Editorial

The Problem of Evil and the Anticipation of Divine Justice

Editor –in– chief

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The problem of evil in religious philosophy is perhaps the most unsettling and existentially profound issue for human reflection. While it may initially seem like a metaphysical question concerning the relationship between Allah, Almighty, and the world, it quickly unveils its deeper ethical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. It touches upon the very essence of human suffering in the world and challenges the mind to reconcile the belief in divine mercy with the pervasive reality of daily, relentless pain. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of evil has served as a key catalyst for the modern Western rebellion against metaphysics, contributing to skepticism regarding traditional views of divine justice, and even playing a significant role in the rise of nihilistic, absurdist, and meaninglessness philosophies.

The paradox becomes even more apparent when we consider that much of the writing on the problem of evil has emerged from a Western theological framework, one that is built upon a particular conception of God, a static understanding of justice, and a centrality of abstract reason that is detached from the purpose of creation. Despite the Islamic philosophical engagement with this issue, its presence in global discourse has remained muted, despite the profound approaches it requires, particularly within the "Sadraian" tradition, which blends Peripatetic philosophy, Illuminationist thought, and mysticism, offering a fundamentally different vision, both in essence and foundation.

First: The Context of the Problem in Western Philosophy

Since philosophy first emerged as a rational contemplation of issues related to

existence and eternity, the problem of evil has been one of the most complex dilemmas. This is because it presents a paradox that, at first glance, seems impossible to resolve: how can the existence of evil in the world be reconciled with the belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-merciful God?

This problem was framed in Western Christian thought in a well-known classical equation, which says: "If Allah is able to remove evil but chooses not to, He is not merciful; if He wants to but cannot, He is not omnipotent; and if He neither wants to nor can, then there is no point in discussing Him at all."

This philosophical description became widespread after it was formulated by some Western critics based on texts attributed to the Stoic philosopher Epicurus or some of his followers. Regardless of the accuracy of this attribution, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) reformulated this issue in his book "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion", where he said: Is Allah willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both willing and able? Whence then is evil?[1]

This transformation was later adopted by 19th-century philosophers, particularly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who saw the glorification of suffering as a form of Christian moral slavery and, in its justification, a kind of metaphysical deceit. From that point onward, the question of evil in the West was framed in a way that directly places responsibility on Allah, Almighty, turning the issue from a universal inquiry into a judicial claim against God. Theology was now expected to defend, rather than explain. Western responses to this claim were divided into three main approaches:

1. Defensive Interpretations: These sought to deny or downplay the existence of evil, as Augustine (354–430) did, when he considered that evil was not something that exists on its own, but rather a corruption of will and a lack of good, with no independent existence. He based his view on a Platonic principle that states that what exists is good, and any deviation from good is nothingness and lack, not real existence.[2]
2. Hierarchical Approach: It presented by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who argued that divine perfection requires a diversity of beings, and that the

1 - David Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 127.

2 - Augustine, Confessions, translated by Henry Chadwick, p12.

gradations of existence demand differences. What seems like evil in itself could be good in the totality and thus evil is a relative necessity in the system of divine wisdom.[3]

3. Rational Justifications: they emerged among modern philosophers, particularly Leibniz (1646–1716), who argued that despite the presence of evil, this world is the best of all possible worlds, because Allah, Almighty, only creates the most perfect. Evil, in this view, is simply a means to achieve a greater good.[4]

However, these attempts remained trapped in abstract reasoning and did not address the essence of human suffering in the face of evil. Nor did they dispel the doubts of critical thinkers. David Hume, for instance, questioned the very possibility of reconciling the existence of an all-perfect God with the presence of evil, arguing that daily human experience demonstrates the predominance of suffering, making belief in a merciful God logically impossible.

With the rise of Enlightenment thought and religious critique, the question of evil became a crucial entry point for undermining theology altogether. The issue was no longer a partial explanation but a full-scale argument against the existence of Allah. This existential shift was expressed by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) through the character Ivan Karamazov, who, in his novel, says: "I do not reject Allah, Alyosha, but I return my ticket to Him with full respect."[5]

In this cry, Dostoevsky was not denying Allah, but rather rejecting the world itself, as long as it was built on the suffering of the innocent. The issue here was no longer intellectual, but moral, making any acceptance of universal wisdom a betrayal of human conscience. Later, existential thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus picked up on this thread, declaring that the world is without God, and that the existence of evil is proof of nothingness, not a matter that needs justification.

