159.

be pointed out that according to his theory of the “Oneness of Being” (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), the distinction of good and evil is on the level of “appearance.” There is no such thing as good as well as evil in “reality” (*Ḥaqq*). Because according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, there is only one “Reality” in existence, that is, God (*al-Ḥaqq*).<sup>483</sup>

The modern influential Shi‘ī philosopher Murtaḍā Muṭaḥḥarī (1921-1979), too, maintains that “a simple observation shows that the nature of evil is ‘privation’ and ‘non-existence’.”<sup>484</sup> However, he points out that privation does not mean that there is no evil in the world. No one can deny the reality of such evils as blindness, deafness, death and earthquake. Otherwise, there would be no point in struggling in life to eradicate suffering, pain and injustices. So, how is one to understand the privative theory? Muṭaḥḥarī explains, “All of these [evils] are of a kind of ‘privation’ (“*adamiyyāt*”) and ‘deficiencies’ (“*fikdanāt*”)... They are evil because they are either deficient, lacking, empty or absent, or the source of deficiency, lack, emptiness or absence.”<sup>485</sup> It is the responsibility of human beings to remedy the situations of privation and deficiency. Muṭaḥḥarī believes that his analysis eliminates the question as to who created evil. Because evil is not being, but it is absence of being. Therefore, to ask “whence evil” is futile as there is no such a being as evil.

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<sup>483</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, with the Commentary of al-Qaṣhānī, (Cairo: AH 1309), 147.

<sup>484</sup> Muṭaḥḥarī, *Adl-i Ilāhī*, 155.

<sup>485</sup> Muṭaḥḥarī, *Adl-i Ilāhī*, 156-7.



However, I am not sure that this theory can provide a solution to the problem of the source of evil. First of all, the distinction between evil and good is not as clear as Muṭahhārī thinks. In fact, the author himself admits this in the following paragraph. He says, “good and evil are mixed to each other.”<sup>486</sup> One cannot firmly say in any instance that this is good or that is evil. An implication of this is, if we agree to the theory of privation, that good is no different from evil. That is to say that good is privation of evil.

Moreover, even if we suppose that one can make such judgements, this explanation does not justify God in the face of evil. If God is just and good as it is believed to be, why did then he allow these deficiencies and privation? Surely, he must be powerful enough to remove them or to create so to speak “perfect beings” without any want. Mehmet Aydın articulates this point very well. He writes,

“to deny the reality of evil is not a solution to the problem, but it is an escape from it. Evil belongs to our world as good does. Rain is good as long as it is in the right quantity for soil. If the term “good” here has a meaning, it must have a meaning to say evil for flood as well.”<sup>487</sup>

However, it seems to me that the theory of privation does not comply with an essential reason for the existence of religions. If evil had no reality, why would humankind be urged to eradicate evil as much as possible and help the sufferer? Of course, this is not the case. Most of the religions of the world affirm the reality of evil, and urge their followers to terminate the causes of suffering. As the Muslim philosopher

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<sup>486</sup> Muṭahhārī, *Adl-i İlahî*, 157.

<sup>487</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi*, 152.

Ibn Rushd (520-595 AH/1126-1198 CE) contends, "He is the creator of all things, both good and evil, because of what most of the communities have believed, that there are two Gods, one of them the creator of good, and the other the creator of evil."<sup>488</sup> Since there is only one creator, and evil is as real as good is, then God must be the cause evil as well as good. Consequently, it seems safe to say that the privation theory does not solve the problem of evil by denying its reality.

## 2. The Free-Will Explanation

It seems that the majority of Muslim theologians and philosophers have affirmed that the cause of some moral evil is human free-will. In plain language, they all believe that human beings have been equipped with certain qualities such as senses and intellect to distinguish good from evil and right from wrong. In addition, God sent his messengers to human beings in order that they would use their free-will sensibly. It is for this reason that humankind is responsible for their actions to God as well as to human fellows. Although it does not sound problematic if it is expressed crudely, the problem as to who is the creator of human actions, God or human beings, seems to have caused serious discussions among Muslim theologians from the early times. The reason for this debate appears to be the Qur'anic ambiguity over divine predestination and human free-will.

The Qur'anic references seem to be convenient to understand the notions of God's predestination and human free-will side by side. The same trend can be observed

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<sup>488</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb al-Kashf an Manāhīc al-Adilla*, quoted from J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 172.

in the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Since the Prophet did not allow Muslims to enquire about the nature of predestination at that time,<sup>489</sup> this mystery was not unravelled completely. A century after the Prophet died, a serious controversy erupted among Muslim theologians concerning divine predestination and human free-will.

For the first time in Islamic history Mā'bad al-Juhanī (80 AH/699 CE), the originator of the Qadariyya school of theology, asserted that human beings, not God, determined their own actions. The Qadarī theologians refused to accept divine predestination in the sense that God predetermines everything before creation.<sup>490</sup> The majority of Muslim theologians accused them of heresy. There are no more representatives of the Qadariyya sect in Muslim intellectual circles today. On the other hand, the founder of the Jahmiyya sect Jahm b. Ṣafwān (128 AH/745 CE) denied human free-will and thought that humans were under the total control of God as inanimate beings were.<sup>491</sup> To attribute action to human beings should be taken figuratively rather than literally in the sense that “water runs” or “the sun rises.” As God makes the sun rise, he also creates the actions of human beings.

Later the views of the Qadariyya was taken over by the founder of the Mu'tazila school of theology Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (80-131 AH/699-748 CE). The Mu'tazilī theologians would call themselves “the People of Justice and Unity” (*Ahlu al-'Adl wa al-Tawhīd*).

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<sup>489</sup> See, for instance, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Fayz al-Qadr* (Egypt: 1938), 1, 347.

<sup>490</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa'l-Nihal* (Cairo: 1961), 1, 37.

<sup>491</sup> al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*, 1, 37.

Accordingly, human beings were the creator of their own acts. As a reaction to the Mu'tazila, al-Ash'arī (260-324 AH/873-935 CE) abandoned his old school and took a position against the Mu'tazila, later it would be known as the Ash'ariyya. Al-Māturidī (333 AH/944 CE), the founder of the Māturidīyya, tried to find a middle way between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'ariyya. Here I shall explore briefly the views of the last three schools of thought.

The Mu'tazilī theologians affirmed human free-will as a source of human good and evil, a view which the majority of Muslim theologians have described as unorthodox. Although the sect ceased to exist, the teaching of the Mu'tazila seems to have found fertile ground among Shi'ī Muslims. According to Mu'tazila, human beings "creates" their actions, good and evil; therefore, they are to be blamed or commended for their actions.<sup>492</sup> God cannot create evil, infidelity, and wickedness in a person. He cannot even desire these things to happen because he is all-good and just. Their evidence is from the Qur'ān. "...Then unto your Lord is your return and He will tell you what you used to do. He knows the secrets within the breasts" (*al-Zumar* 39:7); and "But as to the unbelievers, wretched are they and perverse are their works" (*Muhammad* 47:8). Therefore, the Mu'tazilī theologians attribute moral evils to human free-will. Connected to this, they asserted that the intellectual capacity to make choices is inherently present in human

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<sup>492</sup> Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 208.

nature. Revelation is only a favour of the good and all-wise God. Without revelation, human intellect has the ability to distinguish good from evil.

One of the greatest Mu'tazilī theologians Kāḍī Abd al-Jabbār (323-415 AH/935-1025 CE) maintained that the work of creation can be attributed to others beside God. He refers to the Qur'ān in support of his argument. Some of his evidences are that Jesus "created" the likeness of a bird (*al-Māida*, "the Table," 5:110), and Allah is described as "the Best of Creators," (*al-Mu'minūn* 23:14). Kāḍī Abd al-Jabbār asserts that as the Qur'ān attributes creation to creatures, there is no danger of polytheism (*shirk*) in attributing creation to human beings as well.<sup>493</sup> Therefore, it is safe to say that human beings create their own actions, and are responsible for them. In this sense, the cause of moral evil is the human failure of making the right choice.

In response to the Mu'tazilī assertion, Ibn Ḥazm (384-456 AH/994-1064 CE), who lived in Muslim Spain, argues that even if we can accept that human beings are the creators of their own choices and actions, this does not solve the problem. As an all-powerful God, he could have prevented any moral evil before it happened. He would not have allowed a person to commit sins and immoral actions or to deny divine reality.<sup>494</sup> God has the power to do this.

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<sup>493</sup> Kāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed by 'Abd al-Karīm Uthmān, (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1965), 379-80.

<sup>494</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-Fiṣāl fi'l-Milal* (Cairo: AH 1317), 3, 142.

Al-Ash‘arī and later al-Māturidī developed a theory of “acquisition” in order to reconcile human responsibility with God’s omnipotence and justice.<sup>495</sup> According to al-Ash‘arī, God is the absolute and sole creator of human actions, and human beings “acquire” these actions. The theologian describes acquisition as follows: “It is necessary for the action that there must be an acquirer (*muktasib*) as it is necessary that there must be a creator (*Fā‘il*) to create the action.”<sup>496</sup> In this sense, a human being acquires an action with his volition (*irāda*), which is created by God (*ḥādith*), and God creates it. For instance, a human being acquires the state of being a believer or unbeliever, and God creates both faith (*īmān*) and infidelity (*kufr*) in those people.<sup>497</sup> Therefore, God is not responsible for human acquisitions. If we translate this into our issue, human beings choose to acquire sin and other moral evils and God accordingly creates them. God does not force anything on them.

One could ask, if human beings acquire an action that is created by God, is it not true to say that they are the real agents of their actions? Al-Māturidī, who also developed a theory of acquisition (*kasb*) similar to al-Ash‘arī, maintains that “everyone knows from himself that he is autonomous (*mukhtār*) in what he does, and he is agent (*fā‘il*) and

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<sup>495</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>496</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-Luma’* (Beirut: 1952), 73.

<sup>497</sup> Al-Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-Luma’*, 74.

acquirer (*kāsib*).”<sup>498</sup> The difference between al-Ash‘arī and al-Māturidī seems to be that while the latter attributes only the creation of an action to God and the agency and acquisition to human beings, the former attributes the agency to God as well. However, this subtle difference seems to me not significant since both the theologians say the same thing in the final reckoning. That is, human beings acquire an action with their created volition and God creates it. If so, how could individuals be entirely free, and responsible for their actions. God could have created human volition in a way that he or she would always choose good whenever he or she made a decision. Since he did not, the question stands: Is God also not responsible for moral evils committed by human beings?

It seems to me that Muslim philosophers were more concerned with the problem of natural evil rather than moral evil. A pressing question for them was the disorders in nature, which they believed to be good. As pointed out earlier, al-Fārābī denies the reality of natural evil, and recognises human free-will as the cause of moral evil. Although he does not discuss moral evil in as much detail as he does natural evil, one can still trace some indications of the Free-Will Explanation. Concerning moral evils, al-Fārābī associates moral evil with the privation of “happiness” and actions leading to unhappiness. The term he uses as opposed to “happiness” (*ṣa‘āda*) is “wretchedness” (*shaqā’*). For al-Fārābī, the cause of this evil is human will or volition (*irāda*).<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Abū Manṣūr al-Māturidī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, edited by Faṭḥullah Khulayf, (Beirut: 1970), 226.

<sup>499</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, 81.

Muhammad Abduh (1265-1323 AH/1849-1905 CE), who is widely regarded among the founders of Muslim modernism, affirms that human free-will is responsible for moral evils. He believes that human intellect is able to differentiate between good and evil. Therefore, some actions chosen freely by an agent contain the quality of good and evil in themselves.<sup>500</sup> According to Abduh, human intuition and intellect can determine which action is good or evil. If this were not the case, human intellect, and consequently, free-will would have no significance whatsoever.<sup>501</sup> If human beings were not free in their actions, it would be unjust to hold them responsible for their actions.

The Shi'ī philosopher Muṭahḥarī also affirms that human beings have free-will, and the failure to make the right choice is a cause of moral evil such as sin and immoral conduct. He seems to talk about two different kinds of causes of moral evil. One is the privation of good human qualities such as in the case of incapacity (*'ajz*) and poverty (*faqr*). Accordingly, moral evil proceeds from human beings not because God refrains his providence (*imsāk-i fayz*) from them but because there is a lack or deficiency of certain good qualities in certain people.<sup>502</sup>

The other cause of moral evil is brought about by the intentional choice of human free-will. Muṭahḥarī asserts that since human beings are free creatures and responsible for themselves and their surroundings as the “vicegerent of God,” they are

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<sup>500</sup> Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Risāla al-Tawḥīd*, (Cairo: 1966), 56.

