Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Problem Solved

Islamic Philosophy

The issue of the best world order, or order from design, as well as the problem of evil, are some of the most important philosophical questions extant. As was shown in the previous section, this issue led to the appearance of such ideologies as dualism, materialism, and pessimism in both the east and the west. Few indeed are those who have not made comments on this issue and given it their due attention. Philosophers of both the east and west have considered the problem of evil but, to the extent of my knowledge, western philosophers have not found a conclusive solution to this problem. The philosophers and sages of Islam, on the other hand, have analyzed this issue in detail and have met the challenge that it poses in an admirable fashion-unravelling an important enigma in the process.

It would not be out of place if at this point, and by way of appreciation, we said some words on the transcendental philosophy of the east. This sacred wisdom, hailing from eastern lands, is a great blessing and boon that has blossomed by virtue of the advent of Islam and has been given to humanity as a precious gift. But unfortunately, only a handful fully and deeply understands this rich body of knowledge and it is for the most part promulgated by those ignorant of it and by its avowed enemies.

A group of those who lack sufficient understanding of traditional philosophy and who do not know much more than the theory of the “nine heavenly spheres,” and the “ten intellects,” judge texts of Islamic philosophy by this grossly imperfect measure. Upon glancing through such a text, if they do not understand anything in it, they conclude that Islamic philosophy is not anything in excess of the nine spheres or ten intellects and because this cosmology has been “proven” wrong today, they have the right to hold their head high and consider themselves to be higher than Farabi,[1] Ibn Sina, or Mulla Sadra, This group imagines that Islamic philosophy is just the same thing as Hellenic philosophy and does not have anything extra to offer. Moreover, they add that this Greek tradition was illegitimately brought into Islam.

Knowingly or unknowingly, this group has done a great disservice to Islam and Islamic teachings. Islamic philosophy differs from Greek philosophy to the same degree that the physics of Einstein differs from the

physics of Antiquity. There is evidence to support the argument that even the theology of Ibn Sina has not been fully transferred to the west and that westerners are still uninformed with regards to it. The following is an example of this assertion.

In the footnotes of the second volume of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* we mention the fact that the Cartesian[2] maxim, "I think, therefore I am," which is taken to be a brilliant innovation and valuable contribution to philosophy in the west, is an insubstantial and senseless idea that Ibn Sina explicitly and formally invalidated in the third section of his *Isharat*. If the Avicennian corpus had been correctly translated and transferred to Europe, this saying of Descartes would not have been heralded as an "innovation" and "new idea" and would not have gone on to become the basis for a new philosophy. But what are we to do in a world where, for now, everything that is labelled as European or western is warmly received, even if it be an old and worn out idea which we have left behind many years ago?'

Now we will turn our attention to the questions that were posed in the preceding section. We will answer those questions under four different headings: Discrimination, Annihilation and Non-existence, Imperfection and Defectiveness. From these four, the first one will be discussed in the following section on Discrimination. The remaining three will be addressed in the section on Evil. We feel that it is necessary to briefly go over the various methodologies and approaches that have been used to answer the questions and objections at hand.

Methods And Approaches

There are various methods and approaches to Divine justice. Believers who have faith in God and religion usually satisfy their conscience in this regard by giving a general answer to the problem. They think like this: Definitive proofs have been given for the existence of a wise and all-knowing God, hence there is no reason for such a wise and omniscient God to do injustice. Why should He? Does He have any enmity with anyone that He should, out of animosity, want to deprive him of his rights? Or does He have need of something, so that he would want to deny someone of their rights and take them for Himself? The inclination to oppress is either due to a psychological complex, or it is due to certain needs and wants. As such an inclination does not exist in the case of God, oppression or injustice has no meaning for Him. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-wise-He knows the best possible order and design for the world and has the ability to create it. So, there is no reason for God to make the world other than with the best order and design. Surely, those things which are called bad or evil-as they are opposed to this best order-would not be created. Even if this group sees things which they cannot explain away, they put it down as some type of wisdom and expediency-something which is hidden from them and which only God knows the secret of. In other words, they see it as a part of the secret of destiny (and the mystery of creation).

No doubt this type of thinking and deduction is in itself a type of proof, and a correct one at that. The people who think like this can argue that even if some evils are unexplainable, it is due to the weakness

of the human mind in understanding the secrets of the universe. When man sees himself in a world full of mysteries and hidden reasons, he must not doubt the basic facts, even if he cannot decipher a particular incident and see the wisdom behind it.

Let's assume that a person reads a book that throughout shows the mental acumen and meticulousness of the writer. If he comes across a couple of passages in this book that are ambiguous or inexplicable, he naturally thinks that, “I don't understand what the writer meant in these few cases.” He in no way thinks that, “Just because I could not understand the meanings in these cases, the author is careless and lacks a proper intellect and that all those places which made sense came about accidentally.” It would be a very selfish and ignorant thing to do if somebody were to say that because of a few ambiguous parts of a book, that otherwise is stock full of evidence of the erudition of its author, the writer is ignorant or that the wisdom that the book contains is entirely fortuitous.

Whenever the average believer comes across such issues, he solves them for himself in the manner suggested above.

As was previously seen, the Traditionalists are exoteric pietists who choose to remain silent in the face of such questions and refrain from giving their opinions. But in reality their (personal) way of solving these issues is the way of the average believer and majority. The Ash'arite theologians have taken a route that avoids the question altogether–meaning that the question doesn't even arise for them. But as for the rest of the theologians, and also for those who favour an empirical approach to theology, the resolution to the problems involved in the doctrine of Divine justice lies in researching the secrets, uses, and expedients of existents.

The philosophers approach the problem in an *ilmmi* way that is to say they proceed from the cause to its effect attempting to formalize the above–mentioned solution of the average believer. They argue that the world is an effect of God. It is effectively a “shadow” of God who is all–beauty. The shadow of the beautiful must naturally also be beautiful. They also argue that evil, in its essence, is non–existing and is accidental. They go on to speak of the necessity of evil and the fact that it can never be separated from good–or in other words, the fact that creation can not be divided and partitioned off into segments. Finally, they discuss the effects and uses of evil.

We will not examine in detail the philosophical proof (from causes to effects) here as it is beyond the level and scope of this present study, but we will discuss some other pertinent areas.

As we have previously stated, the questions and objections surrounding the subject at hand will be covered under two general headings: Discrimination and Evil. We will first turn our attention to the discussion on Discrimination and then will go on to analyze the subject of Evil in a separate section.

1. See Endnote 30
2. See Endnote 31

Source URL: https://www.al-islam.org/divine-justice-murtadha-mutahhari/problem-solved