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The Notion of Evil in the Qur'an and Islamic Mystical Thought

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ABSTRACT

'The Problem of Evil' has continued to survive as one of the most contested issues in the history of philosophy of religion. This thesis aims at contributing to the existing literature by exploring the notion of evil in the Qur'an and Islamic Mystical thought as expressed in the writings of Jalal ad-Din Rumi and Muhammad Iqbal. The Qur'an sheds light on various shades of moral evil and explains how they are manifested through the actions of various agents. When it comes to natural evil and human suffering resulting from it, the Qur'an provides a utilitarian place for it in human life. Rumi and Iqbal, whose mystical views are rooted in the Quran, argue that evil is relative, and that evil has an important role to play in advancing the spiritual development of an individual. Moreover, Rumi regards evil as a logical necessity for the functioning of life in this world.

Keywords: Evil, Islam, Qur'an, Rumi, Iqbal, relative, free will, devil, religion, philosophy, trial, punishment, spiritual.

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis aims at providing a view of how the Qur'an, Islamic religious text, and Islamic Mystical thought explain the existence of the problem of evil in this world. The Qur'anic narrative elaborates on various kinds of evil, moral evil and natural evil, in a comprehensive style and enlightens the readers on their implications in human life. As far as moral evil is concerned, the Qur'an explains the semantic field of *sharr* and elaborates on how various forms of moral evil are manifested through the actions or interactions of various agents such as the devil, *nafs,* and free will. In the context of natural evil or physical evil, the Qur'an sheds light on how God uses it, in various forms, to test the believers and punish the wrongdoers.

As far as Islamic Mystical thought is concerned, this thesis explains the views of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, a 13th century Sufi mystic, and Muhammad Iqbal, a Muslim philosopher of the 20th century, as expressed in their writings. Rumi and Iqbal, whose mystical views are rooted in the Quran, argue that God is the creator of everything in this universe including evil, and that evil exists to serve as an instrument in the actualization of God's plan of creating this universe. Both mystical thinkers agree that evil is relative, that is, things are bad only in relation to human beings and not in relation to God, and that evil plays an important role in unfolding the spiritual potential of an individual. Moreover, Rumi regards evil as a logical necessity for the functioning of life in this world as, in his view, it would have been impossible for human beings to identify good in the absence of evil.

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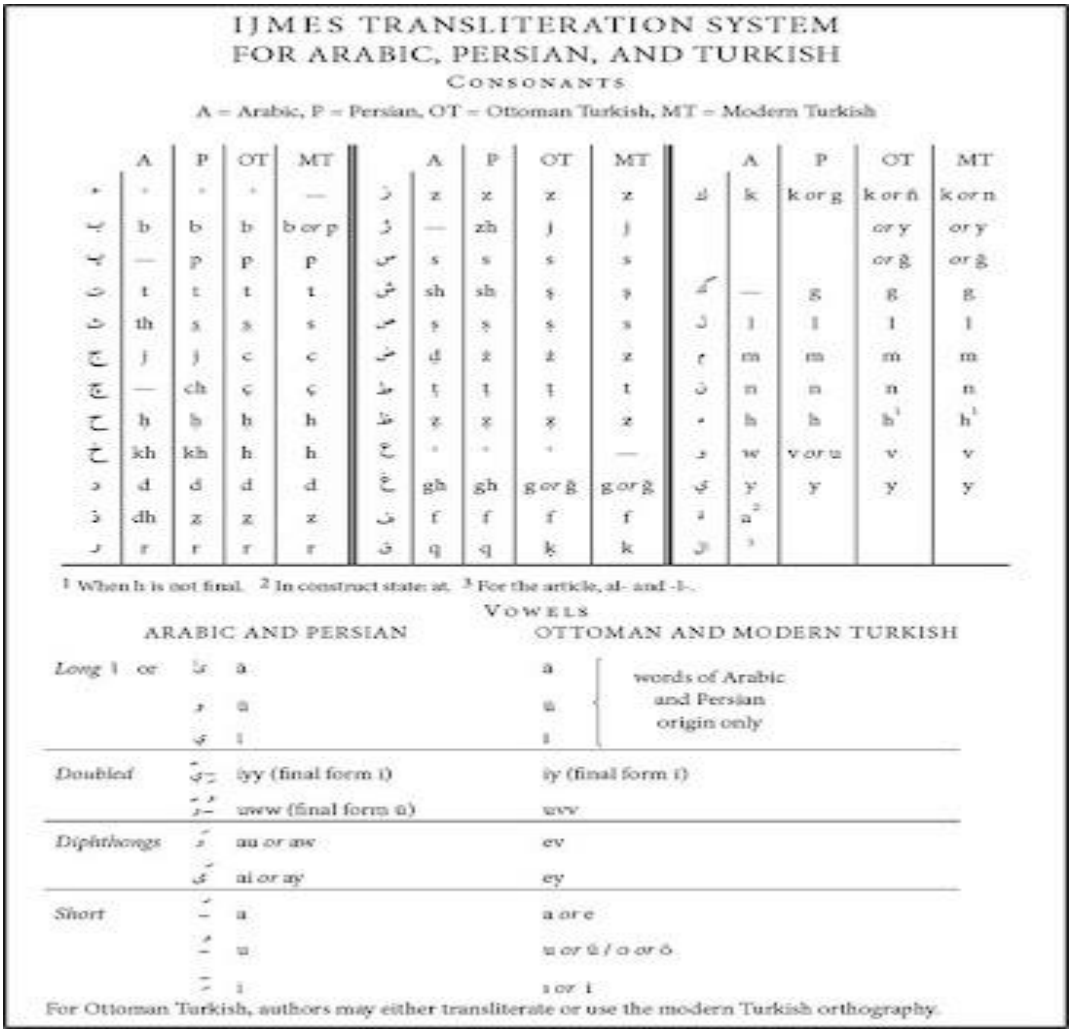
Table of Contents

Arabic Transliteration Chart



IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM
FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

CONSONANTS

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k or g	k or ñ	k or n
ب	b	b	b	b or p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				or y	or y
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				or ğ	or ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ş	ş	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	s	s	s	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ḍ	ż	ż	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	h	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	z	ه	h	h	h[1]	h[1]
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	—	و	w	v or u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g or ğ	g or ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	z	z	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a[2]			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	ķ	k	ال	ʾ			

[1] When h is not final. [2] In construct state: at. [3] For the article, al- and -l-.

VOWELS

		ARABIC AND PERSIAN	OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH	
Long	ا or آ	ā	a	words of Arabic and Persian origin only
	و	ū	u	
	ي	ī	ı	
Doubled	يّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	
	وّ	uww (final form ū)	uvv	
Diphthongs	وْ	au *or* aw	ev	
	يْ	ai *or* ay	ey	
Short	ـَ	a	a or e	
	ـُ	u	u or ü / o or ö	
	ـِ	i	ı or i	

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.

INTRODUCTION

Background

> Times and cultures change, but some things remain constant. People continue to suffer and to wonder how there can be an all-loving and all-powerful God who allows such evil in our world. The problems that evil creates continue to engage philosophers and theologians as well as ordinary people who experience pain and evil. There is no evidence that these problems (and thinking about them) will go away anytime soon. They continue to be a major obstacle in the way of many people believing in any kind of theism.[1]

The philosophical problem of evil, in both its theoretical and existential forms, is categorized as one of the most contested issues in the history of philosophy of religion and remains an enduring challenge with which the monotheistic religious traditions have to grapple.[2] How can the pervasiveness of evil in the world be reconciled with the presence of an Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent God?[3] The problem of evil, formally articulated by Epicurus[4] (341-270 B. C.) and reported by Lactantius[5] (A. D. 260-340) in his *De Ire Dei,* reads as:

> God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?[6]

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[1] John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil – Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), 15.

[2] Michael L. Peterson, "Recent Work on the problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1983): 321.

[3] H. J. McCloskey, "The Problem of Evil," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 30, no. 3 (1962), 187.

[4] An ancient Greek philosopher and founder of Epicureanism, one of the most influential schools of philosophy.

[5] A Christian author who, at later stages, rose to the position of an advisor to Constantine 1, a Roman emperor, to guide his religious policy.

[6] Ismael T. Fortunado, "God as Necessary Being and Source of Goodness: Six Other Responses to the Epicurean Paradox in the Biblical and Quranic Contexts," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 99 (2018): 2.

God's Justice and His Power are twin horns of the dilemma of theodicy as the existence of evil calls these two attributes into question. Unravelling this dilemma requires offering a logical explanation of the existence of evil without compromising God's Justice and His Power. If a proposed solution emphasizes Omnipotence, justice may be compromised; contrarily, if it accords great weight to justice, Omnipotence will suffer.[7] The theologians and philosophers of all major religions of the world have confronted this issue and formulated different theodicies to reconcile these apparently conflicting realities.

Over the past several centuries, Muslim theologians and philosophers have also tried to address the issue from various perspectives. This led to the production of a great body of knowledge comprising of distinct theological, philosophical and mystical theodicies throughout the history of Islam.[8] It may not be wrong to say that theodicy was initiated in the realm of Muslim theological thought (*kalām*) in reaction to the attempts to understand the phenomenon of God's Omnipotence and its relation to human life.[9] The starting point for this scholarly journey was the Qur'an and multiple interpretations of its verses related to the Divine names and attributes (*al-asmā al-husnā*). The theological debates, over time, led to the emergence of many schools of thought in Islamic theology whereas the philosophical debates spurred the theodicies of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Rumi (d.1273), and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) among others.[10]

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7 Eric Linn Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Al-Ghazali's Best of All Possible Worlds* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.

8 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2015),1.

9 Eric Linn Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Al-Ghazali's Best of All Possible Worlds*, 16.

10 Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought: Towards a Mystical Theodicy," *Religions* 9, no. 47 (2018), 4.

As far as the schools of Islamic theology are concerned, the most prominent among them are the *Qadariyya,* the *Jabriyya*, the *Mu'tazilites*, the *Ash'arites* and the *Maturidis*. The Qadariyya[11]are those early Islamic theologians who upheld the importance of human free will from 690 CE to the definitive emergence of the Mu' tazilites at the start of the 9th century.[12] The Jabriyya[13]school, articulated by Ja'd ibn Dirham (d. 736) and Jahm ibn Safwān (d. 745), advocates for God's Omnipotence in its most absolute or uncompromising form. Its followers argue that God, being the Creator of His own acts and the acts of human beings as well, is the only agent in this universe. Given this, all things are predetermined, and human beings are not free in actions.[14] They cite the following Qur'anic verses to substantiate their viewpoint:[15] "Surely, Allah is powerful to do anything" (2:20); "And you will not so wish unless Allah so wills. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise" (76:30); "While Allah has created you and what you make" (37:96). This thought reduces human beings to be entirely powerless.

In response to the Jabriyya's excessive emphasis on God's Omnipotence and powerlessness of human beings, the Mu'tazilites emerged. The Mu'tazilites' criticism of Jabriyya's approach was based on the latter's negligence of the importance of humans' free will.[16] The Mu'tazilite school of theology, which originated in Basra in the eighth century, was led by Waṣil

[11] The term Qadariyya was originally used, by certain opponent groups, sarcastically for those early Islamic theologians who advocated free will and argued that human beings are responsible for their actions.
[12] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 41.
[13] The term Jabriyya term was used, for this school of thought, by opponent Islamic schools in a derogatory sense to criticize or deride their philosophy of predestination.
[14] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 40.
[15] Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28, no. 3 (2017), 294.
[16] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 40.

ibn ‘Atā (d. 748), ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 761), and Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 849). The followers of this thought contend that there is no reason to be accountable for anything that you do not have a choice to avoid. Thus, if God is the creator of all human actions, how do we justify that He will judge us for our actions? And, how can this be reconciled with the concepts of reward and punishment as explained in the Qur’an?[17]The Mu‘tazilites, in their emphasis on the importance of human free will as bestowed by God, argue that humans are free in choosing among different alternatives. Thus, being the creators of their deeds, humans can be held accountable for their actions or deeds. They further stress that since God is Just and All-Wise, no injustice or evil can be attributed to Him.[18]

The Mu‘tazilites received a lot of pushback on account of their overemphasis on trying to find a rational account behind all events and happenings. The reaction to the Mu‘tazilites approach came in the form of Ash’arites breaking away from Mu'tazilites in the 10th century and assuming the position of a dominant school of thought. While the Ash’arites returned to the viewpoint of stressing God’s Omnipotence, they provided space for the incorporation of certain rationalist approaches taken from the Mu‘tazilites as well.[19] The Ash’arite school of theology was founded by Abū al-Hasan al-Asharī (d. 936).[20] The followers of the Ash’arite school stress God’s Omnipotence but they do not deny the role of free will. They argue that all actions are created by God, but they are acquired by human beings. It is human beings who appropriate or obtain

[17] Ozgur Koca, “Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics, 295.