<sup>501</sup> 'Abduh, *Risāla al-Tawḥīd*, 57.

<sup>502</sup> Muṭahḥarī, *Adl-i Ilāhī*, 173.



bound to behave in a certain way.<sup>503</sup> The failure to do so brings about moral evils such as sin and corruption.

Two objections could be raised to Muṭahhārī in particular and to other defenders of Free-Will Explanation in general. Firstly, it is difficult to understand how a person who was born and brought up within, say, a criminal environment could be entirely free, and therefore responsible for his or her criminal acts. Most probably, the person will tend to follow the examples he presently has. God could have created that person in a neutral environment or prevented the bad effects he was subjected to from birth onwards. Since this is not the case, how is it possible that that person could be free in the ultimate sense and responsible for his or her actions. Secondly, although the Free-Will Explanation offers a partial solution to the origin of moral evil in the sense that human beings are the authors of their actions, it does not answer why God had to create free creatures to disobey him. He could have created free creatures that would choose good rather than evil every time they made a decision.

### **3. The Best-Possible-World Theodicy**

The best possible world explanation enjoys a special place in Islamic tradition even though it has lost its charm in the Western traditions. An optimistic account of the world has been a common feature of Islamic thought. As mentioned above, a great number of Muslim theologians, ṣūfīs, and philosophers have argued that this is a good world and there is no genuine evil. Be it created or emanated, the all-wise and just God

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<sup>503</sup> Muṭahhārī, *Adl-i Ilahī*, 173-4.

would not bring about anything evil, let alone anything useless. However, this optimist approach took its mature form in the writings of one of the most influential theologians and philosophers, namely, al-Ghazālī (450-505 AH/1058-1111 CE). This is an influential theodicy developed in Islamic tradition even before Leibniz's Best of All Possible Worlds theodicy.

Before exploring al-Ghazālī's Best of All Possible Worlds theodicy, I shall summarise the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-aṣlah*. As perhaps the founders of optimism in Islamic theology, the Mu'tazilī theologians argued that God was obliged to create the best. Although some of them held that God had to create the best in the hereafter not in this world, they all believed that God created only good if not the best.<sup>504</sup> This is the idea which actually led al-Ash'arī to secede from the Mu'tazila. It is often narrated that one day al-Ash'arī questioned his Mu'tazilī master al-Jubbā'ī's notion of optimism with a story. It is known as "the story of the three brothers." They are a child, a believer and an unbeliever who die and are recompensed accordingly. The conversation between al-Ash'arī and al-Jubbā'ī runs as follows:

"What, asked al-Ash'arī, if the child who had died should say, 'O Lord! If only you had let me live, it would have been better (*aṣlah*), for then I would have entered paradise?' God, replied al-Jubbā'ī, would say to the child, 'I

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<sup>504</sup> Kaḏī Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 301.

knew that if you had lived, you would have become a sinner and then entered hell.' But, then, countered al-Ash'arī, the unbeliever in hell would exclaim, 'O Lord! Why did you not kill me as a child, too, so that I would not sin and then enter hell?' At this, according to the accounts, al-Jubbā'ī was left speechless."<sup>505</sup>

Al-Ash'arī refused the idea that God had to create good or the best, and embraced that God was the sole creator of evil as well as good. Al-Ash'arī writes, "Good and evil (occur) through the decree and power of God. We believe in God's decree and power...the good as well as the evil, the sweet as well as the bitter."<sup>506</sup> Human beings can only acquire acts; it is God who creates. It seems that the tide turns back with al-Ghazālī.

Al-Ghazālī, who was an Ash'arī, maintained that this world is the best of all possible worlds because the omniscient, powerful and just God would not do less. Al-Ghazālī maintains, "there is essentially no better, more perfect, and more complete world than this one" (*laysa fi'l-imbkân aṣlan aḥsana minḥu wa lā atamma wa lā akmalā*).<sup>507</sup> In subsequent years, this saying was to spread in a shorter form among Muslims: "there is no possible world better than this" (*laysa fi'l-imbkân abda' min mā kān*). Although al-

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<sup>505</sup> Eric Linn Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's "Best of All Possible Worlds"* (PhD: Princeton University, 1981), 27.

<sup>506</sup> al-Ash'arī, *al-Idāna 'an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, 291 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 27.

<sup>507</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, (Cairo: 1968), 4, 321.

Ghazālī's theodicy can be found in several of his works, we shall concentrate on one of his most influential books, *Ihyā al-Ulūm al-Dīn* ("The Revival of Islamic Sciences").

When discussing God's unity, al-Ghazālī asserts that for one to have the true faith it is necessary to believe without any doubt that it is not possible to have a world better, more beautiful and more perfect than this one. Al-Ghazālī writes, "If people directed their gaze and considered steadfastly everything that God has created in heaven and earth, they would see neither discrepancy nor rift." He continues, "Everything which God apportions to man, such as sustenance, life-span, pleasure and pain, capacity and incapacity, belief and disbelief, obedience and sin, is all of it sheer justice, with no injustice in it; and pure right, with no wrong in it." The following passage is perhaps the heart of al-Ghazālī's argument. He contends, "Indeed, it is according to the necessarily right order, in accord with what must be and as it must be and in the measure in which it must be; and there is not in possibility anything whatsoever more excellent, more perfect and more complete than it."<sup>508</sup> This is the best world among all the possible worlds.

The Turkish philosopher of religion Cafer Yaran analyses al-Ghazālī's theodicy of the best of all possible worlds, and detects two kinds of arguments. One is *a priori* argument, and the other is *a posteriori*.<sup>509</sup> According to al-Ghazālī's *a priori* argument, the creation of the best of all possible worlds is a necessity of being God. Al-Ghazālī

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<sup>508</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4, 222-3 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 46-7.

<sup>509</sup> Cafer S. Yaran, *Kötülük ve Theodise*, 157.

states, “For if there were and He had withheld it, having power to create it but not deigning to do so, this would be miserliness contrary to the divine justice. But if He were not able, it would be incapability contrary to divinity.”<sup>510</sup> Firstly, if God had the power to create the best, and had not created it, it would be injustice on his part. Therefore, as a just God he has to create the best of all possible worlds. Secondly, if he did not have the power, then he would be incapable and impotent. God cannot be thought to be powerless. Therefore, he must be capable of creating the best possible world. Consequently, it is necessary that the just and all-powerful God must create the best of all possible worlds. This is, therefore, the best possible world.

Is that really so? We observe that there are many natural and moral evils in the world. If this is the best that God could do, is he really powerful or just? Is it not true that this notion limits God’s power? A similar kind of concern led many theologians immediately to criticise al-Ghazālī’s argument. Among them is al-Biqāī. He refuses to accept that the world containing evils such as deafness, lameness, vengeance and hate could be the best world. God could have done better than this. He could have created human beings with such perfect qualities as knowledge and power so that they would not do any evil. Al-Biqāī reverses al-Ghazālī’s statement and says, “There is in possibility more wonderful than what is” (*kāna fi’l-imbkān abda’ min mā kān*).<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4, 222-3 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 47.

<sup>511</sup> Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Biqāī, *Tahdīm al-Arkān min Laysa fi’l-Imkān Abda’ min mā Kān*, as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 166.

Cafer Yaran argues that this is not a correct way to understand the optimistic view because it overlooks the purposeful nature of the creation. “An analysis that does not take into account the teleological aspect of the world and human being,” writes Yaran, “can see the creation deficient or evil, and can suggest a better one.”<sup>512</sup> Such a world will not be better than this because the structure of the world will be different. In a world in which there is no natural and moral evil, human beings cannot be entirely free in the sense that there will be no requirement from them to behave in a certain way. Because the conditions giving value to human existence will not be present any more. They will not be free creatures as they are now.

It is true that the purposefulness of the creation in al-Ghazālī’s argument seems to be overlooked by the critics in most of the cases. In order to show what they imagine to be the best possible world, the critics often tend to exaggerate and ignore the whole picture. This is partly al-Ghazālī’s fault because sometimes he depicts the world as if there is no evil and everything is perfect. This is not actually true; he believes that there are some imperfections in the world such as poverty and disease; but he does not believe that they are actually evil. However, God designs the ills of the world for a good purpose, and their reward will be in the hereafter. In the words of al-Ghazālī,

“Indeed, all poverty and loss in this world is a diminution in this world but an increase in the next. Every lack in the next world in relation to one individual is a boon in relation to someone else. For were it not for night, the value of

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<sup>512</sup> Yaran, *Kötülük ve Theodise*, 159.

day would be unknown. Were it not for illness, the healthy would not enjoy health. Were it not for hell, the blessed in paradise would not know the extent of their blessedness. In the same way the lives of animals serve as ransom for human souls; and the power to kill them which is given to humans is no injustice.”<sup>513</sup>

Therefore, al-Ghazālī’s main concern seems to be the purposefulness of the world. Since the world is purposeful, it must be the best of all possible worlds. However, there is no way of knowing whether it is the best or not, or whether God has a conception of possible worlds. Some of our experiences in this world force us to acknowledge that this may not be the best world God could have created. This takes us to the Muslim philosopher’s *a posteriori* argument.

Al-Ghazālī, as Yaran pointed out,<sup>514</sup> employs *a posteriori* argument in his best of all possible worlds theodicy. In order to support his argument that this is the best world, al-Ghazālī argues that the extant world is so perfect so that it cannot get any better than this. Even the slightest change in the constituents of the world would spoil the perfection of the creation. The Muslim philosopher supports this assertion with evidences from nature and human life. For instance, he writes,

“A gnat is a small thing to see; and yet, were the inhabitants of the heavens and earth, the angels and those below them in both worlds, and all the other creatures, to wish to know how the Creator apportioned its parts and perfected

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<sup>513</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4, 222-3 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 47.

<sup>514</sup> Yaran, *Kötülük ve Theodise*, 163.

the symmetry of its limbs' forms, they would not be capable of anything beyond displaying their inability, for they are ignorant of the truth of the matter."<sup>515</sup>

Divine wisdom has fashioned the creation so perfect that the limited human mind cannot truly understand the true nature and the purpose of the creation. From the smallest creatures such as the gnat to complex ones like humankind there is no creature without any purpose. In the words of al-Ghazālī, "Consider whether you can find in the creation of the body anything without its meaning."<sup>516</sup> The philosopher extends his notion of the perfection of the creation to human social order. He, for example, regards the use of money (*dirham and dīnār*) as "one of God's greatest blessings toward man"<sup>517</sup> due to the crucial role they play in human society.

However, God is under no obligation (*wujūb*) to create the best for human beings, but is free to do so. Nothing is necessary for him. Otherwise, he would not be God. He tries to reconcile the idea of the best world with God's transcendence. Al-Ghazālī states, "God is generous (*mutafaḍḍil*) in creating, in inventing, and in imposing obligation, ...not out of any necessity (*wujūb*)...and He is lavish in providing favors and

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<sup>515</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *al-Hikma fī Makhlūqāti'l-lāh*, 54 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 55.

<sup>516</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *al-Hikma fī Makhlūqāti'l-lāh*, (Cairo: 1934), 23 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 58.

<sup>517</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4, 79 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 59-60.



‘the optimal’ (*al-aṣlah*)...not out of any obligation (*luzūm*).”<sup>518</sup> As an Ash‘arī, al-Ghazālī believes that God is the sole creator of the whole existence including human actions. The characteristic expression of this idea can be seen in his following saying, “What He wills, is and what He does not will, is not.”<sup>519</sup> He follows the Ash‘arī view of human acquisition and God’s creation.

To sum up, it seems to me that al-Ghazālī’s Best-Possible-World Theodicy can be seen as an attempt at reconciling divine justice and wisdom with the apparent evils of the world. God is the sole creator, and from him only good proceeds. In this sense, the creation is a manifestation of divine goodness and wisdom. As for the imperfections of the world, they cannot be evil since they, at least some of them, constitute certain portion of divine creation. Therefore, earthquakes and diseases are created for a purpose. In this sense, they are good.

However, I think that there is no way of checking realistically whether this is the best world. Although the beauty and orderliness of the world appears to support the idea that this is the best world, some human experiences make it bitterly difficult to accept. Moreover, the Best-Possible-World Theodicy does not explain why God is silent to the sufferings of many innocent people, and why certain people are more subjected to a greater suffering than others. Apart from instances of excessive suffering in the world,

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<sup>518</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1, 80 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 328.

<sup>519</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi’l-I’tiqād*, 108 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 244.

the irregularities of distribution of suffering and pain as well challenges the view al-Ghazālī presents.

