

# Good and Evil

- The Mutazilites do not accept the complete rationality of good and evil, but rather they believe that the intellect is limited in its realisation of good and evil, so some issues follow sharia and some issues are subjective.
- As for the Asharites, they reject the notion of the rationality of good and evil completely.
- As for the Imamiyya, we believe in the rationality of good and evil, but this belief is not necessary in order to prove God's justice.

# What is the definition (milaak) of rationality of good and evil?

**Opinion 1:** ‘Good is what one feels comfortable with, and evil is what one feels uncomfortable with’. This of course is subjective from person to person – so it is not accepted.

**Opinion 2:** ‘Good is that which correlates with personal goals and benefits, whilst evil is that which does not correlate with personal goals and benefits’. This opinion is also not accepted, because it is subjective like the first opinion.

**Opinion 3:** ‘Good is that which a person deserves a reward for engaging in, whilst evil is that which a person deserves punishment for engaging in’. This definition is not the point of discussion, because it goes into good and evil in terms of divine law, but not in terms of rationality.

**Opinion 4:** ‘Good is that which a person is praised for engaging in, whilst evil is that which a person is blamed for engaging in’ – and this is the point of discussion. Here, a question poses itself: are there actions in which God never engages in? Like those actions which the intellect perceives that the one who engages in such actions should be blamed, or can He do whatever He wants?

# Aql Nathari /intellect in theory

- This is the power of realisation/perception (*idraak*) in a person.
- The predicate of all its premises is always either necessary, possible, or impossible.

## A premise is divided into what is necessary/self-evident and what is non-necessary/not self-evident

- The necessary premise is that premise which does not need evidence to prove that it is correct (*badihi*).
- The non-necessary premise is that which does need evidence to prove that it is correct.
- If there was no such thing as a self-evident premise, then all knowledge will eventually end up being meaningless as the eventual result would be sophism. Every premise would need evidence to prove that it is correct, and that evidence – which is another premise – would also need evidence, until we enter an infinite chain of regress, and so nothing can actually be proven to be correct.

# Proofs of the rationality of good and evil (*husn wa qubh aqli*)

## Arguments For

**Proof 1:** It is self-evident, as every person with a sound mind knows on their own the goodness of justice, and the evil of oppression.

A question which poses itself here is: **What is meant by self-evident?**

**Proof 2:** If we say that goodness and evil can only be applied through divine law, then it means that good and evil is restricted to this realm and we cannot know the goodness or evil of a thing outside of it.

**Proof 3:** If good and evil can only be applied through divine law, then there is no point to the different prophethoods and laws they came with - because Divine law (and so applying truth and falsehood) would come only after proving one's prophethood.

# Denying the rationality of good and evil, and the proofs of its application through divine law.

## Arguments Against

Argument 1:

A beneficial lie is not evil. If evil was rational and intrinsic, then lying must always be evil, and this is not the case. For example, if you had to lie to save a person's life, then lying would be considered a good action in this situation.

The theological reply:

The lie, in essence, is bad/qabeeh.

The action of lying is indeed a cause for evil, but there may be limitations which blocks the cause from being complete - for example, the saving of a person's life. Here, if telling the truth leads to a person's death, then a lie would be deemed as the prioritised approach because the preservation of human life is a priority - but not because lying becomes good within itself. Within itself, it is not good, only in consideration of what is more important would the evil of a lie become nulled.

Argument 2:

To say that good and evil are rational is to limit Allah's actions, because to say that oppression or even lying is evil, is to say that Allah is not able to perform such an action – or that we are obliging Allah not to act upon such an action, whilst obliging him to perform good actions like truth, and obliging him to be just.

Reply:

The intellect's role is to realise and see what is already there. It is not to create something from nothing, or a rule or limit to bind Allah to as an obligation. We are only perceiving and observing, not creating.

Argument 3:

Allah has imposed the pillars of belief upon the disbeliever – and to impose something that is not within someone's capability is something the intellect may claim to be a bad action.

Therefore, Allah has performed actions which you may consider rationally evil or bad. For example, God binded belief upon Abu Lahab but he did not live unto it and will end up in hell , so it is as if he gave him an obligation he could not live up to.

Reply:

Allah never imposes an obligation on his servant which is outside of his capability.

The example you have brought forth is not correct, as belief is within the person's capability, and rather they chose not to believe. Whatever obligation you bring fourth, in perspective, will also be shown to be within the capability of the person at hand.



# The Philosophers

What has been discussed so far is primarily the opinions of the theologians.

They use the rationality of good and evil to prove God's justice, in saying that Allah would never oppress and so he would never perform an evil deed. However, the philosophers do not use the rationality of good and evil to prove God's justice in this manner, but in saying that justice is a perfection and God must have all and complete perfection - therefore God is just.