[18] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 41.

[19] Eric Linn Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Al-Ghazali’s Best of All Possible Worlds,* 16-17.

[20] Ozgur Koca, “Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics, 295.

the acts created by God. This is known as *kasb.*[21] The Ash'arites represent a middle course between Jabriyya's' absolute Divine Omnipotence and Mu'tazilites' free will.[22]

Some other schools of thought also emerged over time that contributed to this discussion. The Maturidis also allow for the role of free will. They argue that the principle of predestination has no bearing on the free acts of human beings because predestination is just divine foreknowledge of what human beings will do. The followers of this school of thought contend that God's Will and Power do not entail any constraint or limitation on humans' ability to act freely. The infidels and transgressors opt for infidelity and acts of transgression on their own. God's Wisdom encompasses the past, the present and the future but that does not prevent human beings from exercising their choice of free will.[23]

When it comes to philosophical aspects of this debate, Muslim philosophers have relied on a range of approaches to explain this puzzle. Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Mullā Sadrā (d. 1636), two prominent Muslim philosophers, employed the method of ontological interpretation to argue that good and evil are inextricably linked to the domains of existence (*wujūd)* and nonexistence (*'adam*). Good emerges from existence and is positive in nature, whereas evil stems from nonexistence and is negative in nature.[24] Ibn Sīnā's approach to theodicy was heavily influenced by ancient Greek philosophy.[25] Ibn Arabī (d. 1240), another Muslim philosopher and mystic,

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21Edmund Power, "Fatalism and Free Will in Islam," *An Irish Quarterly Review* 2, no. 5 (1913): 870-71.

22 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 43.

23 Edmund Power, "Fatalism and Free Will in Islam," 864.

24 Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought: Towards a Mystical Theodicy," *Religions* 9, no. 47 (2018), 5.

25 Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics," 296.

situated the problem of evil in a broader metaphysical framework and argued that the world exists on account of being a God's volitional act and a metaphysical necessity.[26]

Al-Ghazālī's theodicy offered a different explanation based on the view that God created the universe in the most balanced form. His noteworthy statement "it is not possible for anything to be more wonderful than is" gives credence to this view.[27] Al-Ghazālī advocated for a strong bond between God and human beings, arguing that there is a profound necessity to have a higher level of trust in God's Wisdom while going through the pangs of adversities and suffering. Rumi's mystical theodicy argued that God, being the Creator of everything in the universe, was the creator of evil as well. He further stated that evil, in the form of trials and adversities, was necessary for humans to come out of a state of negligence and set forth on the spiritual path of development.[28] More importantly, for Rumi, as things are known through their opposites, it is not possible for human beings to identify good in the absence of evil.[29]

While these schools of thought, theologians and philosophers have made notable contributions, there is not extensive scholarly literature on how the problem of evil is understood in Islamic Mystical thought. This thesis attempts to fill this gap.

Research Question and the Main Argument

This thesis aims at contributing to the existing literature or ongoing discourse by exploring the notion of evil in the Qur'an and Islamic Mystical thought as expressed in the writings of Jalal ad-

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[26] *Ibid,* 297.

[27] *Ibid,* 297.

[28] Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought: Towards a Mystical Theodicy," 8.

[29] Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics," 303.

Din Muhammad Rumi, a 13th-century renowned Sufi mystic, and Muhammad Iqbal, a Muslim philosopher of the early 20th century.

Rumi and Iqbal, whose mystical views are rooted in the Quran, argue that God is the creator of everything in this universe including evil, and that evil exists to serve as an instrument in the actualization of God's plan of creating this universe. Both Rumi and Iqbal agree that evil is relative, that is, things are bad only in relation to human beings and not in relation to God, and that evil has an important role to play in advancing the spiritual development of an individual. Moreover, Rumi regards evil as a logical necessity for the functioning of life in this world as it would have been impossible for human beings to identify good in the absence of evil.

Chapter Outline

My thesis comprises four chapters. The first chapter explains the semantic range and major narratives of evil in the Qur'an. The semantic analysis includes a description of the main acts or deeds that fall within the semantic field of *sharr,* that is, transgression, defamation/slander, miserliness, breaking the treaties/covenants, associating partners with God, etc. The major narratives of evil in the Qur'an shed light on various aspects or dimensions of moral evil and natural evil. Drawing on the evidence from Qur'anic verses 2:256, 7:12-18, 7:23, 12:53, 18:29, I analyze, how the Qur'an explains the existence of moral evil[30]as a result of the failure of human beings to exercise the right of free will responsibly in the face of the inducements of *nafs* and the

[30] Moral evil includes the willful acts of human beings such as murder, rape, genocide, human and drug trafficking, cheating etc.

devil. In the context of natural evil[31], drawing on the evidence from Qur'anic verses 2:114, 2:155, 21:35, 29:2, 85:4-8, and the story of the Prophet Ayyub (21:83-84, 38:41-44), I show, how natural evil serves the purpose of testing the believers and enabling them to live up to their highest spiritual potential. I also explain the Qur'anic view, using evidence from the Quranic verses 6:42, 8:25, 15:74-75, 30:41, 59:19-21, that God uses natural evil to punish wrongdoers.

The second chapter focuses on Rumi's account of evil. I quote from the writings of Rumi to illustrate his viewpoint that God is the creator of everything, in this universe, including evil. In addition, I explain Rumi's treatment of evil, which views its existence as a logical necessity, arguing for its relativity. Rumi, very cogently, argued that, since things can only be known through their opposites, it would not have been possible for humans to identify good in the absence of evil. He explains the relativity of evil from two different perspectives: a) things are bad only in relation to human beings and not in relation to God; and b) there is nothing absolutely bad or absolutely good in this world. At the end of this chapter, I show how Rumi also interprets evil as an instrument for the spiritual advancement of the believers.

The third chapter illustrates Iqbal's treatment of evil. For Iqbal, evil has no absolute existence, and it is only due to limited powers of comprehension or understanding of human beings that we see evil or discord around us. Thus, Iqbal suggests that if we elevate ourselves to the level of 'Universal Reason', we will not see any evil or discord, and all parts of the universe will appear harmoniously fitted with one another. In his interpretation of the legend of the Fall,

[31] Natural evil includes natural disasters like earthquakes, cyclones, floods, lightening, famines, birth defects, genetic disorders etc.

Iqbal explains why, after the creation of Adam, it was necessary to place human beings in a place resembling a painful or discomforting environment of this world to accomplish the purpose of their creation. He also interprets evil in terms of free will and, like Rumi, as a means of humans' spiritual development. In the fourth chapter, I conclude.

Sources and Methodology

The major goal of this research is to explain the notion of evil in the Qur'an and Islamic mystical thought. I use two main methods of qualitative research. First, I employ the method of content analysis. For my research, I use the Qur'anic translation of Shaykh Mufti Taqi Usmani. As far as the hermeneutical approach is concerned, I employ the approach of contextual interpretation. I collect passages of the Qur'an that deal with human suffering on account of the existence of evil to understand the concepts more precisely. My research employs the same method of content analysis with Rumi's writings – *Masnawi* and *Fihi Ma Fihi* (Discourses of Rumi), and Iqbal's writings – *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Payam e Mashriq* (Message from the East), and *Baang e Dara* (The Call of the Marching Bell). To explain the semantic range of evil, I use Toshihiko Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* and Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan's *Muslim Response to Evil* as the main sources.

As far as Rumi's writings are concerned, I use R.A. Nicholson's English translation of *Masnawi,* and A.J. Arberry's English translation of *Fihi Ma Fihi.* These scholars are regarded as two of the most authentic translators of Rumi's work. In the words of William Chittick, a prominent commentator on Rumi's works, "Both of these scholars were extremely dedicated to accurate renderings of the original Persian. Nicholson's translations in particular are on the whole so exact that his text corresponds to the original practically word for word. His fidelity is such

that even additions to the text which are clearly understood in Persian and necessary for grammatical renderings in English are usually marked off by parentheses."[32] Moreover, the translations of these two scholars are widely used and quoted in the academic literature. Regarding Iqbal's writings, I use English version of *Payam e Mashriq* (Message from the East), and Urdu version of *Baang e Dara* (Call of the Marching Bell). *Baang e Dara* has been originally written in Urdu, whereas *Payam e Mashriq* in Persian.

Second, I use the method of comparative research. In the chapters on Rumi and Iqbal, I draw philosophical parallelisms between their views and those of other prominent Islamic theologians and philosophers. These parallelisms enrich my discussion of their views on the problem of evil and help to understand the issue at hand more accurately.

Significance

This project is significant on account of two main reasons: First, it has taken up the issue every believer has to deal with at some stage of their life. Every human being has to go through their fair share of difficulties and tribulations during this worldly life. And these difficulties or tribulations usually descend upon us without any warning. The randomness of tragedy flabbergasts the human mind and prompts an individual to ask the proverbial question: Why me? Why would a supposedly All-Merciful God allow this to happen? What is the rationale behind God making us pass through tough times and the emotional ebb and flow of a seemingly purposeless course of action? More importantly, why does a Benevolent God allow the infliction of great suffering at all?

[32] William, C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 14-15.

Second, this project provides a detailed account of the perspectives of two major Islamic mystical thinkers, Rumi and Iqbal, on evil. The existing literature is a testament to the fact that Iqbal's philosophy of evil has not been explored extensively by academics. Moreover, in contrast with the existing literature, this thesis explains, in one piece of writing, the views of Rumi and Iqbal on all dimensions of evil including its origin, its relativity, purpose and various manifestations. To illustrate the concepts and present the problem efficiently or logically, I have also drawn comparisons between the philosophical views of Islamic mystical thought and other theologians or philosophers.

CHAPTER 1

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS AND MAJOR NARRATIVES OF EVIL IN THE QUR'AN

1.1 Introduction

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is God's Word revealed verbatim to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years. It consists of 114 chapters (*Surahs*) and over 6200 verses. Every letter and word of the Quran, including its language, meaning, and text, is considered sacred by followers of Islam. Being a Holy Book, the Quran is a constant guide for Muslims during their life span on this earth.[33] According to Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyib, the chapters of the Holy Qur'an are traditionally classified as Meccan or Medinan, keeping in view the period of revelations. The Meccan parts of Qur'anic revelations are mainly concerned with Divine Oneness, fundamental articles of faith, references to Paradise and Hellfire, and mentions of ancient communities and their attitudes towards the revelations of God. On the other hand, the Medinan parts of the Qur'anic revelations deal with the enforcement of law at individual and collective levels. These chapters instruct the believers regarding family laws, laws of marriage, child nursing, usury, commercial transactions, retribution, and jihad among other things. Another important distinguishing feature is that Meccan verses usually open with the phrase *O Children of Adam, O people,* whereas Medinan verses open with *O you who believe.*[34]

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33 Syed Hossein Nasr et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary,* (New York: HarperOne, 2017), 1.

34 Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyib, "The Qur'an as Source of Islamic Law," in *The Study Quran – A New Translation and Commentary,* ed. Syed Hossein Nasr et al (New York: HarperOne, 2017), 3600-3601.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is a basic source of Islamic law in all aspects of life. As narrated by Joseph Lumbard, the most distinctive feature of the Qur'an is its inimitability.[35] The Quranic verse that gives credence to this view reads as follows: "Say, If all the humans and jinns join together to bring anything like this Qur'an, they will not (be able to) come up with anything like it, even if they assist one another" (The Qur'an, 17:88). More importantly, Muslims believe the messages of the Qur'an to be universal. Ahamad Ogunbado, a Nigerian scholar of the Qur'an, goes one step ahead and suggests that even though the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic language, it offers guidance for the whole of humankind. He further argues that the significance of the Qur'an is not bound by any period or time of human development. Its message is believed by many Muslims to have covered all important aspects ranging from guidance to humankind in general to the matters of social, political, historical, and economic significance.[36] Barbara Stowasser, a former Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, introduces the Qur'an in the following words,

> If scripture is a sacred text, then the Qur'an to the faithful is scripture at its purest and highest. According to the Qur'an's doctrine of its own nature, it is God's word revealed *verbatim* (word for word) and *seriatum* (in a continuous series over time) to God's Prophet Muhammad, seal of the Prophets. As a book, it is the faithful copy of the text recorded on the heavenly tablet (*lawh mahfuz*), God's heavenly scripture (*umm al-Kitab*). Free of any human imprint, the Quran is a record of both God's eternal word and His last and complete revelation to mankind.[37]

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35 Joseph Lumbard, "The Quran in Translation," in *The Study Quran – A New Translation and Commentary,* ed. Syed Hossein Nasr et al (New York: HarperOne, 2017), 3324.