The Muslim philosopher and theologian must have seen these difficulties. No wonder, then, that he refrains from discussing certain aspects of the problem of evil such as divine predestination and divine wisdom. It is not rare to meet such expressions as the following: “an explanatory treatment of this is not allowed;” or “disclosure of the mystery of God’s lordship is *kufṛ* [“infidelity”].”<sup>520</sup> He also retreats in the notion of divine mystery in the last resort.

#### 4. Suffering as Redemption

One answer to the problem of human suffering in Islamic tradition often associated with Shī‘ī thought is that certain suffering is redemptive. In its simple sense, redemptive suffering affirms that the faithful are delivered from sin through such sufferings as disease, injury and death. There seem to be some references alluding to the redemptive understanding of suffering both in the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s tradition.<sup>521</sup> Yet, there is no doctrine of redemption formulated in the Qur’ān and Islamic theology,

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<sup>520</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ al-Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4, 213 as quoted in Ormsby, *An Islamic Version of Theodicy*, 89.

<sup>521</sup> See “the Eschatological Responses” in “The Problem of Evil and the Answers of the Qur’ān” above.

either in Shī'ī or Sunnī thought.<sup>522</sup> However, in recent years, there have been some attempts to understand suffering in redemptive terms in Shī'ī thought.

It appears that Sunnī<sup>523</sup> Muslims are reluctant to affirm the idea of redemptive suffering. For instance, Muzammil Siddiqi in his essay "The Doctrine of Redemption: A Critical Study" contends that the idea of redemption is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, and therefore, it is not an Islamic notion.<sup>524</sup> He further argues that Muslim Scripture rejects the idea of original sin, Incarnation and vicarious suffering, which are the bases of the notion of redemption. Then he admits that there is a passage in the Qur'ān in the story of Abraham's sacrifice to God of his son, which is very similar to the one in the Hebrew Bible (*Numbers* 3:45-6).<sup>525</sup> Abraham obeyed God's order and attempted to sacrifice his son. Pleased with Abraham's intention, God ransomed Ishmael with a large sacrifice. The Qur'anic passage reads, "And We ransomed him with a large sacrifice" (*al-Saffāt*, "the Rangers," 37:107). To commemorate this event, Muslims still make an animal sacrifice once a year.

However, I believe that one ought to differentiate the Christian notion of Redemption from the idea of redemptive suffering. While the former emphasises Jesus'

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<sup>522</sup> See Muzammil H. Siddiqi, "The Doctrine of Redemption: A Critical Study," Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ashaq Ansari (eds.), *Islamic Perspectives* (Leicester, UK: the Islamic Foundation, 1979), 99 and Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Āshūrā' in Twelver Shī'ism* (The Hague, the Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 15.

<sup>523</sup> The term Sunnī Islam designates the mainstream and majority of Muslims in contrast to Shī'a.

<sup>524</sup> Siddiqi, "The Doctrine of Redemption: A Critical Study," 99.

<sup>525</sup> Siddiqi, "The Doctrine of Redemption: A Critical Study," 100.

death on the cross in order to atone the sins of humankind at a cosmic level, the latter may not necessarily mean that. We may call the former the cosmic event of redemptive suffering, the latter an individual redemptive suffering. It is true that the Qur'ān rejects the ideas of Incarnation and Crucifixion.

On the other hand, we can, as mentioned above, find references in the Qur'ān and in the Prophet's tradition expressing a notion of individual redemptive suffering. Nevertheless, this does not come near to the Christian concept of, what we called, the cosmic redemptive suffering. For that, as 'Umar Austin points out,<sup>526</sup> one needs to look up Shī'ī thought. In this respect, the Shī'a<sup>527</sup> is completely different from Sunnī Islam.

Mahmoud Ayoub, a champion of the notion of redemptive suffering in the Twelver (*Ithnā 'Ashariyya*) Shī'ī thought, in his book *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* attempts to formulate a Shī'ī version of redemptive suffering from the Shī'ī hagiography. He argues that any suffering can be redemptive for the faithful. His main concern is, however, the suffering and martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn (4-61 AH/626-680 CE), the grandson of the Prophet and the third Imām of the Shī'a. Ayoub argues, "the suffering of Imām Ḥusayn has been taken by the Shī'ī community to be a source of salvation through the interiorization and emulation of that suffering by the community and through the high

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<sup>526</sup> 'Umar Austin, "Suffering in Muslim Religious Thought," 35.

<sup>527</sup> Shī'a is the party of those who believe that 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, the fourth *khalīfa*, the head of Muslim community, and the first Imām of Shī'a, is the most virtuous of all people following the Prophet, and, therefore, he should have been the first *khalīfa*.

favor of the Imām as an intercessor.”<sup>528</sup> The major themes of redemptive suffering such as redemptive martyrdom, a suffering community of faith, and intercession of the martyr for the faithful can be detected in the Shī‘ī notion of redemptive suffering.

At the heart of the Shī‘ī ethos of redemptive suffering lies the doctrine of Imāms and the “People of the House,” the Prophet’s progeny descended from his daughter Fāṭima (c. 605-632 CE). According to the Shī‘ī imamology, The Imāms are regarded as “the proofs” (*ḥujaj*) of God. They are “the concrete embodiment of the Divine Word.”<sup>529</sup> Only through the Imāms (“*esoteric leaders of the Shī‘ī community*”) can human beings understand the true meaning of divine revelation (*wahy*). The eighth Imām ‘Ali al-Riḍā (c. 148-203 AH/765-818 CE) is reported to have said, “Had it not been for us, God would not have been worshipped.”<sup>530</sup> The Imāms are the most respected people for the pious Shī‘ī community after the prophets.

Among the Imāms, Ḥusayn has a distinguished place because of his sufferings and martyrdom. As Mostafa Vaziri notes, the martyrdom of Ḥusayn seems to have affected the Shī‘ī community even more than the martyrdom of their first Imām ‘Ali b.

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<sup>528</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 15.

<sup>529</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 287-8.

<sup>530</sup> Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, 1, 275 as quoted in Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 288.

Abī Ṭālib (c. 598-661 CE).<sup>531</sup> The tragic death of Ḥusayn at Karbala, an Iraqi city containing his tomb-shrine, is seen to be the basis of the Shīʿī notion of redemptive suffering.

The martyrdom of Ḥusayn is the necessary consequence of the fulfilment of his *imāmate* (“esoteric Shīʿī leadership”) as the leader of the Shīʿī community. Because his role of *imāmate* requires him to become “the paradigm of selfless sacrifice, the measure of truth and falsehood, and the intercessor on the Day of Judgment for his followers.”<sup>532</sup> Therefore, redemption and intercession in Shīʿī tradition are closely connected to each other since intercession is understood as divine gift for the suffering of the Imāms and their family.

The sufferings and martyrdom of Ḥusayn are seen as cosmic events, which has a universal significance for human history. Ayoub argues that the sufferings before the martyrdom of Ḥusayn were events foreshadowing his tragic death. In addition, the suffering and martyrdom of the Shīʿī community after the martyrdom is the participation of the pious Shīʿīs in Ḥusayn’s martyrdom.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Mostafa Vaziri, *The Emergence of Islam: Prophecy, Imamate, and Messianism in Perspective* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 107.

<sup>532</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 15.

<sup>533</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 27.

‘Ali Naqi Naqvi (1904-), an Iraqi Shī‘ī scholar, says that Ḥusayn knew the sacrifices his ancestors such as Abraham, the Prophet Muḥammad, and his father ‘Ali made. Naqvi writes, “He [Ḥusayn] represented a stock which had an unbroken record of sacrifice.”<sup>534</sup> The way to Ḥusayn’s intercession was to emulate his struggle, suffering and even martyrdom. The Shī‘ī community’s participation into the sufferings of the Imāms, and of the Imām Ḥusayn particular, can be seen in the memorial services called *majālis al-ta’ziya*. On the tenth of Muḥarram, called the days of ‘*āshūrā*’, the pious Shī‘ī community participates in the suffering of Ḥusayn and other Imāms through mourning, weeping, and even inflicting pain upon themselves.<sup>535</sup>

The participants to the suffering and martyrdom of Ḥusayn are promised forgiveness for their sins and high places in paradise. In this sense, weeping, mourning and sorrow become a means of salvation for the faithful.<sup>536</sup> The believers are urged to remember and share the suffering of Ḥusayn and the other Imāms. The eighth Imām ‘Ali Ridā is reported to have said,

“He who recalls our afflictions and weeps for all we have suffered will be with us in our high station on the day of resurrection. He who is reminded of our

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<sup>534</sup> ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi, *The Martyr for Mankind (Shahid-e-Insaniyyat)*, an abridgement, trans and ed. by S. ‘Ali Akhtar, (London: The Muhammadi Trust, 1986), 4.

<sup>535</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 148-9.

<sup>536</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 291.

sufferings and weeps, and causes others to weep, his eyes shall not weep on the day when many eyes shall weep. He who sits in an assembly wherein our memory is kept alive, his heart will not die on the day when many hearts shall die.”<sup>537</sup>

Redemption in the Shī‘ī tradition is the consequence of voluntary suffering and sometimes death. This is true for the Imāms, who are the redeemers of their community, as well as for the participants in the suffering of the Imāms. God bestows redemption on the redeemer and their community through their steadfastness to their faith in the face of suffering and death. In this way, the Shī‘ī community becomes the “faithful remnant” or the “elect community”<sup>538</sup> as the Imāms are the elect friends (*awliyā*) of God.

Here the intercession of the Prophet and his household (*Ahl al-Bayt*) plays a major role. The Shī‘ī Muslims expect that the Imāms, especially the Imām Ḥusayn, will intercede for the faithful granting them high places in paradise. Ayoub writes, “Redemption in Shī‘ī Islam is not expressed in the idea of ransom or the ancient ritualistic sacrifice, but through intercession. The martyred Imām earned this prerogative of intercession through frustration, failure and, finally, the cup of martyrdom.”<sup>539</sup> As he

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<sup>537</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 44, 278 as quoted in Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 292.

<sup>538</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 210.

<sup>539</sup> Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 292.



earned his place in the eyes of God, the faithful may also earn their respected place through emulating the suffering of the Imām.

To sum up, the Imāms, and especially Ḥusayn, as the Prophets throughout history, struggled, suffered and sometimes died in conveying God's revelation to humankind. Through their constant suffering and death, they earned a respected place in paradise. Among them, the suffering and martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbalā is especially significant as the third Imām of Shī'a. He suffered, and was eventually martyred for God. Consequently, he was granted a high place in the heavens, and will intercede with God for the pious Shī'ī individuals on the Day of Judgement. In order to redeem their sins and benefit from the intercession, the Shī'ī community also needs to suffer and die if necessary. Through this way, every affliction becomes redemptive suffering.

I believe that there are two issues to scrutinise closely here. One is the theological significance of these "passion" narratives in the Shī'ī thought. The other is the question of whether the redemptive suffering of Ḥusayn is any different from what I have earlier called the individual redemptive sufferings.

To begin with, my reading suggests me that the writings of hagiography depicting the Imāms, especially the Imām Ḥusayn, in supernatural terms do not represent even the position of the mainstream Shī'ī thought. Mostafa Vaziri points that "these supernatural stories connected to the tragedy of Karbala formed part of the system of Arab belief, as well as part of the dogma promulgated by the aggrieved Iraqis known as

Penitents (*tawwabun*).”<sup>540</sup> In this sense, the stories of the superhuman Imāms can be seen as a pre-Islamic Arab attitude to divinise their heroes. In addition, Abū Mikhnaf, who reported these stories first, is thought to have narrated them in a “mythological and supernatural format.”<sup>541</sup> It appears that the Shī‘ī doctrine of the Imāms also support this argument. Apart from marginal Shī‘ī groups rejected by the mainstream Shī‘a, no Shī‘ī theologian believes that the Imāms are even partly divine. They believe that the Imāms are the most pious, knowledgeable human beings after the prophets. Therefore, the idea of supernatural Imāms has no place in the mainstream Shī‘ī thought.

Moreover, since the Imāms were not supernatural beings, is their suffering and martyrdom, including Ḥusayn’s, any different from a pious believer’s suffering and martyrdom? I believe that there is not much difference between them in essence. Since they are human beings and obliged to follow divine revelation, the suffering and death of the faithful is as redemptive as that of the Imāms. The only difference is perhaps in the Shī‘ī notion of intercession. The Shī‘a believes that the Imāms will intercede with God for the Shī‘ī community on the Day of Judgement. Perhaps it is here that Shī‘a comes closer to the cosmic notion of redemptive suffering in Christianity.

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<sup>540</sup> Vaziri, *The Emergence of Islam*, 107.

<sup>541</sup> Vaziri, *The Emergence of Islam*, 108.