Albert Camus (1913–1960), for example, took this logic to its extreme in his myth of "Sisyphus", writing: "There is only one truly serious philosophical problem, it is

3 - Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, p2.

4 - Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil, p128.

5 - The Brothers Karamazov, translated by Sami Al-Daroubi, Vol. 2, p. 319.

suicide. To judge whether life is or is not worth living is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy."[6]

Metaphysics in the West collapsed under the weight of evil, and existence becomes absurd, freedom becomes a curse, and rebellion becomes the only remaining meaning. Rather than being a test for humanity, evil became a negation of creation, a blow to the purpose of life.

The paradox is that Western thought, as a whole, never escaped the initial concept of Allah as presented in Christian theology: a transcendent deity, separate from the world, whose absolute attributes are subject to cold, abstract logic, and who does not account for the trial or gradual integration of existence. Thus, the failure of Western philosophy to resolve the problem of evil is fundamentally rooted in its reductionist concepts of Allah, humanity, existence, and suffering.

Therefore, the problem of evil in modern Western thought has ceased to be an existential inquiry into the nature of pain. Instead, it has gradually transformed into a philosophical excuse to reject belief in Allah entirely. The question has detached itself from its explanatory purpose and turned into a tool in a grand conceptual struggle: either Allah or suffering; either hidden wisdom or an inescapable absurdity. This transformation did not result from accumulated reflection but from an epistemological shift born with modernity. Metaphysics lost its reference point, and humanity, searching for an alternative certainty, found nothing but evil as evidence against it.

Therefore, there is a need for a new approach that goes beyond these assumptions and redefines the very structure of the question. This is what Islamic philosophy aims to offer, particularly through its Sadrian framework, which views the world as a harmonious system of interconnected existential levels, rather than a mere arena of stark contradictions. Before exploring the details of this perspective, it is important to first present the Islamic understanding of evil, as seen through the lens of both revelation and reason, in their complementary roles.

Secondly: The Quranic Perspective

In contrast to the Western philosophical framework, which frames the issue of evil as a

6 - Albert Camus: The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 7.

logical contradiction that challenges Allah's attributes, the Qur'an offers a fundamentally different perspective. It does not begin by assuming the existence of a problem, nor does it accept the duality of good and evil as opposing principles. Instead, it places the existence of evil within a precise purposeful system based on trial, activating human will, and highlighting the distinction between people based on responsibility. According to the Qur'anic text: evil is a part of the very system itself.

The noble Qur'anic verses clearly state that creation was not purposeless and that everything in existence is governed by wisdom, preceded by divine planning: {And We did not create the heavens and earth and that between them in play} [Al-Dukhan, verse: 38].

{He who created all things, and ordered them in due proportions} [Al-Furqan, verse: 2]. { Indeed, all things We created with predestination.} [Al-Qamar54:49].

This means that what we consider to be "evil" is embedded within the realm of fate and divine decree, serving a higher purpose than itself.

Perhaps the central key to understanding the role of evil in the Qur'anic perspective is the concept of "trial" (Ibtelaa), which serves as a foundational idea for understanding human existence. Humanity was not created for comfort, but for testing. As Allah, Almighty, says: {He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed} [Al-Mulk, verse: 2]. He Almighty says: {And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient} [Al-Baqarah, verse:155]. He Almighty also says: { Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken} [Al-Baqarah, verse: 214].

In this context, evil is understood as a tool for purification. The trial differentiates those who are patient from those who are impatient, those who act from those who rely on others, and those who advance from those who retreat. Evil, therefore, is meant to activate human freedom, which is a condition of its very existence. If the world were devoid of evil, humans would lose the meaning of responsibility and the field of choice would cease to exist.

The Qur'an also speaks of this freedom as an inseparable principle of human duty: {Indeed, We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful} [Al-Insan,

verse: 3], { And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it, And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness} [Al-Shams, verse: 78-].

Moral evil here, such as injustice, murder, and disbelief, is of human making, not Allah's creation, though Allah, Almighty, has permitted its occurrence as a test, not as an act of creation. This distinction between "ontological evil", which happens without human choice, such as natural calamities, and "legal evil", which results from human actions and choices, is a precise and profound aspect of the Qur'anic understanding.