36 Ahamad Faosiy Ogunbado, "The Significance of the Qu'ranic Messages to Humanity: A Revisit", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 9, (2014): 20-21.

37 Barbara Stowasser, "The Qu'ran and Its Meaning", *The Arab Studies Journal* 3, no. 1, (1995), 4.

The Qur'an has served, for more than 1400 years, as the foundation of Islam and continues to play a pivotal role in inspiring the lives and shaping the worldview of its followers irrespective of their diverse cultures and backgrounds. Because Muslims regard it as the most fundamental and primary source of Islamic thought, any attempt to explain an intellectual puzzle or phenomenon from an Islamic perspective starts with guidance offered by the text of the Qur'an. It is due to this importance that the Qur'an serves as the starting point for much scholarly inquiry in Islam.[38]

This chapter aims at exploring various manifestations of evil, moral evil, and natural evil, from the Qur'anic viewpoint. This includes an overview of the semantic field of evil. The beauty of the Qur'an is that it does not treat the problem of evil as a theoretical problem. As the Qur'an deals with concrete particulars or aspects of life and not with theoretical abstractions, it not only explains the problem of evil but also delineates its various practical manifestations and implications.[39]

As far as the major narratives of evil in the Quran are concerned, there are two well-defined categories of verses dealing with evil in the Quran. These can be defined as verses dealing with the semantic field of *sharr* and verses falling beyond the semantic field of *sharr.* The first category explains moral evil whereas, the latter focuses on human suffering or natural evil.[40] This concept has been illustrated by Nasrin Rouzati, a Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, in the following words,

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[38] Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought – Towards a Mystical Theodicy," 2.

[39] John Bowker, "The Problem of Suffering in the Quran," *Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (1969): 185.

[40] Nazrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought," 2.

> A key term in Arabic that is translated as evil is '*sharr*' and it is presented in two distinct categories of Qur'anic narratives. The first category includes verses that fall in the semantic field of *sharr* and appears among the moral concepts of the Qur'an. The overall notion of good (*khayr*) and bad/evil (*sharr*) is a central theme in Quranic teachings and is emphasized in both Meccan and Medinan phases of the Islamic revelation. The second category of Qur'anic narratives is more of an interest to us as it is directly related to human suffering and theodicy. This group of verses fall beyond the semantic field of *sharr* and is revealed in various historical contexts reflected in the Qur'an.[41]

Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, a scholar and co-director of the International Foundation for Muslim Theology, offers a similar view. She argues that there are verses in the Qur'an dealing with evil that cannot be categorized as belonging to the semantic field of *sharr.* These verses become the basis of explaining human suffering in terms of tests or punishment.[42]

1.2 Major narratives of Moral Evil in the Qur'an:

This section of the chapter explores the semantic field of *sharr* and explains the existence of moral evil on account of its main agents, that is, free will, *nafs,* and the devil.

1.2.1 Semantic field of *Sharr*

The Qur'anic term *sharr* is the opposite or antithesis of *khayr. Khayr* and *sharr* function as direct opposites of each other in both religious and non-religious contexts.[43] The root word for *sharr* is *sh-r-r* and it is mentioned in thirty different verses of the Quran.[44] Tubanur Ozkan describes the semantic field of *sharr* in the following words:

> The term is in its evaluative layer, since *sharr,* having a very broad meaning and covering many wrongful actions and deeds, can be understood differently if not explained in a more precise way. In order to develop a sound understanding of the term as intended in the Qur'an, it is necessary to build an appropriate semantic field for it. This can be achieved by finding the descriptive layers of the term *sharr*, in other words, the primary

41 *Ibid,* 2.

42 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil*, 29-30.

43 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 220.

44 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 19.

> level moral terms that serve as a definition of *sharr.* The respective terms that have been found in the Qur'an are parsimony (*b-kh-l*), going astray (*d-l-l*), rejecting God (*k-f-r*), idolatry (*sh-r-k*), violating a covenant or treaty (*n-q-d*), turning away, aversion from God (*'-r-d*), slander (*'-f-k*) and transgression (*t-gy-y*).[45]

As argued by Tubanur Ozkan, the verses of the Quran, that include the word *sharr* in their text, show the following main acts or deeds falling into its semantic field:

1-Transgression

Izutsu Toshihiko defines transgression as an act of going beyond the bounds of what is proper or legally and morally acceptable.[46] Tubanur Ozkan defines transgression, more precisely, as an act of going beyond limits in wickedness or displaying excessive insolence and impiousness. The root word for it in the Arabic language is *t-gh-y*.[47] These definitions of transgression suggest that it is a comprehensive term that includes almost all kinds of evil or bad deeds. The following Quranic verse establishes the link between transgression and *sharr:*

> Having said this, the transgressors will surely have the evil (*sharra*) place to return (The Qur'an, 38:55).

2- Defamation/Slander

Defamation/slander is usually defined as a false statement that is made to damage the good repute of a person. The root word for it in the Arabic language is *'-f-k.*[48]

> Those who have come up with false imputation are a gang among you. Do not think it is bad (*sharra*) for you; rather, it is good for you. Every one of them is liable for what he

[45] *Ibid,* 28.

[46] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran,* 168.

[47] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 27.

[48] *Ibid,* 26.

earned of the sin. And the one who played the major role in it, for him there is a mighty punishment (The Qur'an, 24:11).

3- Breaking the treaties/Failing to keep promises

The root word for it in the Arabic language is *n-q-d* and it has been mentioned 9 times in the Quran.[49] The following Quranic verse links failing to keep one's promises with *sharr.*

> Surely, the worst (*sharra*) of all moving creatures, in the sight of Allah, are those who reject faith and do not believe. Those with whom you have entered into a treaty, then they break their treaty each time, and they do not fear Allah (The Qur'an, 8:55-56).

4- Miserliness

The term miserliness refers to stinginess, or unwillingness to spend money. The root word for it in Arabic is *b-kh-l.*[50] The following Quranic verse clearly identifies miserliness with *sharr.*

> Those who withhold in miserliness what Allah has given them out of His Grace should not take it as good for them. Instead, it is *sharr* for them. They shall be forced, on the Doomsday, to put on what they withheld, as iron-collars around their necks. To Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Allah is All-Aware of what you do (The Qur'an, 3:180).

5- To err or go astray

To err or go astray, as mentioned in the Qur'an, conveys the meaning of going away from the straight path (*sirāt al-mustaqīm*). The root word for it in Arabic is *d-l-l.*[51]

> Say, 'Shall I tell you about the ones whose retribution with Allah is worse than that (which you deem bad)? They are those whom Allah has subjected to His curse and to His wrath; and He has turned some of them into apes and swine, those who worshipped Taghut (Satan, the rebel). They are worse in their situation (*sharrun makānan*) and far more astray from the right path (*adallu*)' (The Qur'an, 5:60).

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[49] *Ibid,* 23.

[50] *Ibid,* 20.

[51] *Ibid,* 21.

6- Disbelieving in God

The act of disbelieving in God but other entities, as narrated in the Qur'an, also falls under the domain of the semantic field of *sharr.* The root word for it in the Arabic language is *k-f-r.*[52] The term *kufr* is mostly used as an opposite word of *īmān* but it also conveys the meaning of ingratitude.[53]

> When our verses are recited to them in all their clarity, you (can) recognize disgust on the faces of the disbelievers. They seem to attack those who recite to them our verses. Say, 'Shall I, then, tell you about something more disgusting than that (*bisharri min dhālikum)*? The Fire! Allah has promised it to those who disbelieve. And it is an evil end' (The Qur'an, 22:72).

7- Associating partners with God (*Shirk)*

The root word for it in Arabic is *sh-r-k.* It is defined as the act of ascribing partners to God.[54] The following Qur'anic verse clearly tells us that the act of ascribing partners to God falls in the domain of the semantic field of *sharr.*

> Surely those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book and the polytheists will be in the fire of Jahannum, in which they will be living forever. They are the worst of all human beings (*sharru 'l bariyyah*) (The Qur'an, 98:6).

8- Turning away

The root word for it in the Arabic language is *'-r-d.* This term has been used in the Quran in both ways, that is, turning away from God and turning away from the disbelievers. However, turning

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52 *Ibid,* 21-22.

53 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran,* 120.

54 *Ibid,* 130.

away from God finds its connection with *sharr.*[55] The following verses of the Qur'an illustrate this concept.

> Surely, the worst (*sharra*) of all animals in the sight of Allah are the deaf and the dumb who do not understand. Had Allah seen in them some good, He would have made them listen (as due). But if He makes them listen (now), they will turn away (*mu'ridūn*) paying no heed (The Qur'an, 8:22-23).

1.2.2. Free Will and Moral Evil

In this section, I describe the views of different Islamic schools of thought on the question of free will and discuss textual evidence they provide to support their claims. The question of humans experiencing a sense of free will has been a companion of mankind since the beginning.[56] In the realm of Islamic religious thought, there are both determinists and advocates of free will. As discussed in the introductory chapter, different Islamic schools of theology hold contrasting viewpoints on this question. The most prominent among them are the *Jabriyya,* the *Mu'tazilites,* the *Ash'arites* and the *Maturidis.*

The Jabriyya school of theology emphasizes God's Omnipotence in its most uncompromising form. It argues that since nothing can happen except through the decree of God, human beings are not free in their actions. On the other hand, the Mu'tazilites uphold the existence of free will. In their view, if God is believed to be the creator of all human actions, it requires justifying that He is also the ultimate creator of our bad actions, which we freely undertook, and this goes against the principle of accountability. Thus, for Mu'tazilites, the system

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55 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 24.

56 Mohsen Eslami and Muhammad Hossein Jamshidi, "The Man's Freedom and Free Will from the Point of View of Muslim Philosophers," *International Journal of Physical and Human Geography* 6, no. 1 (2018), 24-25.

of accountability in Islam is an evidence that humans have free will. Another school of thought, the Ash'arites, accepts arguments about the Omnipotence of God but still gives allowance to the existence of free will. The Asha 'rites believe that God creates all actions, which are then "acquired" by human beings. This appropriation of acts by human beings is referred to as *kasb.* The Maturidis also allow for the role of free will.[57]

Determinists, while emphasizing God's Omnipotence, draw support from the following Qur'anic verses to support their view:

> "Surely, Allah is powerful to do anything" (2:20).
>
> "And you will not so wish unless Allah so wills. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise" (76:30).
>
> "So, Allah lets go astray whom He wills and lets find guidance whom He wills" (14:4).
>
> "While Allah has created you and what you make" (37:96).

However, the advocates of free will do not view God's Omnipotence as a restriction on human's ability to choose freely. They cite the following Qur'anic verses to argue that humans still have the freedom to choose between right and wrong paths:

> There is no compulsion in faith. The correct way has become distinct from the erroneous. Now, whoever rejects the Taghut (the Rebel, the Satan) and believes in Allah has a firm grasp on the strongest ring that never breaks. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing (The Qur'an, 2:256).
>
> And say, 'The truth is from your Lord. Now, whosoever so wills may believe and whosoever so wills may deny. Surely, We have prepared for the unjust a fire, whose tent will envelop them. And if they will beg for help, they shall be helped with water like oily dregs that will scald the faces. Vile is the drink and evil is the fire as a resting place (The Qur'an, 18:29).

[57] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 40-44.

> Surely those who adopt perversity about our verses are not hidden from Us. So, tell me which one is better: the one who is thrown into the fire or the one who will come safely on the Day of Judgement. Do whatever you wish. He is watchful of whatever you do (The Qur'an, 41:40).

Modern Muslim scholars, not necessarily affiliated with the traditional schools of theology, have offered their views on whether the Qur'an allows free will and taken a position for or against it. Nasrin Rouzati, in her article 'Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought – Towards a Mystical Theodicy', argues in favour of free will in the following words:

> It is clearly stated in the Qur'an that when mankind, through his volition, acts in certain ways and adopts specific behaviours that are not in accordance with the divine plan, he situates himself in a situation that is referred to as *sharr* in the Qur'an. Some of the deeds that fall into this moral category include miserliness, unbelief/rejecting God, slander, and transgression. [58]

Along the same lines, Dr. Ozkan contends that a system of accountability in Islam underlies the importance of the existence of free will because, in the absence of power to make a free choice, the whole system of accountability collapses.[59]

1.2.3 Self (*Nafs*) and Moral Evil

The Qur'an suggests that *nafs,* being the inner side of human beings, is inextricably linked with behaviours, impulses, desires, and attitudes.[60]The term *nafs* is mentioned in the Quran 295 times. As explained in the Quran, there are three main kinds of *nafs.* The first one is *al-nafs al-mutma'innah* (the type of *nafs* entirely in a state of peace and free from the contamination of lust and other abominable qualities); the second one is *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the type of *nafs*

[58] Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought – Towards a Mystical Theodicy," 2.