To conclude, does Mahmoud Ayoub's explanation of redemptive suffering solve the problem of evil? First of all, the scope of the solution is limited with the Shī'ī community, which is insignificant compared with the suffering people around the world. Since those who are not Shī'ī will not benefit from the intercession of the Imāms, an important part of the problem remains. In practical terms, to know that one's suffering will redeem sins committed is a consolation. However, the question "why me?" is as much a problem as ever.

It appears that the major response to evil from Muslim theologians and philosophers are limited. The response from the privative theory does not solve the problem of evil. To say that evil is privation is no different from saying that good is privation, because good and evil participate in human life on the same level. There is no reason to differentiate one from the other. In addition, to deny the reality of evil goes against the heart of Muslim faith. If there is no evil, why is there Islam? Why should one struggle to behave oneself?

Moreover, although the Free-Will Explanation offers a partial solution to the origin of moral evil in the sense that human beings are the authors of their actions, it seems to me that the majority of Islamic theologians does not recognise full human freedom. The emphasis is always on divine predestination even when the theologians are talking about human freedom. If God is so dominant, and predestines everything, why has he allowed evil and suffering? It seems that Muslim theologians have not succeeded in reconciling divine predestination and human free-will.

Furthermore, while the idea of the purposefulness and orderliness of the universe appears to support the Best-Possible-World Theodicy, realistically there is no way of checking whether this is the best world. Besides, it does not explain why God is silent to the sufferings of many innocent people, and why certain people are subjected to more suffering than others are. In addition, the irregularities in the distribution of suffering and pain challenge the Best-Possible-World Theodicy.

## **PART THREE**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **V. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

I have explored so far the major responses of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions to the problem of evil and suffering separately. The major scriptural responses to the reality of human suffering and the following major theological and philosophical theodicies in each religious tradition have been examined. Now I shall attempt at an analysis of the scriptural as well as theological and philosophical responses to evil. The primary questions to be sought answer here are whether there are any similarities between different responses of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions to the problem of evil. If there is, what are they? Moreover, in which aspects do they differ from each other if there is any dissimilarity?

Before tracing the similarities and differences between the theodicies, I believe it is appropriate to answer the question why the comparison and contrast are so important. What is one to expect from a comparative analysis? The objective of a comparative study of religion can be expressed in terms of seeking the truth wherever it is. In the words of the great scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the purpose of this "grander attempt" is

"to interpret intellectually all human faith, one's own and other'; comprehensively and justly. Seeing one's own group and its history thus far as making up one complex strand in the total history of religion until now, a total history that one is endeavouring to understand from within, one may essay a

theory that aspires to be part of a movement towards the truth. Seeing one's own group as a component in the total community of humankind, a total community whose corporate critical self-consciousness in this matter has yet to be articulated, again one may endeavour to contribute to its formulation."<sup>542</sup>

From here, one may infer that there may be two major aims of a comparative study. The first one is that comparison and contrast may contribute to understand the truth in one's own religious tradition within a wider context of humanity. The second aim may be that a comparative examination may contribute to articulation of true and meaningful religious notions within a wider context of world religious community.

I believe that the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic responses to evil are all important, and their comparison is also necessary for a true understanding of suffering, human being and God. As the contemporary Muslim theologian Mahmoud Ayoub writes, "The truth is far too great and too profound to be contained in any one religious tradition, philosophy or ideology. Nor is the truth static; it is rather a dynamic force forever challenging and enriching our lives, whatever our understanding of God and man may be."<sup>543</sup> Therefore, the comparison and contrast of the theodicies in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions help us to seek a true understanding of suffering and evil.

Having pointed out the significance of a comparative study in general, we can now return to our main subject; that is, the comparison and contrast of theodicies in the Scriptures and the theological and philosophical traditions in question. As pointed out,

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<sup>542</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 152.

<sup>543</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 293.

the comparison of the answers within each religious tradition is naturally expected to show us some similarities and dissimilarities. As the geographical areas, cultural milieu, social conditions, and historical period in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam emerged show differences and divergences, it is natural that they accommodate dissimilar features in their beliefs, rituals and responses to everyday phenomena.

In this sense, it is quite natural that some conceptions of evil are different among the people who lived thousands of years away from each other in different cultural and social conditions. As human conceptions of life and its conditions are shaped by experiences, different happenings may lead to develop different ideas and beliefs. This is also true for the responses to the occurrences of evil. However, a closer research such as this one indicates that there are intriguing similarities between the scriptural, and theological and philosophical responses to the problem of evil in the three religious traditions in question.

This analysis may also indicate inconsistency of each theodicy with other teachings of individual faiths as well as its reasonableness in its claim against the atheistic argument from evil. It seems that the dilemma of evil is so a comprehensive problem so that it permeates some other religious doctrines along with the belief in God such as human free-will and eschatology. In this sense, a reasonable and consistent theodicy needs to take into account of the idea of human free-will and life after death. The comparative analysis in this part of the study shall question and seek the coherence of such beliefs from the standpoint of the problem of evil.

From the comparison and contrast of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theodicies among each other shall emerge some similarities and dissimilarities naturally.

While the similarities may help to find a common approach to the problem of evil within a wider context of theism, the dissimilarities are expected to emphasise the particularities of each religious tradition. The latter will indicate the characteristic theodicies developed in order to reconcile the belief in God and the reality of evil within the framework of each faith. It seems to me appropriate to start with a comparison and contrast of the scriptural foundations of the theological and philosophical theodicies in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.

### **K. An Analysis of the Scriptural Theodicies**

One can notice in our examination of the scriptural foundation of the theological and philosophical theodicies that Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān offer similar solutions to the problem of evil along with certain dissimilarities. It is possible to find in the sacred books that the three faiths allude to the notions of retributive suffering, Free-Will Explanation, and disciplinary suffering. While majority of Christian scholars of religion and a relatively small number of Jewish scholars interpret some passages in the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament in terms of redemptive suffering in cosmic sense, some other Jewish scholars and their Muslim counterparts as a whole deem that their scripture does not contain such a notion. The latter affirms that Tanakh and the Qur'ān focuses more on redemptive acts of individuals.

Moreover, the idea of life after death is another scriptural answer to the problem of evil that is common in the New Testament and the Qur'ān. The Jewish Scriptures seem to be departing to a great extent from the others in this respect. At least one can say that even if there is a notion of life after death in Tanakh, it is totally absent in the earlier



books of the Torah, and there are only vague references in the later Hebrew Scriptures ascribed by the later scholars to life after death.

The first similar answer of the Jewish Scriptures, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān that will be analysed here is that the sacred books of the three religions all contain references to the idea of suffering as a punishment for sins. They all seem to suggest that there is a correlation between suffering and sin . generally speaking, since God is just in essence, injustice and wrong cannot be attributed to him. If there is suffering in the world, and if there is God who is the Creator, he must be the ultimate cause of evil as well. If he inflicts suffering on anyone, he cannot do it unjustly without any reason.

One purpose of such incidents may be that God inflicts suffering in order to punish the wicked. Since a good supreme being cannot be thought to be doing wrong and injustice, the sufferer must be deserving affliction. Thus, God punishes the wicked for his or her wickedness by inflicting pain and sorrow. The sudden death of Hanniah, an adversary of Jeremiah, in *Jeremiah* 28:15-17 in Tanakh, a similar fate of Ananias and Sapphira in *Acts of the Apostles* 5:1-11 in the New Testament, and the destruction of people of old such as Sodom and Gomorrah in the chapter *al-Ankabūt* 29:33-34 in the Qur'ān suggest that some disasters, suffering and death may be punishment for sin. Many centuries Jews, Christians and Muslims believed, and some still continue to believe, that some sufferings and death in this world are God's punishment for the sins committed, and that prosperity is a divine blessing.

However, the idea of retributive suffering seems to be challenged in the very same Scriptures as well. For example, the epitome of suffering in the Hebrew Bible,

namely, Job, objects the idea of retribution in the following words, "He destroys the blameless and the guilty" (*Job* 9:22). That is to say, God as the ultimate cause inflicts suffering on people regardless of being innocent or wicked. Jesus negates the suggestions that retributive suffering in the case of a blind man (*John* 9:1-3). Accordingly, the blindness of that man is not because of his or his parent's sinfulness. The Qur'ān also warns, "The Blind are not at fault, the lame are not at fault, the sick are not at fault..." (*al-Nūr* 24:61). Therefore, evil and suffering is not necessarily a divine retribution for human wickedness. The destruction of the innocent as well as the guilty, and the birth of disabled and lame infants without any guilt are some indications that evil, at least some of them, cannot be a divine punishment. God cannot inflict afflictions or destroy the innocent.

It appears that there is a growing tendency today among modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers towards the latter position even though there are still those who accept that suffering is a punishment for sin. That is to say that some modern scholars of religion deny that Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān offer the notion of retribution as a response to the problem of suffering.

The Christian theologian Brian Hebblethwaite, for instance, refers to *Luke* 13:4 in his rejection of retributive suffering.<sup>544</sup> A similar attitude can be observed among the majority of modern Jewish thinkers with the exception of some ultra-orthodox Jews. The brutal reality of the Holocaust seems to be the major motive behind this position. For

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<sup>544</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, 49.

example, the Jewish theologian Shmuel Boteach rejects the suggestions of some orthodox Jews that the Holocaust might be a divine punishment for Israel's sins. Boteach asks, "Was is it not God who, when asked by Moses, 'Show me Your Glory, Your essence,' responded, 'I am full of mercy, compassion, benevolence, and long-suffering when it comes to man's iniquities'?"<sup>545</sup> According to Boteach, such a merciful God cannot be thought to have punished the people of Israel in the gas chambers. Furthermore, the Turkish philosopher Mehmet Aydın approaches to retributive explanation of suffering from the viewpoint of enormous disasters befell on a people. He asserts that God's punishment of a society for her wickedness cannot be defended against the objections of the atheist.<sup>546</sup> The idea of retributive suffering does not seem to offer an adequate and satisfactory solution because the realities of life do not seem to support this claim. One may without great difficulty observe that many wicked people die without any significant suffering, and, in some cases, the wicked often becomes more prosperous than the righteous in the world. If God is just, and punishes the sinful in this life, the questions turns out to be that why he punishes some, not others. Why should he discriminate some of his creatures over others?

Besides, there is no one apart from God to verify that a particular suffering is retribution, that is, a punishment for a certain sin. It seems that no human being is in a position to be able to determine that a certain evil is a genuine divine retribution. Even the defenders of retributive suffering do not dare to claim that God informed them that

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<sup>545</sup> Shmuel Boteach, *Wrestling with the Divine: A Jewish Response to Suffering* (Northvale, New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995), 188.

<sup>546</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi*, 152.

certain evil is retribution. What is done is nothing else than reiterating the once popular response to evil in a religious tradition. This seems to be true for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Another similarity between the answers of the three Scriptures is that the cause of some suffering lies in misuse of human free-will. Free-Will Explanation is perhaps one of the most antique responses to the problem of evil. The primeval sin committed by the human ancestors Adam and Eve and its punishment are shared by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The first human beings sinned by misusing their freedom against divine will. This brought about their expulsion from paradise and fall onto the earth. Hypothetically speaking, if there were no sin committed by Adam and Eve in paradise, human beings would be enjoying a suffering-and-struggle-free life without any blemish. The fact that the three Scriptures recognise is that Adam and Eve sinned with their own freewill, and was, consequently, expelled from paradise exposing the subsequent generations as well as themselves to life-long challenges, threats, and sufferings in the world.

Furthermore, the commands of the Torah, which are regarded as Jewish law, strongly suggest that human beings are able to choose between good and evil, righteousness and wickedness. In a similar fashion, the following passages from the Letter of James in the New Testament openly state that temptation to evil is not from God but from human free-will. It reads, "No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it" (*Jas.* 1:13-14).

Here one needs to point out a misinterpretation. It is that the Qur'ān teaches a fatalistic notion of human actions. Some western scholars of religion such as Wensinck<sup>547</sup> assert that the predestinarian view dominates the Muslim sacred book. God preordains everything in detail including human actions. Thus, nothing takes place without God's will. I believe it is to misread the Qur'ān, if not to distort the truth, to say that the Qur'anic view of human action is predestinarian in essence. In this context, the negation of human involvement in suffering and evil is not a Qur'anic attitude. As John Bowker affirms, "a fatalistic and indifferent attitude to the occurrence of suffering is ruled out by the Qur'an itself."<sup>548</sup> It is true that the Qur'ān affirms the notion of God's absolute sovereignty and human freedom side by side. However, it is misleading to assert that the Qur'anic teaching is totally fatalistic and predestinarian.