Another crucial aspect in the Qur'anic view is that evil is never understood outside of the context of the ultimate reward or punishment in the Hereafter. The Qur'an links this world with the next in an organic relationship. Without belief in the Afterlife, it is difficult to accept many forms of evil that find no resolution in this life. Allah Almighty says: {Or should we treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like corrupters in the land? Or should We treat those who fear Allah like the wicked?} [Sad, verse: 28], {We only extend it for them so that they may increase in sin} [Al Imran, verse: 178].

The delay and apparent empowerment of the wicked is part of the trial, not the end of the story. Thus, what seems to be "absolute evil" may be a test for multiple parties, a precursor to further purification, or a postponed punishment. In this framework, evil becomes a point of revelation, not condemnation. It reveals the truth of one's claim, one's capacity for patience, the nature of the soul, and establishes the meaning of moral duty.

Therefore, the Qur'anic perspective views evil as part of the movement of existence toward its purpose, as part of the system of trial and purification. The goal is not to eliminate evil, but to confront it with awareness and to use it as a means of drawing closer to God. It is an "existential opportunity" because it brings what is hidden into the open, reveals the concealed aspects of the soul, and activates human potential for either ascension or decline. Thus, evil in the Qur'an may appear as an existential dilemma, but it is a component of the divine educational system. Even in its harshest forms, it still carries the potential for meaning, as in the verse: {But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you, and Allah Knows, while you know not.} [Al-Baqarah, verse: 216].

This verse establishes a complete framework for Islamic consciousness: Real goals are the measure of judgment, not appearances; and the feeling of pain is a sign of the need for understanding and patience.

With this Qur'anic foundation, it can be said that Islam integrates evil into the horizon of ultimate purpose, transforming it from a curse into a sign. This monotheistic approach will later develop in Islamic thought, from theology to philosophy, through more structured intellectual efforts.

Third: Evil Problem in Islamic Thought

While the Qur'an presents a clear understanding of evil as part of the system of testing and distinction, thinkers in Islamic thought, including theologians and philosophers, have tried to explain this idea within a rational and theoretical framework. This was in response to the issue of dualism on one hand, and the effort to present a view that aligns with Allah's absolute attributes on the other. The approaches varied depending on different schools of thought, with some focusing on divine justice and human responsibility, others affirming Allah's absolute power and denying the existence of real evil, and still others attempting to rebuild the entire existential system.

1. The Mu'tazilites [Mu'tazilism]: Rejecting Compulsion to Protect Justice

One of the earliest groups to address the issue of evil philosophically were the Mu'tazilites [Mu'tazilism]. They started from the principle of "justice and unity" as the foundation of their doctrinal system. They believed that Allah's justice requires that He should never do anything evil, and that any evil that occurs is the result of human free actions. The judge Abdul-Jabbar expressed this idea by saying: "Allah does not do evil, nor does He create it in His servants, nor does He approve of it; because if He did, He would be unjust, and Allah does not wrong people."[7]

Thus, the Mu'tazilites linked evil with human freedom and rejected any view that made Allah the creator of human actions, as they believed it would contradict Allah's justice and divine command. In doing so, they closely aligned with the idea that Allah is absolved of responsibility for evil in defense of His attributes, but in turn, they placed absolute responsibility on humans, even in situations beyond their control.

2. Al-Ash'ari: Affirming Absolute Divine Power and Denying Rational Morality

In contrast, Al-Ash'ari established a position that emphasized the protection of Allah's

7 - Judge Abdul-Jabbar: Explanation of the Five Fundamentals, p. 265.

absolute power, even if that required asserting that Allah creates the actions of human beings, and that good and evil are not understood by reason, but by divine law [Shari'ah]. They argued that none of Allah's actions can be described as good or bad based on reason, but rather everything He does is good simply because it is from Allah. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari stated: " Allah is the creator of good and evil, of faith and disbelief, of obedience and sin."[8]

This view led Al-Ash'aris to introduce the concept of "acquisition" [kasb], where humans "acquire" actions but do not create them, in an attempt to reconcile divine power with human choice. However, this explanation remained philosophically unclear and raised questions about divine justice in light of an emphasis on will and power.

3. Philosophers: Evil as Non-being, Not Existence

Muslim philosophers, particularly Ibn Sina (d. 1037 CE), presented a different approach based on ontology. For Ibn Sina, evil is not a real existence, but rather a 'non-being'. It is a deficiency in existence, not an independent entity, and thus cannot be attributed to Allah, as He only brings about existence and goodness. He stated: "Evil does not have existence in itself, but is a relative matter that appears from the absence of some goodness or the lack of a condition necessary for perfection."[9]

This view represented a significant shift from theological debate to an existential perspective, focusing on the denial of the true existence of evil. Evil, in this view, is simply a comparison between two states, the failure to achieve the best, and nothing more.