[59] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 171.

[60] Gavin Picken and Jaafin Bacon, "Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Quranic paradigm," *Journal of Quranic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 108-9.

that regrets or incriminates itself), and the third one is *al-nafs al-amārrah* (the type of *nafs* that inclines human beings towards evil and urges them to commit wrongdoings). It is the third type of self or *nafs* that plays a role in the existence and proliferation of moral evil. [61] In this state, human beings become overpowered by their desires and choose to fulfill them to the exclusion of everything else. This view suggests that, in this situation, even God's commandments and limits set by Him become secondary for humans to the fulfillment of their desires.[62] The following Quranic verses shed light on the role of the third type of self or *nafs.*

> They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves (*anfusana*), and if you do not forgive us and do not bless us with mercy, we shall, indeed, be among the losers (The Qur'an, 7:23).
>
> And I do not absolve my inner self (*nafsi*) of blame. Surely, a person's inner self often incites to evil, unless my Lord shows mercy. Certainly, my Lord is the Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful (The Qur'an, 12:53).

These verses suggest that humans commit wrongful actions under the influence of *nafs* and it is only through God's Mercy that this lower level of self or *nafs* does not rule human beings every time. Through God's beneficence, the lower *nafs* yields to other motivations, and humans become inclined towards regret and repentance. This repentance, later, becomes the source of salvation for them.[63]

The Qur'an highlights both positive and negative tendencies or inclinations of *nafs.* As this chapter deals with the role of *nafs* regarding evil, I will limit the discussion to the negative

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[61] Alpaqih Andopa, Hardivizon, and Nurma Yunita, "The Meaning of *Nafs* in the Quran Based on Quraish Shihab's interpretation," *Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 139.
[62] Gavin Picken and Jaafin Bacon, "Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Quranic paradigm," *Journal of Quranic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 112.
[63] *Ibid,* 112-13.

tendencies of *nafs.* The negative tendencies can be identified as hatred, envy, jealousy, fear, conceit, anxiety, miserliness, and impatience. Conceit or arrogance is the inclination of *nafs* that manifests itself in most souls.[64] The following Quranic verses serve the purpose of illustrating these negative trends of *nafs.*

> Whereas for the one who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his self from the (evil) desire, the paradise will be the abode (The Qur'an, 79:40-41).
>
> (O Muslims) many among the people of the Book desire to turn you after your accepting the faith, back into disbelievers – all out of envy on their part (*indhi anfusahum*), even after the truth has become clear to them. So, forgive and overlook, till Allah brings out His Command. Certainly, Allah is powerful over everything (The Qur'an, 2:109).
>
> Said those who do not even expect to meet Us, 'Why the angels are not sent down to us or why do we not see our Lord?' Indeed, they think too highly of themselves (*laqadi stakbaru fi anfusihim*) and have gone too far in rebellion (The Qur'an, 25:21).
>
> So, Musa concealed some fear in his heart (The Qur'an, 20:67).

1.2.4 The Devil and Moral Evil

The devil has been mentioned in the Quran under two different designations, that is, *Iblis* and *al-shaytan.* According to many linguists, the term *Iblis* is derived from *ablasa* (desperation from God's Mercy) or *balasa* (no benefits). The root of the word *shaytan* is *shatana* (stay away).[65] The devil has been described in the Quran as a jinn (18:50), a rebel against God's Commandment (4:117), an enemy of mankind (43:62), an ungrateful one (17:27), a trial for people having the disease in their hearts (22:53), and as a whisperer (114:4-5).[66]

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64 *Ibid,* 108-110.

65 Ahamad Asmadi Sakat et al., "The Jinn, Devil and Satan: A Review on Qur'anic Concept," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 5 (2015): 543-44.

66 F. Islam and R. A. campbell, "Satan has Afflicted Me! Jinn Possession and Mental Illness in the Quran," *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 1 (2014): 235.

According to the Qur'anic narrative, the devil's activity is another trap for human beings while living on this planet. While choosing among the alternatives and making decisions or acting in different matters of life, human beings often fall prey to the inducements of the devil. The devil has been mentioned in the Qur'an as the enemy of human beings from the beginning. It was the devil who became the cause of the fall of Adam from paradise. Apart from that, he tempts or deceives the people, makes them forgetful, inclines them towards indecency, and causes strife among the people.[67] The following Quranic verses describe this dynamic:

> And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam!' So, they prostrated themselves, all but Iblis (Satan). He refused and became one of the infidels (The Qur'an, 2:34).
>
> Allah said, 'What has prevented you from prostrating when I ordered you?' He said, 'I am better than him. You have created me of fire and created him of clay'.
>
> Allah said, 'Then, get you down from here, it is not for you to show arrogance here. So, get out. You are one of the degraded'.
>
> He said, 'Then give me respite until a day when all will be resurrected'.
>
> Allah said, 'You are granted respite'.
>
> He said, 'Now that you have led me astray, I will certainly sit for them (in ambush) on Your straight path'.
>
> Then I will come upon them from their front side, and from their behind, and from their right and from their left. You will not find most of them grateful.
>
> Allah said, 'Get out of here, condemned, rejected. Indeed, whosoever will follow you from among them, I will fill hell with all of you together' (The Qur'an, 7:12-18).

[67] M. J. L. Young, "The Treatment of the Principle of Evil in the Qur'an," *Islamic Studies* 5, no. 3 (1966): 276.

The Qur'an states that the devil deceives humans by making their evil behaviours and bad deeds fair-seeming to them.

> By Allah, We sent (messengers) to communities before you, but Satan made their deeds look good to them. So, he is their patron today, and for them, there is a painful punishment (The Qur'an, 16:63).
>
> Why then, they did not supplicate in humility when a calamity from Us came upon them? Instead, their hearts were hardened, and Satan adorned for them what they were doing (The Qur'an, 6:43).

The Qur'an further states that human beings should not follow the suggestions or advice of the devil as he is their enemy and makes every effort to lead them astray.

> O you who believe, do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Whoever follows the footsteps of Satan (should know that), he orders (one to commit) shameful acts and evil deeds. Had it not been for the grace of Allah upon you, and His Mercy, not a single person from you would have ever attained purity. But Allah purifies whomsoever He wills. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing (The Qur'an, 24:21).
>
> O people, eat permissible good things out of what lies in the earth and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; indeed he is an open enemy for you. He orders you only to (do) evil and immodest acts, and that you ascribe to Allah what you do not know (The Qur'an, 2:168-169).
>
> Satan frightens you with poverty and bids you to commit indecency, and Allah promises you forgiveness from Him, and grace as well. And Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing (The Qur'an, 2:268).

1.3 MAJOR NARRATIVES OF NATURAL EVIL IN THE QUR'AN

According to Dr. Rouzati, the Qur'an views natural evil, instead of being a riddle or problem to solve, as an instrument in God's broader scheme of governing the universe and regulating the lives of human beings on earth.[68] Similarly, John Bowker, an English Anglican priest and scholar

[68] Nasrin Rouzati, "Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought," 3.

of Religious Studies, contends that the Qur'an provides a utilitarian place to natural evil or suffering in human life.[69] Along the same lines, this chapter describes that the Qur'an seeks to explain natural evil from two distinct logical viewpoints: natural evil 1) as a test or trial for the believers, and 2) as a warning or punishment for people who commit major sins.

1.3.1 Natural Evil as a Test or Trial

Many Islamic scholars, such as Nabeel Musharraf, state that the Qur'an describes this world as a temporary or preparatory stage for humans to enter the actual reality, which starts unfolding right after the moment of death. These scholars argue that this temporal world has been designed by God to be a place of striving or testing, and not a place of comfort for humans to live in. Thus, according to the Qur'an, God allows trials into the lives of believers to test their resolve and strengthen their faith.[70] The Qur'an states:

> We have created man from a mixed sperm-drop to put him to a test, then We made him able to hear, able to see (The Qur'an, 76:2).
>
> Everyone has to taste death, and We test you through bad and good (situations) with a trial and to Us you will be returned (The Qur'an, 21:35).

In different places, the Qur'an sheds light on the role or purpose of these tests and trials in human life. Many scholars including Damian, Ghetu, and Dura argue that the Qur'anic narrative of natural evil implies that painful trials or tests are necessary for this worldly life because of the fragile nature of human beings. These tests serve as an instrument to assess the true character

[69] John Bowker, "The Problem of Suffering in the Qur'an," *Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (1969), 194.
[70] Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf, "To Him We Belong and To Him We Return – Why Does God Test Us," *Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research* 3, no. 2 (2017): 35-40.

or faith of humans. The assumption underlying this perspective is that true human nature is revealed during times of suffering.[71]

> And among men, there is one who worships Allah (standing) on the verge: so, if some good thing happens to him, he is satisfied with it, and if a trial befalls him, he turns his face back. He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the manifest loss (The Qur'an, 22:11).
>
> Do people think that they will be left (at ease) only on their saying, 'We believe and will not be put to any test?' Indeed, We have tested those who were before them. So, Allah will surely know the ones who are truthful, and He will surely know the liars (The Qur'an, 29:2-3).

Dr. Ozkan states that the Qur'an also views these trials in the context of the creation of Paradise and Hell.[72] According to the Qur'anic account, life does not end after death. These tests in life help true believers acquire salvation as faithful and patient ones will get an everlasting life of bliss whereas transgressors will be thrown into hell. Many Muslims argue that if human beings view suffering from this Qur'anic perspective, these tribulations of life look trivial and insignificant as compared to the rewards of the hereafter.[73] The following Quranic verses support this view:

> Do you think that you will enter paradise while you have not yet been visited by (difficult) circumstances like those that were faced by the people who passed away before you? They were afflicted by hardship and suffering, and were so shaken down that the Prophet and those who believed with him started saying, 'When (will come) the help of Allah?' (Then they were comforted by the Prophet who said to them) Behold, the help of Allah is near (The Qur'an, 2:214).
>
> The One Who created death and life, so that He may test you as to which of you is best in his deeds. And He is the All-Mighty, the Most-Forgiving (The Qur'an, 67:2).

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71 Constantin Iulian Damian et al., "The Quranic Instrumentalization of Suffering," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 4 (2016): 246.

72 Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 118.

73 Constantin Iulian Damian et al., "The Quranic Instrumentalization of Suffering," 246-48.

The trials or tests, in the views of John Bowker, may be used by God to segregate pure and sincere humans from impure and hypocrites as well. The Qur'an describes the example of the battle of Uhud to illustrate this view. The battle of Badr, like the exodus for Jews, increased Muslims' faith in God but Uhud was a test of that faith.[74]

> Whatever you suffered on the day the two troops faced each other was by the will of Allah and in order to know the believers and in order to know those who are hypocrites. It was said to them, "Come on, fight in the way of Allah or defend." They said, "Had we known it to be fight, we would have certainly followed you." That day, they were nearer to disbelief than they were to belief. They utter from their mouths what is not in their hearts. Allah knows well what they conceal (3: 166-167).

In the battle of Uhud, Muslims had to experience many setbacks and a considerable number of people were martyred. This defeat was a test from God, but it made many, having immature faith, ponder whether the success in Badr was an accidental victory or that it was really help from God.[75] This difference of attitude clearly separated faithful ones from liars.[76]

Another important dimension of the Qur'anic view of trials or tests, as viewed by Damian and other scholars, relates to the view that sometimes God does something for reasons intellectually inaccessible to human minds for the time being. This is the theme of the story of Musa and Khidr. According to this story, Musa met Khidr and requested him to teach the knowledge he obtained from God. When Khidr agreed, he instructed Musa not to ask him for the explanations behind his actions during this encounter. Khidr killed a boy, damaged a ship, and repaired a wall that was about to collapse. After seeing all this, Musa could not hold his patience

[74] John Bowker, "The Problem of Suffering in the Qur'an," 191.

[75] W. Montgomery Watt, "Suffering in Sunnite Islam," *Studia Islamica* 50 (1979): 10.