Furthermore, there is a close relationship between freedom and responsibility of actions of human beings. In this sense, the idea of free-will is at the centre of all other responses. The existence of freedom is the necessary condition of disciplinary suffering, and eschatological response. If human beings had no free-will to choose between good and evil, there would be no way that one could have talked about other answers. However, it ought to be noted here that neither Tanakh nor the New Testament nor the Qur'ān explains how to reconcile divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience with human free-will.

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<sup>547</sup> See above, pages 197-8.

<sup>548</sup> Bowker, *The Problem of Suffering in the Religions of the World*, 116.

Connected with the Free-Will Explanation, the next similarity that occurs in Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān is the idea that suffering in this world is to discipline human beings. In this sense, suffering of human beings in this world is the instrument of divine discipline. The Hebrew Bible sees a similarity between the discipline of a father and God. "Bear in mind that the Lord your God disciplines you just as a man disciplines his son" (*Deut.* 8:5). In this sense, suffering is to educate and build a moral character through which God can be worshipped properly. Paul in his Letters to Romans advises that we must rejoice in our suffering because it produces endurance, character, and hope (*Rom.* 5:3-5).

The Qur'ān describes the purpose of human life and death in terms of test and discipline. "He who created death and life so as to test you as to whoever of you is fairer in action" (*al-Mulk*, 67:2). Here suffering is described in positive terms as an instrument of building moral character. According to this instrumental view, suffering does not occur outside the control of divine will; instead instances of affliction take place by the leave of God for a purpose.

A further similarity between Jewish and Christian Scriptures is the idea of redemptive suffering. It is often asserted that the Qur'ān does not affirm a concept of redemption in the sense that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament do. According to the redemptive interpretation of suffering, the sins of the faithful are redeemed by the suffering of the righteous. The idea is sometimes extended further to all the suffering expiating the sins of any individual or community.

Some scholars see the epitome of redemptive suffering in the suffering of the servant in *the Servant Songs* in *Isaiah* 40-66. The innocent servant suffers so that the misdeeds of the people of Israel can be redeemed, and a peaceful future is built. Philip Sigal, for instance, contends that the people of Israel suffer for the rest of humankind.<sup>549</sup> However, others object that the idea of vicarious suffering, that is, transmission of sin from one person to another, is a biblical notion. They believe that the idea of vicarious suffering lacks the support of Tanakh, and opposes the Jewish concept of the covenant.<sup>550</sup>

On the other hand, majority of Christian theologians understands the passages of the Servant in the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament as they prefer to call it, as the foretelling of Jesus' suffering and death. A Christian expression of redemptive suffering, sometimes called vicarious suffering, is found in *John* 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Marilyn Adams interprets this passage as follows, "God was so eager to win our love that he became incarnate and volunteered for martyrdom himself."<sup>551</sup> Therefore, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was not an ordinary event, but it was for a purpose. According to Christian theologians, the Incarnation of God, namely Jesus Christ, suffered on the Cross in order to redeem the sins of human beings and to reunite with them. This has been the view of mainstream Christianity throughout history.

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<sup>549</sup> Philip Sigal, *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism*, 1, 132. See above, pages 29-30.

<sup>550</sup> See, for instance, Harry M. Orlinsky, "Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah: The So-called 'Servant of the Lord' and 'Suffering Servant' in Second Isaiah," 17. See above, page 29.

<sup>551</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," 259.

The Qur'ān does not mention any notion of redemption in cosmic sense. Furthermore, it challenges the issues involved in the idea of redemption.<sup>552</sup> Accordingly, the Muslim Scripture strongly objects the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. It is often reiterated in the Qur'ān that Jesus Christ is a human messenger of God like any other prophets (*al-Mā'ida* 5:75). His whole endeavour was to spread the divine message so that human beings could bring themselves to God as righteous people. Moreover, the Muslim sacred book affirms that human beings are created without any blemish. They have free-will, and are responsible for their actions in the world (*al-Shams* 91:8-9). Thus, each individual is accountable only for their own wickedness before God.

Furthermore, the Qur'ān does not suggest any idea of transference of sins and, correspondingly, transference of punishment to another person instead of the sinner. Every individual is bound to give a full account of his or her own action, no one else's (*Fāṭir* 35:18). There is one instance in the Qur'ān in which God himself redeems the person from his suffering. God ransoms Ishmael's life; the son of Abraham, with a large sacrifice (*al-Şaffāt*, 37:107). In this Qur'anic story, the patriarch Abraham intends to sacrifice his son, but God intervenes and saves Ishmael's life by paying the ransom with a sacrifice.

This seems to be the only instance in the Qur'ān in which God pays the ransom to relieve a human being from suffering. However, here God does not forgive sins of

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<sup>552</sup> Muzammil Husain Siddiqi, "The Doctrine of Redemption: a Critical Study," 99.



Abraham and his son Ishamel. This is traditionally interpreted a way of test through which God tries both Abraham and Ishmael. The sacrifice is, in this context, a reward from God for their submission to divine will. Here there is a parallel with the passage in *Numbers 3:45-50* in the Torah.<sup>553</sup> Here it is reported that God commanded Moses to take redemption money from the first-born of the people of Israel for "those who are in excess."

One ought to note here that God may, according to Islam, redeem the sins of the righteous in the hereafter as long as he or she endures suffering patiently without disobeying him. In the case that the believer holds onto the belief in God even in times of disaster, God may purify the believer in the hereafter (*Āl-i 'Imrān 3:139-40*). This scriptural view is often supported with a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. He is reported to have said that "the believer is inflicted with calamities until he is free from any sin clung to him."<sup>554</sup> In this sense, suffering becomes redemptive for the sufferer as long as he or she is faithful to God. Closely connected with this view, in some other passages in Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān is that suffering is a prerequisite to taking up the responsibility to spread divine message. In this sense, afflictions endured redeem the sufferer from his or her sins. Here redemption is not a cosmic event in the sense that God in person intervenes in the natural process of human life. In fact, it is in the sense that God forgives sin as a result of personal endurance to afflictions out of divine love.

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<sup>553</sup> Siddiqi, "the Doctrine of Redemption: a Critical Study," 100.

<sup>554</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Cāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8, 92.

The prophets and the pious suffer while they call people to know and worship God. Some Jewish scholars understand the suffering and death of the Jewish prophets in redemptive terms. Therefore, their devotion to Yahweh often evoked suffering and even death.<sup>555</sup> Within Christian context, redemption in this sense seems to be closely related with the notion of following the example of Jesus Christ. The biblical notion expressing this idea is “taking up the cross.” Accordingly, taking up cross after the crucifixion of Jesus will naturally rouse hostility and hatred against the Christian, will bring about suffering or, even in some cases, death (*Mark* 13:1-13). Here suffering is, as Simundson puts it, “a direct consequence of bringing the message of Christ to a sinful world.”<sup>556</sup> Accordingly, bearing the burden of spreading the good news to people may engender suffering. The Qur’ān also teaches that God will redeem the sins of the believers as long as they endure suffering holding on to their belief in God (*Āl-i ‘Imrān* 3:139-40).

The final similarity to be considered is the eschatological response to suffering. The New Testament and the Qur’ān, as pointed out, appeal to the idea of life after death as a solution to the problem of evil. The concept of the afterlife in Judaism is generally accepted to be a very late development. According to the eschatological response, the believer is promised eternal happiness in paradise in return for the sufferings he or she endured in earthly life. On the other hand, the wicked is warned of punishment in hell for his or her infidelity.

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<sup>555</sup> Jacob B. Agus, *The Evolution of Jewish Thought*, 24. See above, page 30.

<sup>556</sup> Simundson, *Faith under Fire*, 131.

A well-defined Jewish concept of life after death emerges not in the Torah but later "in the Greco-Roman world." Thus, one cannot see an explicit eschatological response to evil in the Torah. It is believed the rabbis developed an idea of compensation in the Hereafter for the evils of this world. In the words of Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok,

"The notion of a future world in which the righteous would be compensated for the ills they suffered in this life was prompted by a failure to justify the ways of God by any other means. According to Biblical theodicy, men were promised rewards for obeying God's law and punishments were threatened for disobedience."<sup>557</sup>

While some earthly states of affairs such as human well-being, the existence of children, and prosperity are described in terms of reward; such evils as plagues, famines, and poverty are punishments from God for obedience or disobedience of Jews to divine law.

The rabbis observed that the reality of life did not coincide exactly with the promises of the Scriptures. The irregularities in human state of affairs such as the suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked seem to have urged the rabbis to develop a doctrine of life after death in general, an eschatological response to evil in particular. This was the belief that the rabbis believed the Jews needed then. In the words of Cohn-Sherbok, "Such a belief helped Jews to cope with suffering in this life, and it also explained, if not the presence of evil in the world, then at least the worthwhileness of creation despite the world's ills."<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Death and Immortality in the Jewish Tradition," in Linda and Paul Badham (eds.), *Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 25.

<sup>558</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, "Death and Immortality in the Jewish Tradition," 25.

Having formed an eschatology, the rabbis read it back to the Bible interpreting certain passages that they believed alluding to the Hereafter. For instance, according to Rabbi Joshua b. Levi, the origin of the doctrine of resurrection in the Torah is *Psalm* 84:5, which reads "Happy are those who dwell in Your house; they forever praise You." As the last sentence is in future tense, this must be, to the rabbi, in life after death.<sup>559</sup> Although some find allusions to eternal life in the writings of the Jewish prophets in Tanakh, they are understood by modern biblical scholars<sup>560</sup> in the sense of restoration of Jewish prosperity in this life not in the hereafter.

In *Luke* 18:28-9, Jesus promises his disciples of reward in this life and in the hereafter for their steadfastness and endurance to hardships. The Qur'ān describes the hereafter in terms of the day of judgement in which God's justice shall prevail (*al-Anbiyā'* 21:47). On that day, God assures the righteous of reward, and the sinful of punishment. This is believed to recompense the innocent sufferings in this world and to justify God in the final reckoning. The scriptural references to the afterlife in response to the problem of evil have been fully formulated later by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians.

A distinctive New Testament answer to evil is that Jesus shall vindicate suffering in his second coming to the world. On the other hand, we do not come across with a notion of the second coming of Jesus Christ in Jewish religious tradition. While

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<sup>559</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, "Death and Immortality in the Jewish Tradition," 26.

<sup>560</sup> Helmer Ringgren, "Resurrection," in *the Encyclopaedia of Religion*, (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 12, 345.

the Qur'ān does not elucidate the idea of the second coming of Jesus, some Muslim exegetes interpret certain Qur'anic verses in this sense. The explicit references can be found among the prophetic traditions of Muhammad.

The second coming of Jesus Christ (the *Parousia* in Greek) has been for centuries, and is still by especially fundamentalist Christians, regarded as the culminating point in Christian eschatology.<sup>561</sup> For instance, 2 *Corinthians* 5:10 is traditionally understood in the sense that Jesus will come back at the end of the world, and confer reward and punishment for the earthly conducts of human beings. The passage in question reads, "For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil."<sup>562</sup> Furthermore, Oscar Cullmann contends that the second coming of Jesus is the consummation of Jesus' *raison d'être* in terms of salvation.<sup>563</sup> That is to say, Jesus' role as the bringer of salvation will be complete at the *Parousia*.

The Qur'ān does not explicitly mention the idea of the second coming of Jesus. However, some classical exegetes interpret certain verses of the Qur'ān referring to the notion of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Among the Quranic passages of this kind we see *al-Nisā* 4:159 and *al-Zukhruf* ("Adornment") 43:61. The former, for instance, reads, "And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in Him before his death;

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<sup>561</sup> S. H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1980), 63.

<sup>562</sup> See, also, 2 *Thessalonians* 2; and *Revelation* 12:13.

<sup>563</sup> See Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, 85.

and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them."<sup>564</sup> The classical exegetes al-Ṭabarī understands this verse in the sense that there will not be left even one person from the People of the Book who does not believe in Jesus as a messenger of God before the death of Jesus.

According to the orthodox Muslim view, it was not Jesus who died on the cross, but was someone looked like him. Allah raised him to himself. In this context, Jesus is still alive in the body, and shall come back to the world before the Judgment Day. He shall kill the Antichrist, that is, a great evil force, shall purify the world from sin and wickedness, and all shall believe in him. Finally, Jesus shall die before the end of the world.<sup>565</sup> Al-Ṭabarī supports his interpretation with a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. According to this tradition narrated by Abū Hurayra, in his second coming of Jesus, "There will be such security on the earth in his time that lions will lie down with camels, leopards with cattle and wolves with sheep. Youths and boys will play with snakes without harming them or being harmed by them..."<sup>566</sup> Here Islam comes close to the Christian concept of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the examined scriptural explanations do not, critically speaking, offer a conclusive solution to the problem of evil. Although each response provides to a certain extent help to understand evil in this world, they do not

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<sup>564</sup> This passage is from *the Holy Qur-ān*, (al-Madīnah: King Fahd Holy Qur'ān Printing Complex, 1410 AH.).