4. The Leader of the Theologians, [Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi]: The Best Possible System and the Hierarchy of Existence

However, the most profound Islamic philosophical treatment of the problem of evil came later with Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (d. 1635 CE), who developed the philosophy of "transcendent wisdom". He integrated rational proof, mystical intuition, and the Qur'anic text. His understanding of evil was based on three principles:

1- The primacy of existence over essence.

2- The Uncertainty of existence in its various stages.

8 - Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari: Articles of the Islamists, p. 215.

9 - Ibn Sina: Al-Shifa: Theology, p. 368.

3- The essential movement of beings towards perfection.

In this system, evil is seen merely as a sign of the weakness of existence at a certain level, rather than as an independent entity. The world, with all its diversity, is 'the best possible system,' because the perfection of good can only be realized through the existence of different degrees that manifest it. Many forms of perfection can only be attained through the existence of opposites: "Evils occur for noble purposes, and there is no evil without a trace of good in it; this can only be understood by one who has grasped the deeper truths of existence."[10]

Thus, the problem, according to transcendent wisdom, is no longer the existence of evil, but rather the narrow perspective of humans in front of the total system, and their inability to see the bigger picture. This perspective represents a qualitative shift from a defensive response to an existential clarification, where evil is understood as a tool in the process of creation and perfection, not as an objection to the Creator's wisdom. Tracing the paths of Islamic thought on evil reveals that the issue matured within overlapping intellectual and spiritual contexts, varying in depth. What stands out is that the Sadrian perspective is the only one that transcended the logic of defense to reinterpret pain in light of the philosophy of creation. This opens the door to the fourth level of treatment: not merely how to explain evil, but how to activate it in the path of spiritual and existential integration.

Fourth: The Trial Logic in the Integration Path

If the Islamic philosophical perspective, especially the Sadrian one, has transcended the logic of defense to clarify the position of evil within the structure of existence, the question that arises thereafter is: What is the role of evil in human life?

Is it a mere affliction to be avoided, or is it a tool that activates latent potentials within the soul, contributing to the formation of the human's moral and spiritual experience?

The Qur'anic, existential answer to this question gives evil a fundamental position in man's process toward perfection, making it pivotal in transforming existence into a trial, a trial into a passage, and a passage into an essential meaning. Sadr al-Muta'allihin formulated this meaning through his famous theory of essential movement, which every being, especially human beings, is in a state of intrinsic movement toward its own perfection, not only through outward change, but also in the depths of its

10 - Sadr al-Muta'allihin al-Shirazi: The Four Journeys, Vol. 6, p. 271.

essence. Evil, in this context, serves as an internal catalyst for action.

Pain pushes a person to seek salvation, deprivation activates the will to transcend, and weakness calls forth the latent strength. Thus, everything considered evil from one perspective becomes a condition for the emergence of higher levels of perfection from another.

From here, the relationship of humans with evil shifts from a defensive stance to one of understanding, from mere endurance to moral agency. A person is not only required to endure adversity, but also to comprehend it, transforming it into an opportunity for spiritual ascent. For this reason, the Qur'an often connects trial with purification, as in His saying: {And thus We test some of you by means of others, that they may say: "Is it these whom Allah has favored among us?" But is not Allah most knowing of the thankful?} [Al-An'am, verse: 53].

Indeed, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was not deemed worthy of the divine intimacy except after a series of trials that revealed his complete ability to fulfill his covenant, as Allah, Almighty, says: {And when his Lord tested Ibrahim with commands and he fulfilled them, He said: "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people.} [Al-Baqarah, verse: 124). Similarly, Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph's) sequence of trials, from the well to prison, was what ultimately led him to become the ruler of Egypt.

This connection between trials and spiritual completion opens a new perspective on understanding evil as part of the divine training for souls, revealing sincerity and motivating awareness. Therefore, for the believer, evil is a sign of the seriousness of the trail, and their life is a journey toward a goal that can only be attained through purification.