# The Problem of Evil: Avicenna

Avicenna begins his answer with a discussion on the idea of evil. He believed that whatever happens through the power of the Necessary being must be of five possibilities; His action is either:

1 - Absolute good.

2- Absolute evil.

3 - A majority of good and a minority of evil.

4 - A majority of evil and a minority of good.

5- Equally good and evil.

- As for absolute good, it is necessary that Allah brings it into existence. As for a majority of good and a minority of evil, it must also come from him, because his fayd cannot be held back. As for the other 3 possibilities, they cannot come from Him.

# Allah's Fayd/Abundance

- Avicenna's premise is built around the concept of God's fayd.
- If the meaning of justice is fayd, then Allah must give absolutely everything that possibly exists, existence. There can be nothing to stop his fayd.

We will demonstrate this using the example of numbers. Let us say that if everything in existence was 100 units, and 90 units were good whilst 10 units were evil, then God must still give existence to the 100 units, because to deny the 10 remaining units is to deny the absolute fayyd of God, and this would be considered evil in itself. **So if a fire burns a house down, one may call it evil – but does this mean the fire should never have been made to exist? Or the claw of the scorpion which pierced its victim leading to its death, one may call that evil too, but should the scorpion never have existed? If we say yes, then it is tantamount to saying that the fayyd of God should be limited.**

Looking at the specific units themselves in the perspective that the higher the number the more goodness is within it, and that the maximum number is 100 - so the number 100 itself represents absolute goodness. Everything below 100 is then lacking in absoluteness. This means that some goodness is missing within the numbers below 100, otherwise they would all be 100. Does that mean that the numbers 1-99 shouldn't exist because they aren't absolutely and perfectly good?

- To say that 'we have 100, it's perfect and it's good and we don't need anything else', is to deny the numbers 1-99 of their existence, even if they are lacking in goodness.
- That means none of us would ever have existed, since none of us are absolute goodness.
- The numbers 1-99 are contingent, just like we all are as human beings, and so God manifests us in our rightful level of existence – despite us lacking in absolute goodness. Therefore, to deny God's fayd and therefore the existence of a contingent being is what should be considered as the true evil

- As for absolute goodness, it exists in the immaterial worlds.
- As for a majority of good and a minority of evil, then it exists within the material world – our world – and the reason for this will become clear by the end of this lesson.

## Evil in our world:

In the midst of our lives we find much wrong with the world. A major reason for people to disbelieve in God is to look at the disasters and tragedies that have occurred throughout history, and to conclude that surely there cannot be a God if such tragedies have taken place. This is why it is imperative that we understand the nature of evil, what it means and where it comes from – in order to explain the reason behind the catastrophes that have struck our hearts. That which we call evil is always one of two types:

1) Evil in Absence

2) Subjective Evil

# Evil in Absence

- The first type of evil is that which lacks existence. **For example, we may call ignorance evil for its role in the disasters of the world, but ignorance does not really exist. What exists is knowledge, and ignorance is a lack of knowledge, and so it is a lack of existence.**

- Absence is not existence. We do not claim to have brought a minus car, rather we buy a car. We don't purchase which does not exist because it is not there to purchase. Likewise when it comes to evil, much of that we call evil doesn't actually exist, but what we are considering as evil is the absence of existence. Based on this perspective, Allah has not created evil – the non-existent entity.

- This does not mean we deny ignorance, it is obviously in the world and it leads to catastrophes, but God did not create it. He created knowledge, and ignorance is a limited form of knowledge – or rather a consequence of it.

This goes back to the essence of the principle established ipreviously; everything contingent that could exist, is given existence despite its imperfections, due to the infinite fayd of God. And so 1 is given existence despite the existence of the much superior 100, even if the absence of 99 in 1 inevitably leads to problems due to its limited nature.

# Subjective Evil

- Describing the attributes of any 'thing' can be done either objectively, or subjectively.

For example, if I wanted to describe a pen from an objective perspective then I would count it's essential qualities like it being blue or made from plastic. However, if I wanted to describe the same pen but from a subjective perspective, I would compare it to another pen, and deem it smaller or having darker ink in comparison to the other pen. Likewise, I can get a third pen to dwarf the other two and call it the big one.

- This subjective description depends on a comparison, and so it is always looked at with regards to something else.

When someone goes to purchase a carpet, they don't ask the carpenter for a 'taller' carpet without having first compared it with something smaller than it. Subjective descriptions are therefore not essential attributes of a thing, and are simply realised through the act of comparison.

- The second type of evil is this way, in which we consider a thing evil in contrast to something else, like fire.

**We have witnessed tragedies in which people are trapped in a enflamed building with no way of escape. We are pained by the thought of those who suffer such a fate, and ask how God could allow such a thing to happen. Fire is evil when it burns innocent people, yet it is the same fire which we cook our food with and heat our homes with. We do not consider it evil when it serves us, but only in contrast to something else.**

- This form of evil is not a lack of existence, but rather it is a subjective evil. In its essence it is not evil, it is only a form of existence with a certain trait – and depending on the situation at hand, it may be deemed evil.