[76] Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf, "To Him We Belong and To Him We Return," 39.

and started asking Khidr for explanations of his acts. In the end, it became clear to Musa that all those acts had noble reasons behind them.[77]

Thus, the Qur'anic narrative of natural evil instructs believers to exhibit patience and forbearance during times of adversities and difficulties. There are two main qualities of the believers that enable them to pass through these situations, that is, *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in God).[78]

> Surely, We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger, and loss in wealth, lives and fruits, and give good tidings to the patient. Who, when suffering visits them, say, 'We certainly belong to Allah and to Him we are bound to return. Those are the ones upon whom there are blessings from their Lord and mercy as well; and those are the ones who are on the right path (The Qur'an, 2:155-157).
>
> Of course, you shall be tested in your wealth and yourselves; and of course, you shall hear hurting statements from those who have been given the Book before you and those who associate (others with Allah in His Divinity). If you observe patience and fear Allah, then this (observance) is among the matters of firm resolution (The Qur'an, 3:186).
>
> O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient (The Qur'an, 2:153).

1.3.2 Natural Evil as a Warning or Punishment

The Qur'an states that all types of evils or sufferings cannot be understood as a test from God. Natural Evil may also be used as a warning or punishment for transgressors and disobedient people. Muslim scholars, such as Dr. Ozkan, argue that the reality of God's justice demands that evildoers be duly punished and prosecuted for their wrongdoings.[79] Similarly, Tavokkoli and Akbari state that the creator of the universe has instituted a well-defined system of retribution

[77] Constantin Iulian Damian et al., "The Quranic Instrumentalization of Suffering," 248.

[78] W. Montgomery Watt, "Suffering in Sunnite Islam," 11.

[79] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 85.

or punishment that operates both in this world and the life hereafter. In the absence of corresponding retribution, there will be no mechanism to deter people from going beyond the domains of what is right or allowed. This system of retribution works at both individual and collective levels.[80] The Qur'an provides many examples of such types of punishments in the life accounts of Pharaoh, peoples of Prophets Noah, Lot, Ad, Thamud, and Salih.[81]

> The people of Lut rejected the warners. We sent upon them a rain of stones, except the family of Lut whom We saved in the last hours of the night as a grace for us. This is how We reward the one who offers gratitude. And he (Lut) had certainly warned them of Our grasp, but they disputed the warnings (The Qur'an, 54:33-36).
>
> So, when they provoked Our anger, We took vengeance on them, and drowned them all together, and made them a people of the past, and an example for the later generations (The Qur'an, 43:55-56).
>
> If the people of the towns believed and feared Allah, We would have opened for them blessings from the heavens and the earth, but they disbelieved. So, We seized them because of what they used to earn for themselves (The Qur'an, 7:96).

The Qur'an indicates that when human beings on earth transgress their bounds in mischief-making and inflicting cruelty on the oppressed among them, God might send natural disasters in the form of diseases, earthquakes, and calamities to punish evildoers.[82]

> Your Lord is not such that He would destroy the towns unjustly, while their people are good in their ways (The Qur'an, 11:117).
>
> By your life, (O Prophet) they were wandering blindly in their intoxication (misguidance). So, they were seized by the Cry at sunrise. Then, We turned it (the city) upside down and rained down upon them stones of baked clay. Surely, in that, there are signs for those who read signs (The Qur'an, 15:72-75).

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[80] Ghulamhosein Tavakkoli and Reza Akbari, "Surveying the Notion of Divine Justice from the perspective of Islamic Theology," *Spring* 3, no. 11 (2013): 98.

[81] John Bowker, "The Problem of Suffering in the Qur'an," 190.

[82] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 128.

> We did send to them a furious wind, in a day of continuous misfortune, plucking people away as if they were trunks of uprooted palm trees. So, how were My torment and My warnings (The Qur'an, 54:19-21)?
>
> Calamities have appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of the people have earned, so that He (Allah) makes them taste some of what they did, in order that they may return (to the right way) (The Qur'an, 30:41).
>
> Whatever hardship befalls you is because of what your hands have committed, while Allah overlooks many (of your faults) (The Qur'an, 42:30).

In many places, the Qur'an states that God punished people for refusing to believe His message. God sent apostles or prophets to serve as models of exemplary behaviour, and convey His injunctions concerning different aspects of life. When people turned a deaf ear to God's commandments, contravened the rules of action, and continued to spread mischief on the earth, God punished them through various calamities and adversities.[83]

> We did send messengers to communities before you and put them to hardships and sufferings, so that they may supplicate in humility (The Qur'an, 5:42).
>
> We did not send any prophet to a town, but We seized its people with hardship and suffering, so that they may turn humble (The Qur'an, 7:94).
>
> And to Madyan (We sent) their brother, Shuaib. He said, 'O my people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. And do not curtail the measure and the weight. I see you quite well off and I fear for you the punishment of an encircling day' (The Qur'an, 11:84).
>
> They said, 'O Shuaib, does your salah (prayer) command you that we should forsake what our fathers used to worship or that we should not deal with our wealth as we please? You pretend to be the only man of wisdom and guidance' (The Qur'an, 11:87).
>
> And when Our command came, We saved Shuaib and those who believed along with him, out of mercy from Us; and those who transgressed were caught by Cry, and they were found (dead) in their homes, fallen on their knees (The Qur'an, 11:94).

[83] W. Montgomery Watt, "Suffering in Sunnite Islam,"12.

The Qur'an notes that the calamities impact the innocent ones in the same style as the wicked ones.[84]

> And beware of a scourge that shall not fall only on the wrongdoers from among you and know well that Allah is severe at punishment (The Qur'an, 8:25).

Said Nursi, a prominent Muslim theologian, interprets this verse of the Qur'an and argues that this world is a place of tests and trials. In his view, the reality has been veiled deliberately to encourage striving and competition. If God leaves the innocent ones untouched or unharmed in any disaster, the reality, hidden for a purpose, will become crystal clear and even the dumbest ones will choose to submit unconditionally. This will shut the doors of belief in the invisible reality, and the divine purpose behind the creation of this universe would not be fulfilled.[85]

Another feature of the Qur'anic narrative, according to Nabeel Musharraf, is that the suffering, in the form of worldly punishment, is mostly for the benefit of human beings. In his view of the Qur'anic perspective, the believers become forgetful of God's commandments during the activity of their daily life and end up committing sins to the extent of violating the rights of others. Thus, worldly punishment serves as a warning for them to mend their ways. This also provides them with an opportunity to repent for their actions and return to God. If the transgressors humble themselves in the wake of punishment in this world, this will enable them to save themselves from the supreme punishment of life after death.[86]

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[84] Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, *A Muslim Response to Evil,* 128.

[85] *Ibid,* 128.

[86] Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf, "To Him We Belong and To Him We Return," 40.

> And We will certainly make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment so that they may return (The Qur'an, 32:21).
>
> Do they not see that they are put to trial every year once or twice, still they neither repent nor do they take a lesson (The Qur'an, 9:126)?

The view that suffering comes either as a test or punishment for human beings has evoked criticism as well. It raises some questions about the suffering of innocent children and animals. Dr. Liyakat Takim, a Professor of Religious Studies at McMaster, grapples with this issue in his article on 'Theodicy' and suggests that suffering should be interpreted as trials or punishments only for the adults of sound mind who have their moral and religious obligations to fulfill. According to this view, the above-mentioned perspectives on human suffering do not apply to innocent children, mentally incompetent adults, and animals as they do not have the same rational capacity. This is because there is no utility of pain or suffering in such cases as these individuals are neither morally accountable nor suffering serves the purpose of elevating their spiritual potential.[87]

Dr. Takim cites the views of Mu'tazilite scholar 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025) and Ash'arite scholar al-Ghazālī to provide reasoning for these inexplicable situations of suffering. According to him, 'Abd al-Jabbar argues that God imposes sufferings on children and animals to warn the adult human beings around them and that children and animals will be compensated later for this pain in the hereafter. On the other hand, in the view of Dr. Takim, al-Ghazālī argues that even though believers do not know the reasons for all actions of God, they should be convinced that there is a supreme purpose behind all afflictions in this world. However, Dr. Takim acknowledges

[87] Liyakat Takim, "Theodicy," accessed March 03, 2021, http://www.ltakim.com.

that the mystery of suffering, especially in cases of children and animals, remains largely unresolved up to now.[88]

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter offers an account of the Qur'anic narratives of moral evil and natural evil in this temporal world. When it comes to moral evil, the Qur'an explains the semantic field of sharr and enlightens human beings about factors or agents, such as *nafs* and the devil, that help in bringing about various shades of evil in this world. In the context of natural evil or human suffering, the Qur'an states how God uses these natural calamities or adversities to test the believers' faith and punish the evildoers. The Qur'an conveys lessons through various parables or examples of people and communities in the past. Lastly, the chapter explains the Qur'anic instructions regarding how human beings should behave when confronted with different shades of evil in their life.

[88] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

RUMI'S VIEW OF EVIL

2.1 Life and Works

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), known as Rumi in the West and Maulana in Iran[89], was a 13th century Persian poet, Sufi mystic, and theologian of Islam. He was born on September 30, 1207, CE at Balkh, a town in the province of Khorasan in present-day Afghanistan. His family was renowned for having many Islamic theologians. Rumi's father, Baha'al din Valad, was venerated as a religious teacher by people in his community. In 1219, Baha'al din Valad, along with his family, left Balkh to escape the Mongol invasion and settled in the town of Konia, a city in present-day Turkey's Central Anatolia region, after travelling extensively in many Muslim places. Because of being an eminent theologian and religious teacher, he got a highly esteemed religious office in Turkey and was awarded the title "King of the religious scholars." Rumi assumed his father's position after his death in 1231, but, according to some scholars, it almost took him ten more years of study to be regarded as the true successor of his father.[90]

Under the influence of his father's teachings, Rumi started developing an interest in Sufism in the formative years of his life and had the honour of learning as a disciple of many spiritual masters of that time. Among others, the chief role in imbuing Rumi with the spirit of Sufism is believed to have been played by Burhanu'l Din Muhaqqiq of Tirmidh, a former disciple

[89] Manijeh Mannani, "The Metaphysics of the Heart in the Sufi Poetry of Rumi," *Religion and Literature* 42, no. 3, (2010), 161.
[90] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi,* (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2005), 3.

of Baha'al al Valad at Balkh.[91] Although Burhanu'l Din Muhaqqiq left a deep imprint on Rumi's mystical views, the important turning point in his spiritual life arrived at the age of 37 years when he met Shams al-Din of Tabriz, a dervish[92] or wandering Sufi. Rumi found in this stranger a spiritual instructor he had been seeking for long. The encounter dramatically changed Rumi's life. Sultan Walad, Rumi's eldest son, likens Rumi's encounter with Shams to the encounter of Moses with Khidr.[93] He portrays this remarkable transformation that Rumi's life underwent in these words,

> Never for a moment did he cease from listening to music and dancing.
> Never did he rest by day or night.
> He had been a mufti: he became a poet.
> He had been an ascetic: He became intoxicated by love.
> Twas was not the wine of the grape, the illuminated soul drinks only the wine of light.[94]

After his life-changing encounter with Shams of Tabriz, Rumi turned into a person who emitted the flames of divine love. And he passed down this influence on his disciples whom he continued to train during the rest of his life. These disciples became the source of the origin of the Mevlevi order of Sufism. Rumi passed away on December 16, 1273.[95] According to some accounts, his funeral lasted for 40 days and was attended by Persians, Greeks, Christians, Muslims and Jews.[96]

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91 R. A. Nicholson, *Rumi: Poet and Mystic,* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 18.

92 The term 'dervish' refers to a member of the Sufi (Mystic) community or tariqa. The dervishes made their appearance for the first time in the 12th century and are known for certain ecstatic rituals like dancing, howling and whirling.

93 R. A. Nicholson, *Rumi: Poet and Mystic,* 19.

94 *Ibid*, 20.

95 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi,* 4.

96 Muhammad Akram Rana, "Spiritual Role of Mawlana Rumi," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 2, (2008), 2.

Rumi gave expression to his thought through both mystical poetry and prose work, which have been translated into many languages of the world.[97] A significant portion of his writings has been translated into English by R. A. Nicholson and A.J. Arberry.[98] His masterpiece is believed to be *Masnawi-ye-Ma'navi* (a collection of six volumes of poetry consisting of about 25700 couplets).[99] Rumi's other works include *Fihi Ma Fihi* (a Persian prose work consisting of Rumi's conversations and sermons as recorded by his disciples)*, Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* (a collection of 40000 couplets explaining the main points and mystical states of Sufism)*, Makatib* (letters of Rumi)*,* and *Majales-e Saba* (Seven Sermons of Rumi).[100] Throughout these writings, the common theme that runs through is the idea of absolute love for God. Rumi's thought has left an indelible impact on the literature, thought, and aesthetic expressions of the Muslim world.[101] It is on account of Rumi's influence that interest in his poetry has never waned over the past several centuries. Even entertainers, such as Madonna, have adopted Rumi's poetical style in their songs and musical shows.[102]

2.2 Rumi's Account of Evil

In his writings, Rumi has explained various dimensions of evil in a comprehensive style. He takes up the question of the existence of evil in the world and answers it in terms of its origin, relativity

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97 Rumi's influence remains wide ranging despite concerns that translations of Rumi's works published in the West may not completely resemble the poet's writing since different scholars over the centuries have attempted to erase Islamic roots from his mystical thought in order to reconcile it with their own version of spirituality.