<sup>565</sup> Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 81.

<sup>566</sup> Cited in Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 81.

reconcile the reality of evil with the goodness of God completely. In a sense, this outcome is natural because Scriptures are not theological books justifying certain beliefs. They are the account of dynamic relationship between God and humankind. Therefore, human beings are expected to find an answer within their experiences with God. The theological and philosophical theodicies can be seen as the intellectual reflections from one's own point of view. As we shall see now, the scriptural accounts of evil and suffering have been the foundation and main source of inspiration for the majority of theological and philosophical theodicies to develop later.

## **L. An Analysis of the Theological and Philosophical Theodicies**

An analysis of the theological and philosophical responses to evil ought to start with determining similarities and dissimilarities of the theodicies within each tradition first and then among each other. This will probably help us to find more sensible and reasonable responses in accord with the theistic concept of God.

The Christian philosopher of religion John Hick, for the first time, classified the traditional Christian theodicies under two main headings; namely, the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy. Having explored the major theodicies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we can infer that the Jewish and Islamic theodicies have not been classified as the Christian theodicies have been done. They are scattered in the writings of Jewish and Muslim scholars. We can note that a possible reason for that the Jewish and Muslim theodicies are not classified yet, may be seen in the fact that critical and analytical thinking has a prominent place in the West. Therefore, Western philosophers of

religion have explored, clarified, and classified the classical solutions to evil as opposed to the Jewish and Muslim scholars.

I believe that the Jewish and Islamic theodicies may be classified in a similar fashion as well. The Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theodicies including the traditional Christian theodicies can be classified in two main groups: The theodicies that affirm God as the cause of evil and the theodicies that deny God as the cause of evil. This, I believe is an encompassing classification as the enterprise of theodicy is an endeavour to justify the ways of God. Before comparing the Jewish and Islamic responses to evil, one needs to clarify the distinction between the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy, which is expected to shed some light on understanding the differences and similarities among Christian, Jewish, and Islamic solutions to the problem of evil and our classification of the theodicies as a whole.

I firstly propose to outline the differences and then the similarities between the two traditional Christian theodicies. This will help us to understand the gist of modern theodicies as well as the traditional ones. Following Hick's comparison and contrast, the differences between the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy can be summarised in three main points.

The first difference between the two traditional theodicies is seen in their position on the origin of evil. The Augustinian Theodicy denies that God is the source of evil. To prove that God has nothing to do with evil, the Augustinian theologians adopt the Neo-Platonic idea of evil as privation of being. The creation is good as God's work, but the deficiencies, lack and privation of perfection emerges as if they are separate evil entities. Evil is not a being, but a privation of being. If there is any evil in the world, it is



brought about by human free-will. God is good, and he cannot and does not create evil. The Irenaean Theodicy, on the other hand, sees evil as well as good as a work of God. Therefore, he is the ultimate cause of everything in the creation; and the responsibility for evil lies with God. Consequently, what is needed to be done is to seek justification for God's creating or allowing evil and suffering in the world.

Moreover, while the Augustinian Theodicy is built upon the primeval event of the Fall, the Irenaean theory is oriented towards the future world. The former sees the ultimate cause of evil in the event of the fall. For the latter, evil as a work of God serves a purpose that will be fully realised in the hereafter. John Hick writes,

"The Augustinian type of theodicy looks to the past, to a primal catastrophe in the fall of angels and/or men, for the explanation of the existence of evil in God's universe. In contrast, the Irenaean type of theodicy is eschatological, and finds the justification for the existence of evil in an infinite (because eternal) good which God is bringing out of the temporal process."<sup>567</sup>

While the Augustinian Theodicy holds that evil entered into human realm with the original sin committed by the primeval human beings, the latter understands this event as an indispensable stage in the person-making process, a process going from childhood to spiritual maturity and, consequently, unity in God.

Finally, the Augustinian theologians categorise people as the saved and the damned in the hereafter. The Irenaean theologians expect that God's love shall save

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<sup>567</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 263.

all.<sup>568</sup> Connected with the idea of free-will and the traditional view of hell as the abode of evil beings, the Augustinian theodicians find it necessary that those who deny God will be punished eternally after death. On the other hand, there seems to be a growing tendency among Irenaean theologians to reject the doctrine of eternal hell.

Does this mean that there is no converging point between the Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies? Although the differences between these two theodicies go very deep, there are certain convergences as well. Firstly, both the Augustinian and Irenaean theodicians share the Christian theme of the "O felix culpa". That is to say that, there is no suffering in vain in the world. There is a divine purpose behind all suffering that justifies God in the face of evils.

"And even the greatest evil of all, the murder of the son of God, has been found by subsequent Christian faith to be also, in an astounding paradox, the greatest good of all, so that through the centuries the Church could dare to sing on the eve of its triumphant Easter celebrations, 'O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem'.<sup>569</sup> ['O fortunate crime..., which merited...such and so great a redeemer!']<sup>570</sup>

Although it is more explicitly reflected in the writings of the Irenaean theodicians, the Augustinian theologians, too, affirm that the creation of such a universe is better than the one there is no evil. In Hick's words, the idea that "the final end-product of the human story will justify the evil within that story points to an eschatological understanding of the

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<sup>568</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 262-3.

<sup>569</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 280.

<sup>570</sup> This phrases of unknown origin are a part of the Roman Missal in the *Exultet* sung in the evening before Easter Day. The translation is taken from Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 280, n. 1.

divine purpose which gives meaning to human life."<sup>571</sup> In this sense, the creation has a value in the eyes of God, and for that matter there are divine purposes at work in the universe. These purposes can be known to the extent that God reveals them to human beings in his relation.

Secondly, the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy are in the opinion that God's power must be understood in the sense that he can do only what is logically possible. It is not possible for God that he creates free beings and not allows evil, and that free beings are built in the state of fully grown in spiritual sense. However, this is not to be understood a genuine limitation upon divine power. Because, as Hick states, "the inability to do the self-contradictory does not reflect an impotence in the agent but a logical incoherence in the task proposed."<sup>572</sup> However, Leibniz's use of this principle, who thought that divine will is subject to logical necessity in determining the cosmic possibilities, is found far-fetched even by later Augustinian theologians.

A similar distinction seen between the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy can be traced in Jewish and Islamic responses as well. The kernel point in this distinction seems to be the question of the source of evil. It is possible to see in the three religious traditions those who see God as the ultimate cause of evil as well as good, and those who hold that God does not create evil. While the former puts emphasis on the purpose of life, the latter regards human free-will and privation of existence as the origin of evil.

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<sup>571</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 265.

<sup>572</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), 265.

We have seen that Saadia and Maimonides in the Jewish tradition, Ikhwān al-Şafā, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā on Islamic side argue that evil is privation, lack, or deficiency of being. In this sense, existence is excellence as it is brought about by God. They all do not attribute the creation of evil to God because he is all-good and wise. Such a deity cannot cause suffering. The creation is his purposeful action; therefore it cannot be evil. All that is called evil emerges out of material world that cannot accept whole perfection. The ultimate perfection is God. According to this group, the only real evil in the world is moral evil. That is to say, human beings can bring about evil by their own free-will. They are the cause and source of evil on earth.

The Jewish philosopher Judah Halevi and the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, on the other hand, reject the theory of privation in a manner similar to the Irenaean theodacists. They assert that God is the ultimate cause of everything evil as well as good for he is the Creator. Halevi negates the assertion that evil is the privation of goodness or being. He insists that evil is as real as good in this life, and God is their "Prime Cause." Every single object and occurrence in this world is brought about by divine will either directly or through intermediary causes.<sup>573</sup> Likewise, the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd maintains, "it is necessary that evil should be attributed to Him [God] just as there is attributed the creation of good."<sup>574</sup> Ibn Rushd's main concern is that if evil is not attributed to God, this may lead to people believe that there is a creator of evil as well.

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<sup>573</sup> See above, pages 35-6.

<sup>574</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb al-Kashf an Manāhīc al-Adilla*, quoted from J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, 172. See above pages 217-8.

Since this is logically impossible, God must be recognised as the creator of both good and evil.

From purely philosophical standpoint, it appears that the theory of privation does not, even if we accept it, justify God in the face of evil. As the Turkish theist Mehmet Aydın contends,<sup>575</sup> to ignore the reality of evil does not solve the problem. If God is just and good as it is believed to be, why did then he allow these deficiencies? Surely, he is powerful enough to remove them or to create so to speak “perfect beings” without any want. We know from the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions that he is able and has created perfectly good creatures, that is, angels. Since God is able to create such perfect and good creatures as angels, he would have created human beings in a similar fashion. Therefore, the ultimate responsibility for evil lies with God. Consequently, evil is no less reality in our world than the occurrences of good.

Moreover, we have seen that some contemporary process theologians such as David R. Griffin developed a theodicy, namely, Process Theodicy, in order to reconcile the existence of God with the occurrences of evil. Process Theodicy presents completely different picture from the traditional Christian theodicies. As pointed out, the gist of Process argument is that God is limited in his power. His power is persuasive, not coercive. That is to say, he cannot prevent evils from happening by using force; he can try to change the course of an event by using his persuasive power.<sup>576</sup> Therefore, he is

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<sup>575</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi*, 152.

<sup>576</sup> See above, pages 128-37.

not to be blamed for the occurrences of suffering in the world. Without having a coercive power, he cannot prevent evil; consequently, he cannot be blamed for evil.

However, the three monotheistic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, affirm God's omnipotence as opposed to process theology. Generally speaking, God is described in the Jewish Scriptures, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān, and by majority of the subsequent theologians, as the creator of heavens and earth, and the sustainer of the creation. He, for instance, saved the people of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh cleaving the Nile for a passage for them. He is also the healer of diseases and the granter of immortality. There is nothing possible that he cannot do. It is often emphasised that the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is an all-powerful deity. Divine power is restricted only by logical limitations. God can do only what is logically impossible. This is not a limitation in divine power in the real sense of the word as the notion of logical limitation suggests "a logical incoherence in the task proposed."<sup>577</sup> For instance, if it is impossible for God to create a sun of ice-cream, this does not mean that God is impotent. In fact, it signifies that the idea of creating a sun of ice-cream is a logically incoherent task. This is totally different from Process understanding of limitation in divine power.

Christian, Jewish and Muslim critics often point out that the process God is not the God of Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.<sup>578</sup> The Jewish philosopher Alvin J. Reines states, "I see no explanation in panentheism for the deity unsurpassable in love, knowledge, and power not having rid the world of evils with which even very limited

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<sup>577</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 265.

<sup>578</sup> J. Hick, "Critique," F. Sontag, "Critique," and S. T. Davis, "Critique," in S. T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 122-8.

humans have done away.”<sup>579</sup> If humans are able to bring about some actualities using their freedom and power as the process theologian asserts, do these humans need such a God?

Similarly, Mark W. Worthing, a Christian theologian, criticises the process conception of God saying that “God...is maintained by Christian theology to be the conductor of the final act (if indeed our universe has a final act), not just a spectator with better than average chances of finding a way to survive the consummation of the universe.”<sup>580</sup> If God has no power to conduct the final act as the Process theologians seem to argue, then this god cannot be the deity of Christian faith.

The contemporary Turkish philosopher of religion Mehmet Aydın, too, asserts that “...it is obvious that the idea of a limited God cannot satisfy ethical and religious conscience. A limited God may not be hold responsible for the evils in the world perhaps, but it is also not possible to praise him for the goods to be achieved in the end.”<sup>581</sup> We come to the point again that why would human beings need, pray and praise such a God then?

It seems to me that the process conception of God might not be so a radical challenge to Christian faith as it can be to Jewish and Muslim traditions. This is because it is the heart of Christian faith that God entered into human history in Jesus Christ, the

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<sup>579</sup> Alvin J. Reines, “Hylotheism: A Theology of Pure Process,” in Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin (eds.), *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*, 278. However, I do not share Reines’ conviction of God as radically imperfect.

<sup>580</sup> Mark W. Worthing, *Worthing, God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics*, 196.