- To wish fire would not burn people is the same as asking why doesn't God create fire as non-fire – and it is impossible to make fire-non fire, because it would be the transformation a quiddity (inqilaab), and that is impossible . It's impossible for it to be fire if it doesn't burn.

- Fire is necessary to exist, because of Allahs fayyd.



# The Nature of Evil

- The physical realm and world of material is the only world in which that which we call evil resides.
- The immaterial world is a world of no limitations. There is nothing one can deem evil in the immaterial world because there is no deficiency in its existential level, the very same deficiency and absence that we regard as evil.
- This is due to the nature of the physical world, which at its very centre is built upon a constant movement from potentiality to actuality.
- Deficiency is therefore a necessary consequence to the world of nature and physicality.

Mulla Sadra:

The sea is a place of drowning, but not because it was created that way. It is only a necessary consequence of what the sea is (lawazim darooriya), only then do we call the occurrence of drowning evil, but the sea isn't created as evil. It has certain attributes, which in certain circumstances we call evil.

# Potentiality and Actuality

- In the world of nature, everything is made up of two attributes; potentiality and actuality.
- To say that a thing is in a state of actuality is to regard it from the perspective of what it currently is.
- So a piece of wood is piece of wood in actuality, but it has the potential to become ash if it was to burn, which is movement (*haraka*). Everything that is actual can transform into something else. That very same piece of wood is ash from the perspective of potentiality. Every material body in the physical world has this capability of evolution.
- The perspectives of actuality and potentiality are opposites and so they can never be united.
- Depending on which perspective one takes regarding any given thing, then it must be regarded as a completely different form. In perspective of its actuality and current form, it is an entirely different thing than it is from the perspective of what it is potentially.

- As for the immaterial world, it is always and only in the state of actuality. Only a material being has the power of potentiality.
- Once this point has been understood, then it becomes clear that the source of all evil is that which lacks existence, hence, the material world. The material insinuates potentiality by necessity, which also insinuates that a thing is lacking existence.
- The very fact that a material thing has potential means that it lacks what it potentially could be, and that is what we call evil.
- The immaterial is only actuality, hence, absolute goodness and no lack of existence to deem a thing as evil.

# Opposites create movement

- If the nature of the physical world is that of potential, then opposites exist by necessity. Every body has the potential to become another body, and this comes from the movement of potentiality to actuality, two opposites always in a state of friction.
- This perspective of deficiency is what obliges bodies to move. You move from point A because there is something lacking in your existence that you believe you will acquire at point B. You transform.
- Transformation occurs through friction of opposites. Wood can only transform into another form if it touches fire whilst staying away from water; opposites. "
- The collision of opposites in the physical world leads to the movement of existence from potentiality to actuality, piercing through the layers of existence until the core is reached.
- The perfection and goal of material existence is in its movement towards actuality – and yet it's necessary consequence is that which we regard as evil, because of the lack of existence at the very essence of potentiality.

**‘If there were no opposites there is no reason for the continuous fayyd, and the divine bounty would be halted. There would be no more capability of life in our world to achieve the lofty goals. Most of what could possibly exist would remain in the realm of possibility or non-existence. There would be no wayfarer and no wayfaring journey, and no meaning to be from God and to return to Him’**

**— Mulla Sadra**

# How we can understand evil

- In the field of logic, a discussion is held concerning what (ma) a thing is, and why (lima) a thing is. When it comes to the 'whatness' (maahiya) of a thing, then the discussion is about its definition and quiddity. When it comes to the 'whyness' (limmiyya) of a thing, then the discussion revolves around evidence, its cause and its goal.
- Mulla Sadra explains that due to the essential order of existence, then the whatness/quiddity of a thing is the same as its whyness (maahiyatuhu limiyyatuhu). The existence of the thing in its specific rank and its quiddity is equal to the goal of the thing. His existence is caused, coming from his why. And so to ask why he is, is the same as ask what he is. Therefore, this one essential order of all of existence must be considered as a whole when asking about evil.

- The intellect is the focal point of philosophical discussion, and it is limited when considering isolated and individual incidents. It can provide universal rules and principles in its understanding of the wisdom behind the whole of creation, but it cannot do so when it comes to an individual situation.
- So for example, if the question is posed as to ‘why is this specific child born disabled?’, the theologian would answer based on the textual sources as the theological methodology is suitable to answer questions regarding individual cases. He may suggest the benefits of the afterlife, the positive effect the individual had on his or her parents through prayer or provision, or perhaps the benefit the individual had on society due to their condition. But the philosopher, through his philosophical methodology, would answer based on the disabled child’s place in all of existence, which has an essential order.