98 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi,* 1.

99 Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh, "Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation", *Mawlana Rumi Review* 5, (2014), 27.

100 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi,* 4-5.

101Muhammad Akram Rana, "Spiritual Role of Mawlana Rumi," 4.

102 Manijeh Mannani, "The Metaphysics of the Heart in the Sufi Poetry of Rumi," 161.

and its logical necessity for the functioning of the universe. Apart from that, in Rumi's view, evil arises as a result of the exercise of free will, and false suggestions or insinuations of the devil. However, he views evil as an instrument for testing the believers and facilitating their spiritual advancement as well. To further explain these views, this chapter relies on textual evidence from Rumi's two prominent works, *Mathnawi* and *Fihi Ma Fihi* (Rumi's Discourses).

2.2.1 Nature and Origin of Evil

Over the past two millennia, philosophers of religions and theologians have been confronting the question of the origin of evil. The very existence of evil tends to challenge foundational religious beliefs about the world. Some scholars suggest that we must first understand the nature of evil and trace its origin if we hope to make any progress in solving the mystery of 'the problem of evil'.[103] For example, in the words of Plotinus, "Those inquiring whence Evil enters into beings, or rather into a certain order of beings, would be making the best beginning if they established, first of all, what precisely Evil is, what constitutes its Nature. At once, we should know whence it comes, where it has its native seat, and where it is merely present as an accident; and there would be no further question as to whether it has Authentic Existence."[104]

Rumi argues that God, being the creator of everything in the universe, is the author of evil as well. Contrary to the viewpoint that 'God did not create evil; He just permits it,' for Rumi, everything, including evil, in this universe, is the creation of God. And every part of the creation, including evil, is giving testimony to His Greatness and infinite power of creation through its form and essence. Rumi explains God's purpose of creating this universe and everything in it in the

[103] W.P. Wilks, "The Origin of Evil," *Review & Expositor* 13, no. 3 (1916): 372.

[104] Plotinus, *Enneads,* trans. Stephen Mackenna (New York: Larson Publications, 1992), 1,8,1.

following words, “I was a hidden treasure,” God says, “and I wanted to be known.” “So, I created this world of darkness for My Light to become visible.”[105]

Rumi argues that the source of both good and evil is the same. And that both good and evil are one and indivisible. This view is in contrast with the Zoroastrians’ belief about Yazdan being the creator of good, and Ahriman being the creator of evil. Rumi states,

> This is our main quarrel with the Magians (Zoroastrians). They say there are two Gods: the creator of good and the creator of evil. Show me good without evil – then I will admit there is a God of evil and a God of good. This is impossible, for good cannot exist without evil. Since there is no separation between them, how can there be two creators?[106]

For Rumi, desirable things cannot be separated from the things we hate. It is hard to categorize anything as good or desirable unless we have the opposite or comparable in mind. The more we dislike a thing, the more we yearn for its opposite. In his words, “Evil is inseparable from good—for good is the giving up of evil, and the giving up of evil is impossible without evil, and were it not for the incitement of evil, no one would ever abandon the good—from this point of view they are not two”[107]

At another place in his writings, Rumi sheds light on the origin and nature of evil in the following words,

> Therefore, He made a viceroy, one having a heart, to the end that he might be a mirror for His sovereignty,
> So, He endowed him with infinite purity (spiritual light) and then set up against him a contrary (in the form of) darkness.
> He made two banners: white and black: one (was) Adam, the other (was) Iblis (devil) of the Way (to Him).

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[105]Jalal ad-Din Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* trans. Arthur Arberry (London: Routledge, 1995), 145.

[106] *Ibid,* 386.

[107] *Ibid,* 231.

> Between these two mighty camps, (there was) combat and strife, and there came to pass what came to pass. (Masnawi 6: 2153-2156).

In addition to this, Rumi suggests that God created this world to manifest His names and Attributes.[108] When it comes to God's attributes, two prominent schools of Islamic theology, the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, offer contrasting viewpoints. The Mu'tazilites argue that God's attributes do not have a separate existence from Him. They interpret God's attributes as a part of His Essence and hence identical with it. On the other hand, the Ash'arites contend that these attributes are something that subsists independently of God. In their view, thinking of attributes as identical with God's Essence is a denial of those attributes.[109]

William Chittick, a prominent commentator on Rumi's works, takes this debate forward in his *Sufi Path of Love* by suggesting that the difference between the Essence and the Attributes is entirely conceptual in nature. And there is no ontological difference between them. Even at the level of existence, there is no difference between the Essence and the Names and Attributes. There may be some difference between God's Vengeance and God's Forgiveness, and between His hearing and His seeing; yet this difference does not manifest itself in the Essence. This is because the Essence is One in all respects. However, this difference can be witnessed at the level of His Effects (*athar)* and His Acts (*afal).* To put it more specifically, for Chittick, God's Forgiveness and God's wrath are one in the Essence but at the level of creation, they are differentiated in various forms like heaven and hell.[110] Rumi further explains this idea in the following words,

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[108] *Ibid,* 397.

[109] Catarina Belo, "Mu'tazilites, Al-Ash'ari and Maimonides on Divine Attributes," *Veritas* 52, no. 3 (2007), 119-121.

[110] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 42.

> The effects and fruit of His Mercy are manifest, but how should anyone except Him know its Essence (quiddity)?
> None knows the Essence of the attributes of (Divine) Perfection except through their effects, and by means of comparison" (Masnavi 3:3635-36).

Rumi's argument implies that evil is an instrument that makes this world a more comprehensive mirror for the manifestation of the attributes of God. He argues that if there were no existence of evil in this world, God's names of Gentleness and Severity like 'the Forgiver' and 'the Avenger' would have remained hidden and not manifested. Furthermore, in the absence of evil, we would not be able to understand the need for God's punishment or forgiveness.[111] Rumi explains this argument at three different places in his works:

> God has two attributes: wrath and loving-kindness. The Prophets are theatres for both. To believers, they are a theatre of God's love, and to unbelievers, they become a theatre of God's wrath.[112]

> I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known." This is to say, "I created all the world to manifest My Reality now through graciousness, now through severity. [113]

> God was not increased by (His) bringing the world into existence: that which He was not formerly He has not become now.
> But the effect (phenomenal being) was increased by (His) bringing created things into existence. There is (a big) difference between these two increases.
> The increase of the effect is His manifestation, in order that His attributes and action may be made visible (Masnawi 4: 1666-68).

Rumi's view about evil as an instrument to understand God's attributes is shared by other Muslim theologians and philosophers such as Ibn Arabī who argues that God provided existence to the universe to make Himself known. In the views of Ibn Arabī, the great plenitude and infinite

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111 Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics," 302-303.
112 Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 397.
113 *Ibid,* 317.

diversity of God's names are manifested through the existence of all good and bad things in the universe. Everything in the universe gives testimony to a Divine name such as Omnipotent, Omnibenevolent, Humiliator, Honorer, Giver of life and death, etc.[114]

It is important to understand that, for Rumi, the presence of evil in this world is neither a reflection of God's imperfection nor does it detract from the infinite goodness of God. God is the creator, and this world is the creation. The imperfections present in the creation do not affect the perfection of God. Rumi likens God to a skillful painter who demonstrates His skill, perfection, and infinite creative power through both beautiful and ugly paintings. He argues,

> And if you say that evils too are from him, (that is true), but how is it a defect in His grace? (His) bestowing this evil is even His perfection: I will tell you a parable (in the illustration), O respected one.
> A painter made two kinds of pictures – beautiful pictures and pictures devoid of beauty.
> He painted Joseph and fair-formed houris, He painted ugly afreets and devils.
> Both kinds of pictures are (evidence of) His mastery; those (ugly ones) are not (evidence of) His ugliness; they are (evidence of) His bounty.
> He makes the ugly of extreme ugliness – it is invested with all (possible) ugliness.
> In order that the perfection of His skill may be displayed, (and that) the denier of His mastery may be put to shame.
> And if He cannot make the ugly, He is deficient (in skill); hence He (God) is the Creator of (both) the infidel and the sincere (faithful).
> From this point of view, then, (both) infidelity and faith are bearing witness to (Him): both are bowing down in worship before His Lordliness (Masnavi 2: 2535-43).

> God is not the kind of king for whom one voice is sufficient. If every atom in the world became God's herald, they would still be unable to properly proclaim His Truth. Therefore, day and night people are forever revealing God, but while some understand this, others are unaware. In either case, the manifestation of God's will is certain. For example, a prince orders a man to be beaten, and the man screams and shouts with pain. Still, everyone sees that both beater and beaten are revealing the prince's authority.[115]

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[114] Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 178.

[115] Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 317.

2.2.2 Evil, being the Opposite of Good, is a Logical Necessity

Rumi is also of the view that evil is a logical necessity for the functioning of this universe. Evil serves this purpose by providing contrast in the universe and making the good known to us. It may not be possible for human beings to understand good in the absence of evil.[116] The underlying basis of Rumi's argument is that things become known through their opposites. Rumi's view can be supported by a lot we observe around us, as we recognize many things in our lives through their opposing features or differentiation. Thus, the existence of most of the things around us becomes possible only through opposition or differentiation. Every member of a pair of opposites plays an important role and does the job of making the existence of the other member possible and known. For example, humans try to seek happiness, but they fail to appreciate that happiness does not have an independent existence in the absence of sadness.[117]

For Rumi, this principle or phenomenon of opposites applies to everything in the universe except God. This also explains why God is not visible to our eyes because He has no opposite. Rumi explains this argument through the following passages:

> Thou dost not know evil till thou knowest good: (only) from (one) contrary is it possible to discern (the other) contrary, O youth (Masnavi 4: 1345).

> God created pain and sorrow for the purpose that happiness might be made manifest by means of this opposite.
> Hidden things, then, are manifested by means of their opposites; since God has no opposite, He is hidden.
> For the sight fell (first) on the light, then on the colour; opposite is made manifest by opposite, like Greeks and Ethiopians.
> Therefore, thou knowest light by its opposite: opposite reveals opposite in (the process of) coming forth.

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116 Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil," 303.

117 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 49.

> The Light of God has no opposite in (all) existence, that by means of that opposite it should be possible to make Him manifest.
> Necessarily (therefore) our eyes do not perceive Him, though He perceives (us); see this (fact) from (the case of) Moses and the mountain (Sinai) (Masnavi 1: 1130-35).
>
> While to him whose eye has not beheld those (beauteous) cheeks, this smoky heat is (appears to be) the spirit.
> Inasmuch as he never saw Umar ibn 'Abdu'l-'Aziz, to him even Hajjaj seems just.
> Inasmuch as he never saw the firmness (unshakable strength) of the dragon of Moses, he fancies (there is) life in the magic cords.
> The bird that has never drunk the limpid water keeps its wings and feathers in the briny water.
> No opposite can be known except through its opposite: (only) when he (anyone) suffers blows will he know (the value of) kindness (Masnavi 5: 595-99).
>
> Life is the peace (harmony) of contraries; death is the fact that war arose between them.
> The grace of God has given amity to this lion and wild-ass – these two far distant contraries (Masnavi 1: 1293-94).