<sup>581</sup> Mehmet Aydın, *Kant ve Çağdaş İngiliz Felsefesinde Tanrı-Ahlak İlişkisi*, (Ankara: Ümran Yayınları, 1981), 132-3.

second person of the Trinity. While Godhead is unchangeable and outside human sphere, Jesus as the Incarnation of God was in human sphere and subject to change. He was born like any other child surrounded by natural risks, grew stronger, and died like human beings. There were things that he could do or could not do. Yet, Godhead is all-powerful and complete control of human history. The “bipolar” conception of God seems to be more problematic for Jewish religious thought and almost inapplicable to Islamic faith. Although there are some attempts at developing a process theology in recent years, they are not regarded as a mainstream Jewish faith. As Cohn-Sherbok notes,

“Within Judaism such a conception of a limited God has not gained many adherents: instead most religious believers have continued to accept the traditional doctrine of an all-powerful God who has created the universe and continues to direct its destiny without any limitation.”<sup>582</sup>

The Qur’ān and the following Muslim intellectual tradition, as we have emphasised a number of times, proclaim that God is all-power. Although the process theologian Charles Hartshorne introduces Muhammad Iqbal as a Muslim “panentheist” and his thought as “a panentheistic version of Islam,”<sup>583</sup> Iqbal never affirms a limited conception of God. Neither does he spell out that he is a process thinker. He simply objects to the understanding of omnipotence as a blind and capricious divine power. He regards God’s power as “intimately related to Divine wisdom, and finds the infinite power of God revealed, not in the arbitrary and the capricious, but in the recent, the

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<sup>582</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Jewish Faith*, 49. See, also, Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 75-77.

<sup>583</sup> Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 294.



regular, and the orderly.”<sup>584</sup> Iqbal does not limit God's power; he only points out the fact that the operation of divine power in the world is not irregular and aimless. The Muslim thinker points divine purpose and orderliness of the universe.

In short, the process theologian may argue that Process Theodicy offers a solution to the problem of evil by changing the theistic conception of God as there is no other way to do it. As one cannot deny the existence and reality of evil, the only alternative left is to change the classical understanding of God. However, the process God has, as we have seen, very little to do with the traditional Jewish, Christian, and Islamic doctrine of God. Process Theodicy does not solve the problem of evil directed against theistic concept of God, but they escape from the challenge by jettisoning the traditional belief in God. I believe that this cannot be taken as a theistic solution to the problem of evil. It seems to me that this is side-stepping the real problem.

A major dissimilarity is between the theodicies and the anti-theodicies developed to explain the Holocaust. While the theodicies seek reconciliation between God and the reality of evil, the anti theodicies seem to negate, or tend to negate, the traditional conception of God. A relatively complicated approach is of Elie Wiesel. His negative theodicy attempts to protest the traditional Jewish notion of God, while rejecting the atheistic claim that evil disproves the existence of God. However, he does not offer an alternative concept of God. Richard Rubenstein, on the other hand, rejects the traditional doctrine of God, and replaces it with the idea of "nothingness" that is similar to Buddhist notion in the final stage of the development of his conception of God. As Rubenstein's

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<sup>584</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 80.

concept of God is not a Jewish notion, it does not solve the problem of evil. The only response perhaps lies in the future life.

The idea of redemptive suffering is another response to evil that is reflected in Jewish, Christian and Shī'ī thought. As pointed out, the explanation of redemptive suffering can take two different forms. That is, individual, or personal, redemption and cosmic, or universal, redemption. The former signifies the redemption of a human soul from sin through one's own suffering. The latter is used in the sense of salvation of a people as a whole through the suffering of God himself or of a charismatic personality. The latter takes different forms in Jewish, Christian, and Shī'ī traditions. While Judaism, Christianity, and Islam commonly affirm an idea of individual redemption, they differ concerning the latter. It is the latter form of redemptive suffering that is most often referred to by theologians.

The suffering servant theme in *Isaiah* 40-66 constitutes the scriptural foundation of the Jewish and Christian theological explanation of redemptive suffering. While Christian theologians traditionally understand the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in terms of redemptive suffering, in Jewish tradition redemption signifies a messianic event that will take place in the future. Differently, the Jewish theologian Ignaz Maybaum explains the reason behind the death of the Jewish people under the Nazi oppression in terms of vicarious suffering. In a similar way with his Jewish and Christian counterparts, the Shī'ī theologian Mahmoud Ayoub, too, develops an explanation of redemptive suffering based on the martyrdom and intercession of the Imāms, especially Imām Husayn.

The Shī'ī "imamology," the Christian "Christology" and the Jewish concept of the "messianism," although messianism is not accepted by many Jewish scholars today, appears to be corresponding with each other in some particular. Like Christ in Christianity, the 'Imāms in Shī'ī Islam and the Messiah in Judaism are chosen for a particular purpose. They are charismatic personalities and the sources of redemption for the rest of community. As Christ's suffering and death on the cross redeem the sins of his followers, the martyrdom of the 'Imāms, especially 'Imām Ḥusayn, can be a source of redemption from the sins of their followers.<sup>585</sup>

The main difference of Jewish messianism from Christology and imamology is that while the latter two signify a past event as a source of redemptive act, the messianic redemption has not been realised yet. Its fulfilment is a long-awaited promise and consummation of history. Christianity affirms that God sacrificed his only son Jesus Christ to redeem the sins of humankind. In this sense, the crucifixion of Jesus is the redemptive suffering expiating the sins of humankind. Therefore, redemption can be experienced in the inner world of each individual. In a similar way, the suffering and death of the Shī'ī 'Imāms, especially 'Imām Ḥusayn, are purposeful divine works that already took place. The difference of Shī'a notion of redemption from its Christian counterpart here is that redemption will take place in the end of time. While messianic redemption will be realised in the future as well, the Messiah has not come yet.

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<sup>585</sup> Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 288.

Another difference between these three accounts is that while Christianity affirms that Jesus Christ is God's Incarnation, neither Judaism nor Shī'ī Islam makes such a claim for Messiah and the 'Imāms. In the case of Christianity, it is God himself who involves in history as the second person of the Trinity. However, the Messiah and the 'Imāms are human beings, not divine although they are divinely ordained for a special purpose. What makes them special is their chosenness by God for the purpose of redemption.

A major difficulty with vicarious suffering is that in what way it solves the problem of evil. Even if we ignore the question whether the Shī'ī theory of redemption lacks the support of mainstream Shī'ī faith, how does it solve the problem? Suffering and death are everyday phenomena as it was before the vicarious suffering of the servants. Human beings still suffer around the world. Is it enough to hold that they have no more sin? It seems that salvation, which is vicarious suffering is supposed to bring, is limited with a certain community. One excludes the others. How can one explain the suffering of non-Christian, non-Jews, and non-Shī'ī? It seems to me that vicarious suffering offers a solution of limited scope leaving a large number of sufferings unexplained.

Here one ought to point that Sunnī Islam departs from Shī'ī schools in this aspect. The former rejects the view that there is an idea of redemption in Islam. This is the view of the majority of Muslim scholars. Muhammad Iqbal holds a similar view. He writes,

"There is no mediator between God and man. God is the birthright of every man. The Qur'an therefore, while it looks upon Jesus Christ as the spirit of

God, strongly protests against the Christian doctrine of Redemption, as well as the doctrine of an infallible visible head of the Church-doctrines which proceed upon the assumption of the insufficiency of human personality and tend to create in man a sense of dependence, which is regarded by Islam as a force obstructing the ethical progress of man.<sup>586</sup>

The idea of redemption has been regarded as an event impeding spiritual development of individuals.

The last common theological response I shall consider here is the eschatological resolution. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach a notion of life after death in which moral endeavours of individuals are met. Accordingly, this earthly life is not the only life human beings have. There is life after death, and human beings will know God properly in the next world. Although the idea of life after death in Hebrew Bible is a later development, Jewish theologians and philosophers saw that the doctrine of life beyond grave is necessary to vindicate inequities in this world. It is necessary because injustices faced here can only be corrected in the hereafter.

The eschatological response to evil has been one of the major Jewish theodicies throughout history. Saadia and Albo in the Middle Ages, Dan Cohn-Sherbok among contemporary Jewish philosophers hold that the promise of life after death is necessary for vindication of earthly sufferings. The latter asserts that if the people of Israel sustain the belief in God after the Holocaust, "the promise of immortality" is the only way.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. by S. A. Vahid (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), 38.

<sup>587</sup> See above, pages 47-9.

The eschatological resolution has been at the centre of the traditional and modern Christian theodicies. Moreover, while Augustinian theologians such as Swinburne maintain life after death in which divine justice will be fully manifest, Irenaean theodicians such as Hick find it essential for a Christian theodicy.<sup>588</sup> Furthermore, the Muslim belief in life after has a high place among other responses to the problem of evil.<sup>589</sup> This is a world of test, and its results will be seen in the hereafter.

Grace Jantzen, a contemporary philosopher of religion, objects that the eschatological response can be a solution to the problem of evil. Jantzen writes,

“One might argue that only if it (the afterlife) is, is God just: the sufferings of this present world can only be justified by the compensation of eternal life. But this, in the first place, is shocking theodicy: it is like saying that I may beat my dog at will provided that I later give him a dish of his favourite liver chowder. What happens after death-no matter how welcome-does not make present evil good.”<sup>590</sup>

Jantzen simply contends that the future reward does not change the experienced suffering. However, she ignores the goods gained through suffering in this world as well as in the hereafter. We know from our experience that on several occasions we forgot our experiences of suffering when time passes or reward is returned. Therefore, it is possible that the sad memories of human beings can be easily forgotten. Furthermore, I believe that the joyous moment of encounter with God in life after death shall make people forget

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<sup>588</sup> See above, page 123, 162.

<sup>589</sup> See above, page 202-6.

<sup>590</sup> Grace Jantzen, “Do We Need Immortality?” *Modern Theology*, 1, 1 as quoted in Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 321.

the sad instances of suffering in this world. It seems to me that the problem lies somewhere else. It is the religious doctrine of eternal damnation.

The Augustinian theologians, the majority of Muslim theologians, both Sunnī and Shī'ī, and in a lesser degree Jewish theologians affirm that some is destined to paradise, some to hell. The fate of the unbeliever is eternal damnation. The Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo discusses the problem of hell. Having noticed that there was no way that anyone could escape from the torture of hell, he affirms that God's mercy will overcome, and hell like paradise with its inhabitants will be abolished. In Christian tradition, the theologians of the Irenaean approach, more clearly from Schleiermacher onwards, maintained an idea of universal salvation. Every individual will be reconciled with God in the end. The universalist conception comes to its culmination in the thought of John Hick.

The mainstream Islamic teaching, Sunnī and Shī'ī, is that hell is eternal for those who deny the existence of God. The main reason for this position seems to be the high place Muslims ascribe to the Qur'ān. That is to say, it is the word of God that was brought down to human beings. As the Qur'ān is believed to describe the ultimate destiny of the believers and unbelievers in terms of eternity in paradise or in hell respectively, the mainstream Islamic thought has shaped in that way. However, it is possible to find some scholars in Islamic tradition denying the eternity of hell. One needs to note that theirs is a marginal view. They believe that there is no such a thing as eternal damnation even though there is Hell for a certain period of time.

The Cossack Muslim theologian Musa Carullah Bigiyef (1874-1949), for instance, refuses to accept that the doctrine of eternal damnation is among the decrees of Muslim faith. He emphasises, "I cannot introduce the idea of eternal damnation among the doctrines of Islam, a religion that the Qur'ān describes as God's mercy to humankind."<sup>591</sup> Musa Carullah believes that God's mercy includes every individual regardless of believer and unbeliever. Therefore, the notion of eternal damnation is inconsistent with divine mercy.

Moreover, Muhammad Iqbal understands Hell as another chance for stubborn people to complete their spiritual development. Once they are ready to unite in God, the purpose of Hell will be attained. Iqbal writes,

"The word 'eternity' used in certain verses, relating to Hell, is explained by the Quran itself to mean only a period of time (78:23)...Hell, therefore, as conceived by the Quran, is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a revengeful God; it is a corrective experience which may make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace."<sup>592</sup>

For Iqbal who sees human life as a continuous process, the merciful God cannot torture human beings eternally. Hell may be a necessary stage in which human beings come to realise God. I ought to emphasise here one more time that this is a marginal view within Islamic tradition. With the eschatological resolution, the study has come to the conclusion.

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<sup>591</sup> Musa Carullah Bigiyef, *Rahmet-i İlahiye Burhanları*, 88 as quoted in Mustafa Sabri and Musa Carullah, *İlahi Adalet* (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1996), 33.



## M. Conclusion

The problem of evil is one of the atheistic arguments against the theistic belief in a good and powerful God. The principal target of this argument is the monotheistic religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the major religions who teach that there is a God, who is all-powerful and all-good. Therefore, the atheist's main purpose is to destroy such a theistic conception of God in view of the occurrences of evil in the world. It is his or her contention that if he or she succeeds in this attempt, the belief in God is inconsistent with the realities of the world.