From this perspective, the Qur'anic vision transcends the idea of the 'trial of evil' to a broader concept: Those who are patient are honored, but also their true essence is brought to the surface, their will for good is activated, and their inner selves are purified from illusions. And since humans are the only creatures capable of moral self-transformation, evil is the realm in which this transformation occurs. No virtue is achieved without experiencing pain: sincerity requires sacrifice, courage demands facing danger, and humility comes from the breaking of the self. In this way, evil fulfills its purpose through trial, overcoming, and renewal. This understanding reaches its full depth in the moral aspect, where evil is seen as a veil over the manifestations of mercy. The trial is nothing but the outer layer of grace, loss is a path to existence, and brokenness is the gateway to revelation. Imam Zain al-Abideen

(peace be upon him) says in his supplication of the knowers: "My God, the tongues have fallen short of praising You as is befitting Your Majesty, and the minds are incapable of grasping the essence of Your Beauty."

Thus, we arrive at the key conclusion we wish to highlight:

Evil is a condition for the emergence of mercy, a realm for the manifestation of power, and a field for the revelation of justice. This is what makes the Islamic perspective, with all its elements: the Qur'an, reason, and ethics, offer humanity a holistic horizon for understanding suffering, guiding them to wisdom that transcends the apparent towards the unseen, and pain towards hope.

Finally, it is understood that the issue of evil must be linked to the horizon of awaiting [alentedhar]. At the heart of the monotheistic vision lies the understanding that evil is not a final judgment on the world. The existence as it is now, with all its pain, corruption, and turmoil, is not the final form of creation. It is, rather, an incomplete scene yearning for its fulfillment, moving, even if it seems still, towards the ultimate goal for which it was created.

In this context, waiting Imam Mahdi's appearance becomes a deeper understanding of the meaning of evil as a ground for scrutiny, a respite for revelation, and a necessity for divine justice to fully emerge. The justice that has been lost, the truth that has been concealed, and the injustices that have accumulated are the raw materials for a more comprehensive divine project, paved by the laws of affliction and revealed by the scale of waiting [alentedhar].

Every revolutionary movement throughout prophetic and saintly history has been an advanced awareness of the problem of evil: rejecting injustice, striving for truth, enduring trial, and longing for the promised justice. The true awaited does not fall into the philosophical confusion that uses evil as a pretext for nihilism. Instead, they see in it, with the eye of promise, a sign of the approaching reckoning in the end, and a challenge that activates their responsibility in preparation for it. Thus, waiting [alentedhar] is confronting evil from a position of certainty of the alternative, and the preparing is a collective paving of the way for complete justice, where injustice is eliminated by uprooting it.

In this context, the approach to evil moves from a rational inquiry about its wisdom to an existential perspective that links patience with resistance, pain with action, and hardship with hope. From the waiting individual's viewpoint, evil becomes a sign of the near manifestation of divine justice and a driving force for the will to bring about change.

This issue of "Eitiqad" magazine contributes to re-establish the issue of evil from a comprehensive Qur'anic-philosophical perspective. It reshapes the issue not based on the premises of the Western dilemma, but in light of an Islamic understanding of Allah, the universe, and humanity. It places the issue within the context of trial and spiritual growth, rather than within the realm of contradiction and division. This issue includes five research papers in the «focus» section, in which researchers discuss the topic of evil from philosophical, theological, and intellectual perspectives. Dr. (Ihsan Al-Haidari's) research, from Iraq, critically addressed David Hume's concept of evil and the theological responses to it.

Dr. (Jamil Hamdaoui), from Morocco, discussed and critiqued the problem of evil according to John Leslie Mackie.

In «rooting» section, Mr. (Qasim Shuaib) approached the divine existence and the problem of moral evil in humans.

Mr. (Mohammad bin Rida Al-Lawati) explained how evil can be good in light of the Quranic and philosophical perspectives.

Dr. (Mohammad Firas al-Halbawi), from Syria, translated a research paper by Dr. (Mohammad Mohammad Redai) and Dr. (Hussein Rahnamai) on «Ibn Sina's Response to Divine Providence Paradox، Evil in the World.»

In «Studies and Research» section, the editor-in-chief wrote an article titled «The Divine Theory of Worship.»

Finally, Sheikh (Ghassan Al-Asaad) reviews and refutes Daniel Speake›s book «The Problem of Evil.»

As we hope that this issue will resonate with our respected readers and that any shortcomings will be overlooked, we ask Allah, Almighty, to grant success to this nation in all that He loves and is pleased with, and to guide it to the straight path.

Praise be to Allah, the First and the Last.
Editor-in-Chief