In *Fihi Ma Fihi*, Rumi tries to establish this point in another way. He argues,

> God wills only good, and amongst such good things is abstaining from evil. Therefore, God desires only the averting of evil. But evil cannot be averted unless evil exists. Or they say, 'God wills only faith,' but faith cannot exist except after disbelief, so disbelief is a prerequisite to faith. Therefore, willing evil is only bad when it is willed for its own sake. When evil is willed for the sake of some good, then it is good.[118]

Rumi further explains the necessity of the existence of these opposites by arguing that things can be opposite in nature even then they are joined and work for the same purpose. For example, day and night are opposites, but they are partners that serve the same purpose. If the night could go on forever, it would make our eyes overwhelmed and minds insane. When we sleep and take rest at night, our body organs, like hands, feet, minds, ears, and eyes, regain their vitality or strength. This energy or vitality is then consumed by the body organs during the daytime. Thus, Rumi's argument shows how even when things are organized in opposition, they are not opposed

[118] Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 322.

to each other in reality; rather, they may be working in complete harmony with each other. Going by the same argument, both good and evil are opposites, but they, in fact, work together and are inseparable.[119]

Rumi offers another example to illustrate the joint working of good and evil: "For instance, a man intent on murder becomes preoccupied with the man's wife and as a result, he sheds no blood. There is no doubt that taking the man's wife is evil but since this saves her husband's life, she also sees this as good. Therefore, evil and good are one thing and inseparable."[120] This understanding of evil is similar to the viewpoint of another Islamic theologian, al-Ghazālī, who stated that things become known through their opposites, and it was not possible to identify good in the absence of evil. Al-Ghazālī further argued that just like one could not enjoy health without illness, there would not be any perfection without imperfection. And the blessed ones in Paradise would not be able to know their blessedness without the existence of hell.[121]

2.2.3. Evil is Relative

Paul Carus, a German-American author and philosopher, lays out his argument about the relativity of evil by inquiring, "Is not evil the product of mere illusion? Is it not a relative term that ought to be dropped as a one-sided conception of things? Does it not exist simply because we view life from our own subjective viewpoint, and must it not disappear as soon as we learn to comprehend the world in its objective reality?" [122] Similarly, for Rumi, the whole of the

[119] *Ibid,* 385.

[120] *Ibid,* 385.

[121] Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 178.

[122] Paul Carus, "The Problem of Good and Evil," *The Monist,* Vol. 6, No. 4, (July 1896), 581.

opposition or differentiation we observe at the level of creation is only relative in nature. There is no absolute differentiation or distinction. Therefore, he contends, evil is also relative.[123]

Rumi explains the relativity of evil from two different perspectives: a) things are bad only in their relation to human beings and not in relation to God; and b) there is nothing absolutely bad or absolutely good in this world. As far as the first perspective is concerned, because things are differentiated as good and bad only in relation to their effects on human beings, this differentiation does not hold its validity in relation to God. In a broader cosmological context, evil has a different locality and explanation. This is because, for God, all things, good or bad, are doing the service of manifesting the hidden treasure. Rumi explains this argument through the following passages:

> A king has in his realm prisons and gallows, robes of honour and wealth, estates and attendants in waiting, feasting and celebration, drums and flags. In relation to the king, all these things are good. Just as robes of honour are the perfect flourish for his kingdom, in the same way, gallows and prisons are perfect ornaments. In relation to him all these things are perfect, but in relation to his people how could robes of honour and the gallows be one and the same?[124]

> A prince orders a tent to be stitched. One person twists the rope, another strikes the pegs, another weaves the cloth, another stitches, another rends, another uses a needle. Though to outward appearance they are diverse and different, in inner purpose they are united and perform a single task.[125]

In *Masnavi,* Rumi envisages a conversation between a Sufi and a Qadi to explain his argument that how everything is good in relation to God. He states,

> The Sufi said, He (God) whose help is invoked hath the power to make our trading free from loss.

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[123] Ozgur Koca, "Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Rumi (1207-1273) on the Question of Evil," 304.

[124] Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 57.

[125] *Ibid,* 88.

He Who turns the fire (of Nimrud) into roses and trees is also able to make this (World-fire) harmless.
He Who brings forth roses from the very midst of thorns is also able to turn this winter into spring.
He by Whom every cypress is made free (evergreen) hath the power if He would turn sorrow into joy" (Masnavi 6:1739-42).
"The Qadi said, were there no bitter (stern) Commandment (from God) and were there no good and evil, and no pebbles and pearls,
And were there no flesh, and Devil and passions, and were there no blows and battle and war,
Then by what name and title, would the King call His servants, O abandoned man?
How could He say, 'O steadfast one' and 'O forbearing one'? How could He say, 'O brave one' and 'O wise one'?
How could there be steadfast, sincere, and spending men without a brigand and accursed Devil?
Rustam and Hamza and a catamite would be (all) one; knowledge and wisdom would be annulled and utterly demolished.
Knowledge and wisdom exist for the purpose of (distinguishing between) the right path and the wrong paths. When all (paths) are the right path, knowledge and wisdom are void (of the meaning) (Masnavi 6: 1747-53).

Chittick, in *The Sufi Path of Love,* explains this argument of Rumi, suggesting that all things in the universe are good and work perfectly from the reference point of God. It is only in relation to human beings that we see problems. Purity and adultery, observing regular prayers and abandoning the prayers, faith and disbelief, giving testimony to God's Unity and idolatry, all are perfect when being viewed in relation to the divine perspective. However, when seen through human eyes, adultery, disbelief, and abandoning of prayers become bad whereas, regular observance of prayer, donating and giving testimony to the Unity of God become good.[126]

As far as the second perspective is concerned, Rumi explains that there are no absolute distinctions or qualities when it comes to the creation. 'Absoluteness' belongs to God only, such as absolute power, absolute good, absolute knowledge, etc. The reason for not having absolute

[126] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, 54.

things on earth is that when God's absolute attributes get manifested in the world, we see them in their weakened and less effective form because of their separation from the Ultimate Source. This also explains why the level of human power or knowledge in this world is so small when compared with God's power or knowledge. Thus, varying types and degrees of evil emerge to us on account of the goodness getting dimmer as a result of separation from the Source.[127] Rumi argues,

> Hence there is no absolute evil in the world: evil is relative. Know this (truth) also.
> In (the realm of) time, there is no poison or sugar that is not a foot (support) to one, and a fetter (an injury) to another.
> To one a foot, to another a fetter; to one a poison and to another (sweet and wholesome) like sugar.
> Snake-poison is life to the snake, (but) it is death in relation to man.
> The sea is as a garden to the water-creatures; to the creatures of earth, it is death and a (painful) brand.
> Reckon up likewise, O man of experience, (instances of) this relativity from a single individual to a thousand.
> Zayd, in regard to that (particular) one may be a devil, (but) in regard to another person he may be a beneficent (sultan) (Masnavi 4: 65-71).

> Nothing is vain that God created, (whether it be) anger or forbearance or sincere counsel or guile.
> Nothing of these things is absolutely good, nor is any of them absolutely evil.
> The usefulness and harm of each depend on the place (occasion): for this reason, knowledge is necessary and useful (Masnavi 6: 2597-99).

Rumi's argument about evil being relative is like the view of another distinguished Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who also argues that evil created by God is not absolute and general but relative. And things are bad or evil only in relation to human beings and not in relation to God. This similarity of views of Rumi and Ibn Taymiyya is important because the latter is widely

[127] *Ibid,* 53.

known for his rejection of various mystic belief systems. Despite their disagreements about mysticism as an approach to understanding man's relationship with God, their views on evil as relative, seem to have converged. According to John Hoover, Ibn Taymiyya argues in *Hasana* (14:276) that from God's perspective, all things, good or bad, serve some good or higher purpose. God's act of destroying Pharaoh and his followers was evil in relation to them, but this destruction served the universal purpose of being a glaring lesson for all generations to come. Ibn Taymiyya quotes the following Quranic verse to further clarify his view, "So when they angered Us, We took vengeance on them and We drowned them all together. We set them as a precedent and an example to later generations (43:55-56)."[128]

2.2.4. Evil and Free Will:

The subject of free will *versus* determinism has captivated the attention of theologians and philosophers for a very long time and continues to stay as one of the most perennial issues of scholarly disagreements in the disciplines of religion and philosophy.[129] Rumi's argument is that God has granted free will to human beings and that they are responsible for their actions. Rumi regards this free will as "the salt of devotion" without which there would not be any merit in the creation of this world. He further argues that without free will, there does not arise any concept of rewards and punishment. For instance, the revolution of the celestial sphere is involuntary in nature and so, it has no reward or punishment. Contrarily, human beings have been endowed

[128] John Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 192.

[129] Maria De Cillis, *Free will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi,* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

with the freedom of choice. This freedom of action warrants a system of accountability to hold human beings responsible for their actions and deeds.[130] Rumi argues in the following words,

> God said, do thou grant his need: let him have a free hand to choose (good or evil).
> Choice (free will) is the salt of devotion; otherwise (there would be no merit): this celestial sphere revolves involuntarily.
> (Hence) its revolution has neither reward nor punishment, for free will is accounted merit at the time of the Reckoning.
> All created beings indeed are glorifiers (of God), (but) that compulsory gratification is not wage-earning.
> Put a sword in his hand, pull him away from weakness (incapacity to choose), so that he may become (either) a holy warrior or a brigand.
> Because We have honoured man by (the gift of) free will: half (of him) is the honeybee, half is a snake" (Masnawi 3: 3286-91).

> In every act for which you have an inclination, you are clearly conscious of your power (to perform it).
> (But) in every act for which you have no inclination and desire, in regard to that (act) you have become a necessitarian, saying, "this is from God (Masnawi 1: 635-36).

> Some people say that angels, being pure reason and goodness, have no choice in anything they say or do. Like in a dream, if you have no choice of what you say or do, how can you be criticized when you utter unbelief in your sleep or declare God is One, or if you commit adultery. Angels are like this in their walking state. People are the reverse of angels – they have free will, are lustful and passionate, desire things for themselves, and are ready to shed blood to get what they want.[131]

Afzal Iqbal, another noted commentator on Rumi's works and the author of *The Life and Work of Jalaluddin Rumi*, in his article "Mevlana Rumi on the Perfect Man" has explained Rumi's concept of free will in detail. According to Afzal Iqbal, Rumi argues that human beings have been granted a certain amount of freedom of choice. And in the absence of the power of choice, there is no point in providing commandments and prohibitions to humans as prescribed in the Quran. This

[130] Afzal Iqbal, "Mevlana Rumi on the perfect man," *Islamic Studies,* Vol. 30 No. 3. (1991), 365.

[131] Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 364.

power of making a choice from among the alternatives is inherent in the human soul. According to Rumi, on the Day of Resurrection, the devil will state that he had merely presented the tempting options and objects of desire to human beings. He did not coerce them into choosing those options or yielding to those objects of desire. On the other hand, the angels will argue that they had told human beings not to indulge in the prohibited activities of sensual joy as it will add to their sorrow or grief in the end. The arguments of both the devil and angels give credence to the fact that human beings have been granted the freedom to choose in various aspects of their life. Another proof of free will is the sense of guilt or shame exhibited by human beings at various stages of their life. If there is no free will, from where does this shame or sorrow and guilty confession come?[132]

As narrated by Afzal Iqbal, Rumi further cites the Qur'anic point of commands and prohibitions to establish his view of free will. Rumi inquired if anybody had seen any wise person giving commands to a marble rock or showing enmity and anger toward stones and brickbats? If there were no free choice, why do we become angry with a person who has hurt us in any way? On the other hand, when a natural disaster arrives and damages our property or a flood carries away our highly expensive items, we do not take any action against that natural disaster or flood. Neither does a person get angry at the wind when it takes off his turban. This shows that we consider ourselves justified in expressing anger only when we know that the person whose actions may have provoked that anger was able to not have done so. In Rumi's view, all these things point to the existence of free will.[133]

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[132] Afzal Iqbal, "Mevlana Rumi on the Perfect Man," 366.

[133] *Ibid,* 367.

Rumi's argument about free will is in accordance with the viewpoint of the Mu'tazilites and many other Muslim theologians and philosophers. Similarly, Al-Farabi, the Second Master, was also an impassioned advocate of the view that God has endowed human beings with the power of free will by God. Moreover, Al-Farabi regarded free will as an extremely important ingredient required for human prosperity, arguing that human beings could not opt for good or evil in the absence of the power of free will.[134] However, Ibn Taymiyya rejected the arguments for humans having free will on the grounds that this requires us to suppose humans being the creator of their own acts.[135]

Despite these disagreements, free will continues to be considered as one source of evil by scholars even in the present times. Alvin Plantinga, an American philosopher working in the fields of philosophy, epistemology and religion, attempts to establish a link between free will and moral evil, arguing that free will is a source of moral evil. He explains this linkage in the following words,

> A world containing creatures who are 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. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil, and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's Omnipotence nor against His Goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.[136]

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[134] Mohsen Eslami and Muhammad Hossein Jamshidi, "The Man's Freedom and Free Will from the Point of View of Muslim Philosophers," 28.

[135] Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism,* 213.

[136] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 166-167.