The ideas taken as scriptural responses in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān would not help because the sacred writings are not systematic theology books providing logical and rational answers to the problem of evil. Their primary concern is to help human beings to build a relationship with God. In this sense, it was down to the believers to explain the existence of evil in a way that is not irrational to be believe in God. having realised that, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions have developed theodicies, in the general sense of the term, in order to reconcile the belief in God, whether is called Yahweh or Allah, and the occurrences of evil in the world. The main purpose for such an attempt is to show the atheist primarily that the theistic belief in a good and powerful God makes sense even in the face of evils.

Although the atheistic problem of evil is originally a philosophical or intellectual problem, it has been difficult to isolate it from the practical consequences. The particular

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<sup>592</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 123.

disasters such as earthquake, famine, drought and the like and human and animal sufferings seem to exasperate this problem. The Nazi Holocaust is, for instance, particularly important. It appears that this tragedy has immensely affected Jewish thought in a way that radical responses to evil find a strong ground to accelerate. This can be seen as an after shock of the terrible tragedy.

The Christian theology and philosophy of religion seem to be enjoying the enterprise of theodicy. This is because the enterprise of theodicy is more popular in Christian tradition than Islamic tradition. However, the similarities between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic responses to evil striking. In general terms, it appears that there are two major trends within the theodicy tradition in the three faiths. One is that God is the creator of evil as well as good. Therefore, he has a reason for allowing evil. The other trend is that God is a good deity; therefore, he cannot create evil. There is no evil in nature; the only evil is brought about by human free-will.

I concluded that God as a powerful deity must be the creator of evil. This is most often associated with the Irenaean Theodicy in Christian theology. It is also possible to see a similar kind of approaches in Jewish and Islamic traditions of theodicy. To ignore evil in the world does not solve the problem. Even if he did not create it, he would have prevented it. I believe that the Soul-Making Theodicy explains evil in a way that it is reasonable to hold the belief in God even in the face of evil. However, the Soul-Making Theodicy seems to have no answer for what it calls "dysteleological" instances of suffering. That is to say, the idea of soul-making does not do justice to the excessive sufferings such as the Holocaust. It seems to me that Hick overcomes this difficulty to a

great extent by postulating a universalist view of salvation, which is the essential part of his eschatological resolution.

Although Hick's version of the Irenaean Theodicy offers a relatively reasonable solution to the problem of evil, it does not solve it conclusively. Does this mean that to believe in God is irrational, or no more makes sense? Of course, that is not true. The atheistic problem of evil cannot prove that there is no God, or that the belief in God is inconsistent with the reality of evil. To say that the extant theodicies cannot solve the dilemma of evil conclusively is different from saying that the atheist's argument from evil disproves the belief in God. As theodicy is a human endeavour to find the reason for evil in the world with the help of available knowledge, it is a limited enterprise from the beginning. It is possible that God did not let human beings to know the reason for allowing evil in the world even though he has a reason for it. Therefore, it is still reasonable to believe in God. Human knowledge is evolving constantly. Perhaps we shall find an answer in the future.

Moreover, even if we cannot find a satisfactory response, religion provides the believer comfort, a sense of purpose in life, and, perhaps most importantly, a hope to hold onto. Religion provides these human needs with its beliefs, rituals, and festivals. In addition, religion urges people to overcome evil in the world. This practical approach to the problem of evil is the source for the believer of the sense of meaning and purpose in life.

One of the most significant contribution of this study is that this research introduces the discussions of the problem of evil within Islamic theology and philosophy to the Western philosophy of religion. There seems to be a considerable gap in this area.

This is especially true for this subject; namely, the problem of evil. In this sense, this study aims to fill this gap in this area to a great extent. The philosophy of religion in the West is traditionally done within the framework of Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Generally speaking, the views of Muslim philosophers on the issues of the traditional philosophy of religion are not included. This is true particularly for the discussions of the problem of evil as well as other issues undertaken by the Western philosophers of religion.

Moreover, the thesis provides an opportunity to see the major Jewish, Christian, and Islamic responses to the problem of evil side by side. To do this, the atheistic problem of evil is, first, spelled out as it is formulated in the traditional philosophy of religion. Then, the theodicies of each religious tradition are explored. Doing this, I thought that it would be appropriate to sketch out the Scriptural foundation of the theological and philosophical theodicies. This, I believe, gives a chance to see the origin of the later developed rational responses to evil. The exploration of the theodicies in all religions in question provides an opportunity to see the religious responses separately and side by side. This is very useful in comparing and contrasting the religious theodicies.

Furthermore, in this research the problem of evil and theodicy is discussed within the framework of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic intellectual traditions rather than as a pure philosophical problem. In this sense, here the theological and philosophical responses to evil given by the monotheistic religions are explored and subjected to philosophical criticism. It is my contention that this kind of approach to the problem of evil, that is, the enterprise of theodicy within a certain religious context, is more constructive and more effective. This is one of the major goals of this work.

Another important contribution of this research is to analyse the major monotheistic theodicies in addition to their exploration. First, the similarities and dissimilarities among the theological and philosophical theodicies within each religious tradition in question are pointed. Then, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theodicies are compared and contrasted with each other in order to find out common and different aspects between the three religious traditions. I believe that this very part fills an important gap in the discussions of the problem of evil.

The analysis of the theological and philosophical theodicies shows us that there are important similarities between them. One can easily notice some correspondences and affinities in the Scriptural, theological and philosophical responses to evil in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theodicies. The detailed research of the question as to the origins, causes and motives behind these similarities between different religious traditions is a subject of another work. Although it is believed that Muslims met philosophy through the translation movements during the rule of the Umayyad dynasty, there is need to determine which aspect of the problem of evil, through which translation came into and left what kind of impact on the Islamic intellectual tradition.

The major concern of this research is the theological and philosophical responses to the atheistic problem of evil. Although the Scriptural accounts of evil are outlined before the discussions of the theological and philosophical responses, further research from religious standpoint is needed to see the interpretation of the relevant passages and chapters in Scriptures. Understanding of the sacred books may show differences from one scholar to another or one school to another. In order to find out the biblical and Qur'anic responses to the reality of evil and their similarities and dissimilarities, one needs to point

out different interpretations of the sacred texts concerning good and evil. The limited nature of this work forces us to leave this aspect of the religious problem of evil to another study.

The similarities between Imamology in Shīʿī Islam and Christology in Christianity are striking. I have limited my research here to point out correspondences between the two religious traditions. However, whether there is certain Christian influence upon the formation of the Shīʿī Imamology, if there is, what kind of influence there is and through which channel that influence came into Islamic tradition is again the subject of another research.

The main subject of this research is the responses to the problems of evil given by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Even if Scriptural responses are given place in our study, this ought to be understood in the sense that they have the nature of being foundation of the later theological and philosophical responses to evil. Therefore, this study does not attempt to research in detail into the problem of evil and theodicy in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Scriptures, namely, Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qurʾān. This is left out as it is seen a subject of another research.

Furthermore, a part of the Old Testament known as Apocrypha is left out as the Jewish Scriptures, namely, Tanakh, does not contain the books of Apocrypha in distinction from the Catholic Scripture. Moreover, for similar reasons I thought it to be more appropriate to left out the subject of the problem of evil and theodicy in the Muslim prophetic tradition.

Additionally, I have spent considerable effort to limit the study with recent works as much as possible since the thesis is not a research of historical nature. This is not to say that there is no historical material referred in this study. One can see a range of historical figures from Saadia in Jewish tradition to Aquinas in Christian faith, and to Ghazali in Islamic thought. This is to emphasise the historical origin of major responses to evil in the three religious tradition in question.

Theodicy is a subjective and ever-growing enterprise focused on understanding the reason for and purpose of evils and sufferings in the world from a human perspective. In this sense, the problem is not that there is no purpose for the evils of the world, but that God does not spell it out. Human beings try to apprehend the possible reasons and purposes from their standpoint. That is why theodicy can take different shapes as human knowledge develops. Therefore, it must be understood to be an open ended project constantly developing.

This study shows that the currant theodicies and defences face some philosophical difficulties in answering the atheist's argument from evil. Although these difficulties do not pose a serious threat to the core of the theistic faith, namely the existence of God, the atheist is waiting for an answer to his or her objections. From the results of our research, we can conclude that a future theodicy must contain the following main characteristics if it claims to be rational.

A future theodicy must affirm the original innocence of human beings by birth, human free-will, constant process of mental and spiritual growth, and the belief in life after death. It seems that these are the main features of any reasonable future theodicy. Among these characteristics life after death is very important. The survival from death is

expected to bring earthly memories back along with regret and realisation of the ultimate aim of life, that is to unite with God. Additionally, this will produce repentance and re-orientation towards God. As God's mercy overcomes his justice, he is expected to end human suffering and forgive them when they cleanse their impurities.



## GLOSSARY

***Ahl al-Bayt:*** The family of the Prophet Muhammad.

***Al-Ākhira:*** The Arabic word for the Hereafter, the Next World beyond grave.

***Ash'ariyya:*** A Muslim school of theology established by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (873-935 CE).

***Atheism:*** The theory or belief that God does not exist.

***Atonement:*** A doctrine in Christian theology affirming the reconciliation of human beings with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

***Covenant:*** An agreement or contract between God and the people of Israel, which is seen as the basis of the traditional Jewish faith.

***Diaspora:*** The Jewish people who are scattered to the lands outside of modern Israel after the Babylonian captivity.

***Docetism:*** An early Christian belief that denied any real physical suffering of Jesus while asserting his divinity.

***Dualism:*** The theory of two opposing principles or forces at work in the universe such as good and evil.

***Eschatology:*** The doctrine of last or final matters, as death, judgement, or an afterlife.

***The Fall:*** A Jewish and Christian doctrine concerning the sin of Adam and Eve and its consequences.

***Gevurah:*** One of the *sefirot*, divine potencies in kabbalistic teaching, that signifies God's power and judgement.

***Gezerah:*** An anti-Jewish and evil decree and program.

***Hesed:*** One of the *sefirot*, divine potencies in kabbalistic teaching, that signifies divine loving-kindness.

***Hester Panim:*** A biblical concept of God's hiding his face in human history.

**The Holocaust:** The extermination of European Jews in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

**The *'Imāms*:** A group of charismatic spiritual Shī'ī leaders in a line of succession running through the third caliph Ali and his descendants.

***Jinn*:** A class of spirits made of fire.

**The *Ka'ba*:** The cube-like Muslim sacred building in the courtyard of the central mosque in Mecca.

***Kabbalah*:** The Jewish mystical teachings evolved since the Second Temple times.

**The *Kalām*:** The Muslim dialectic theology.

***Kiddush ha-Shem*:** The Hebrew phrase for the glorification of God through prayer, conduct, and martyrdom.

**Manichaeism:** A religious dualism that originated in Babylonia in the 3rd century CE.

***Maturīdiyya*:** A Muslim school of theology established by Abū Maṣ'ūd al-Māturīdī (d. 944).

**Messiah:** A charismatic figure who is believed to restore the kingdom of Israel.

**Monotheism:** The doctrine or belief that there is only one God exists.

***Mu'tazila*:** A Muslim school of theology dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

***Mysterium Tremendum*:** A concept of Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) in his interpretation of religious phenomena. The notion signifies the abysmal mystery of the sacred being beyond rational analysis.

**Panentheism:** The doctrine that God and the universe is one, and God is, at the same time, greater than the universe.

**Optimism (*al-Aṣḥāḥ* in Arabic):** The theory that the existing world is the best of all possible worlds.

**Original Sin:** The traditional Christian doctrine that human beings have an innate tendency to evil, transmitted from Adam to his offspring in consequence of his sin.

**Parousia:** The second coming of Jesus Christ.

**Reconstructionism:** The progressive Jewish movement founded by Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983).

**Sefirot:** The emanations of God in kabbalistic teaching.

**The Shema:** The Jewish declaration of faith, and a central prayer in Jewish liturgy.

**Shī'a:** One of the two main religious divisions of Islam that regards Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the legitimate successor of Muhammad.

**Sunnī:** The majority of Muslims who believe that they represent orthodox Islam.

**Tanakh:** An acronym for the Hebrew Bible.

**Theism:** The belief in the existence of one God.

**Theodicy:** The vindication of divine providence and justice in the face of the existence of evil.

**Yetzer hat-ov:** The Jewish concept of good inclination in human beings.

**Yetzer ha-ra:** The Jewish concept of evil inclination in human beings.

**Zoroastrianism:** The religion founded by Zoroaster in Persia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

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