2.2.5. Evil and the Devil

As explained in the first chapter, Muslims believe that there exists an intricate relationship between the devil and the existence of evil in this world. In accordance with this view, Rumi's argument is that the devil is an eternal enemy of human beings. The devil insinuates false suggestions and tempts human beings to commit every evil deed imaginable. His main tactics are lying, deceit, and trickery. According to Rumi, the devil, for the most part, attacks human beings' thought processes with a pack of lies and disappointing prospects playing tricks on their minds, which eventually leads them toward destruction. Rumi presents this view in the following passage:

> (He pleaded) like the Devil, who was saying, "O Preserver, O my Lord, grant me a respite till the Day of Resurrection.
> For I am happy (to be) in the prison of this world, in order that I may be slaying the children of my enemy.
> (And) if anyone has some food of faith and a single loaf as provision for the journey (to the life hereafter).
> I may seize it, now by plot and now by guile, so that in repentance they may raise an outcry (of lamentation).
> (And in order that) sometimes I may threaten them with poverty, sometimes bind their eyes with (the spell of) tress and mole" (Masnawi 2: 630-34).

This shows how the devil makes use of deceit and argumentation to lead human beings astray. The devil constructs his argument in such a logical style that it becomes difficult for humans to escape his trap without God's grace.

Javed Iqbal is Muhammad Iqbal's son and a famous commentator of Rumi's and Iqbal's works. In his article 'Devil in the Triangle of Rumi, Goethe and Iqbal' he analyzes how Rumi

portrays the devil in his writings. According to Javed Iqbal, Rumi argues that the devil sometimes presents himself as a lover of God, but he is a heartless being always using deceit as his main weapon. Rumi contends that Adam made a mistake out of stomach desire and sexual lusts, whereas Iblis got rejected due to pride and the ambitions taking birth in him inspired by reason. Being equipped with reason, the devil attacks human beings in the pattern of a snake. [137]

The devil, sometimes, persuades human beings to do virtuous acts to deprive them of a higher reward which they could earn from the act of remorse after failing to perform a virtuous act. Rumi elaborates this through a parable in *Masnawi* (2: 2604-2770). In the parable, the devil awakens Mu' awiya, the founder and first Caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate, at the hour of the prayer. Thereafter ensues a dialogue between the devil and Mu'āwiya which has been described in the following verses of *Masnawi*,

> He said, "The time for prayer is (all but) come to an end: You must run quickly to the mosque.
> Mustafa (Muhammad) said, boring the pearl of the idea, 'Make haste to perform your devotions before the time is past.'"
> He (Mu' awiya) said, "Nay, nay; tis not thy purpose to be my guide unto any good.
> (If) a thief comes secretly into my dwelling place and say to me, 'I am keeping watch,'
> How shall I believe that thief? How should a thief know the recompense and reward for good works?" (Masnawi: 2: 2612-2616)

When Mu' awiya forced the devil to tell the truth, his reply was,

> (At length), with the bitterest pangs, he (Iblis) said: "O such-and-such, know that I awakened you for the purpose.
> That you might join the congregation (of Muslims) in praying after the Prophet of high estate.
> If the time of prayer had passed, this world would have become dark to you and without a gleam of light.
> (And then) from disappointment and grief, tears would have flowed from your two eyes in the fashion of (water from) waterskins.

[137] Javed Iqbal, "Devil in the Triangle of Rumi, Goethe and Iqbal," *Iqbal Review* 42, no. 4, (2001), 7.

(Because) everyone has delight in some act of devotion and consequently cannot bear to miss it (even) for a short while.
That disappointment and grief would have been (as) a hundred prayers: what is (ritual) prayer in comparison with the (spiritual) glow of humble supplication (Masnawi 2: 2765-70).

Rumi suggests that it is on account of these deceit-laden insinuations and suggestions of the devil that God has instructed human beings not to fall into the trap of the devil as he is an open enemy of them.

2.2.6. Evil as the Instrument of Spiritual Advancement

For Rumi, evil, in the form of pain and suffering, also serves as an instrument for the spiritual advancement of human beings. Rumi argues that pain and suffering are important instruments to make a person develop spiritually and grow in faith. God uses these instruments to embolden believers to get rid of impurities or imperfections. The various vicissitudes of life marked by pain and suffering serve the purpose of bringing out the best of human character. The realization of this truth is greatly required for the spiritual growth of believers as it helps them encounter the trials of life in a more dignified style. These trials can be a hard pill to swallow since the process of trials and tribulations may become so stressful and painful that believers will start questioning the Divine purpose behind these trials. However, once believers come out of these trials successfully, they gradually become able to comprehend the benefits of having passed through trials or sufferings. More importantly, Rumi even provides guidelines, taking inspiration from the Qur'an, on how to deal with these Godly instruments. While going through pain and suffering, one should not get impatient. The wise people endure the process of pain with patience and perseverance because they know that all this is not purposeless. Rumi elaborates on this through these passages:

> Look at a chickpea in the pot, how it leaps up when it is subjected to fire.
> At the time of its being boiled, the chickpea comes up continually to the top of the pot and raises a hundred cries,
> Saying, “Why are you setting the fire on me? Since you bought (and approved) me, how are you turning me upside down?”
> The housewife goes on hitting it with the ladle, “No!” says she: “boil nicely and do not jump away from one who makes the fire.
> I do not boil you because you are hateful to me: nay, “this is so that you may get the taste and savour,
> So that you may get nutriment and mingle with the (vital) spirit: this affliction of yours is not on account of (your) being despised (Masnavi 3: 4159-64).
>
> Pain is a treasure for there are mercies in it: the kernel becomes fresh when you scrape off the rind,
> O brother, (to dwell in) a dark and cold place, to endure patiently sorrow and weakness and pain,
> Is the fountain of life and the cup of (spiritual) intoxication, for those heights are all in lowliness,
> That spring is implied in the autumn and that autumn is (fulfilled) in the spring: do not flee from it.
> Be a fellow-traveller with grief, agree with desolation, seek long (lasting) life in thy death (to self).
> Do not listen to what thy fleshly soul says that this place (of self-mortification) is bad, in as much as her doings are contrary (to thy spiritual advancement) (Masnawi, 2: 2261-66).

For Rumi, God afflicts people with predicaments or disasters as a sign of love. If people endure through difficult phases of life with fortitude and courage, God chooses them for His grace. In other words, once people show the spirit of gratefulness during the period of trials, God elects them for His Mercy. The interesting point is that some people are grateful to God for His Wrath and some for His Mercy. Rumi presents both situations as good and purposeful. He argues that gratitude is the key in all situations as this makes the way for Wrath to change into Grace. The learned people show the spirit of gratefulness when they are treated harshly because they know that this will lead them to get more. Even if God allows them to be sent to the lowest depths of

Hell, they will be able to find God's purpose advancing through their gratitude.[138] Rumi even justifies the existence of evil when it is there for some greater cause. In his words, "Willing evil is only bad when it is willed for its own sake. When evil is willed for the sake of some good, then it is good"[139]

At another place in *Fihi Ma Fihi*, Rumi suggests that God uses this mechanism of suffering to bring a person closer to Him. Since it is customary with humans to get forgetful of the Ultimate Source and indulge in worldly pleasures, through these phases of suffering, God sends a reminder to a person that they are not in this world to forget the purpose of their creation and get neglectful. Rumi contends,

> The suffering is also a Divine blessing. When the unbelievers are at ease, they forget the Source, so God reminds them through suffering. Therefore, Hell is a place of worship and is the mosque of infidels, for there the unbelievers remember God. In prison, suffering, and toothache, when pain comes it tears away the veil of forgetfulness. The sufferers turn to God and pray, "O Lord, O compassionate One, O God!" They are healed. Then the veils of forgetfulness descend again, and they say, "Where is God? I cannot find Him. I cannot see Him. Why should I even look?" How is it that when you were suffering you saw and found, but now you cannot see? Therefore, suffering is made to prevail over you to the end, so that you will remember God. The sinner is forgetful in times of ease and does not recollect God. In Hell, the sinner remembers night and day.[140]

This view of Rumi is shared by some other theologians and philosophers. al-'Izz bin 'Abdus-Salam, a 13th century Islamic theologian and jurist, highlights a similar view regarding suffering. He argues that evil, in the form of pain or suffering, can save us from many other debilitating and deadly evils like arrogance, ostentatiousness, vanity, and oppression. Izz ad-Din further states,

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[138] Rumi, *Fihi Ma Fihi,* 325.

[139] *Ibid,* 322.

[140] *Ibid,* 390.

"Were Nimrod someone poor and feeble, blind and deaf, he would never have argued with Ibrahim concerning his Lord."[141] This shows what a person may become if he has never seen poverty or suffering in life.

Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most influential Western philosophers, extolled the virtues of pain and suffering, arguing that life confers its greatest rewards on us when we come across adversity. In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche goes one step further and suggests that both pleasure and displeasure are, in fact, linked. If we reduce the quantum of displeasure in life, the quantum of pleasure will be reduced automatically. To quote his words, "The aim of science should be to give men as much pleasure and as little displeasure as possible. But what if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever *wanted* to have as much as possible of one *must* also have as much as possible of the other — that whoever wanted to learn to "jubilate up to the heavens'' would also have to be prepared for 'depression unto death'? And this is how things may well be."[142]

2.3 Conclusion

Rumi starts with the nature and origin of evil, attempting to explain almost all-important aspects and dimensions of its existence. The keynote of his argument is that the presence of evil is necessary for the functioning of human life the way God intended it to be. It would not have been possible for human beings to make sense of good otherwise. He explains this through the

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[141] al Imam al-'Izz bin 'Abdus-Salam, *Trials and Tribulations: Wisdom and Benefits,* trans. Abu Rumaysah (Daar Us-Sunnah Publishers, 2004), 17.

[142] Friedrich Nietsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 85.

phenomenon of opposites operating in this physical world. Making an argument about the relativity of evil, Rumi elucidates through examples how everything, including evil, is serving some important purpose in the realm of God, and how the existence of evil cannot be understood as an example of imperfection on God's part. Rumi also recognizes the role of the devil in the proliferation of evil and elaborates on how he lures human beings into committing evil acts through lying, deceit, and trickery. In the end, this chapter explains how Rumi understands evil as an instrument to elevate the spiritual potential of believers.

CHAPTER 3

IQBAL'S VIEW OF EVIL

3.1 Life and Works

Muhammad Iqbal, an eminent Muslim poet and philosopher of the 20th century,[143] was born on November 09, 1877, at Sialkot, a city of the Punjab province of, at that time, British-occupied India. He was introduced to religious education, such as instruction in reading the Qur'an and Arabic language, in a local mosque at the age of 4. Iqbal's father, Sheikh Nur Muhammad, was a religious man and an adherent of the Qadiri mystic order. It was on account of his father's influence that Iqbal developed an interest in mysticism and Qadiris' interpretation of Islamic theology.[144] Apart from his father, Maulana Mir Hasan, a Sufi scholar of religion and literature, had a great influence on Iqbal's early academic training. Mir Hasan, being a teacher of Iqbal at Scott Mission school in Sialkot, exposed him to Persian literature and inculcated in him an interest in Islamic theology as well as modern sciences.[145]

It was Iqbal's continued interest in both Islamic theology and modern science that led him to pursue his bachelor's degree in Philosophy, Arabic and English literature, and master's degree in Philosophy from Government College, Lahore, a high-ranking academic institution established by the British government in 1864. During his master's degree program, Iqbal came under the

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143 Abdul Hafeez Fazli, "Iqbal's View of Omniscience and Human Freedom," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 1 (2005):125

144 Stephan Popp, "Muhammad Iqbal – Reconstructing Islam along Occidental Lines of Thought," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 5 (Dec 2019), 204.

145 Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, "Iqbal: An Analysis on his Life, Works and Mission," *Journal of Islam in Asia,* Spl. Issue, no. 4 (2011), 366-367.

influence of Sir Thomas Arnold, a philosophy teacher. Arnold, a British orientalist and historian of Islamic art, further honed Iqbal's interest in Islamic theology by encouraging him to apply the purely rational method of philosophy to theological questions. It was Arnold's influence and Iqbal's newfound interest in the application of pure rationality to religion that encouraged the latter to proceed to Europe for higher studies. Iqbal obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College, Cambridge, and studied law at Lincoln's Inn in England. He received his doctorate in Philosophy from Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, Germany.[146]

It was during his stay in Europe that Iqbal was exposed to the writings of Nietzsche, Bergson, Kant and Fichte. Although Iqbal never exclusively focused on Islamic theology during his stay in the West, the views of these Western philosophers enabled him to develop a more nuanced understanding of Islamic theological issues.[147] It was also during this time that Iqbal came under the influence of Jalal al-Din Rumi's mystical thought after reading the *Masnawi*. Over time, the imprint of Rumi on Iqbal's thought became so strong that he regarded Rumi as his spiritual guide. As Iqbal said at one point, "The spiritual guide, Rumi, the holy philosopher opened to us the secrets of life and death." This is because Iqbal believed that Rumi understood the true spirit of the Quran and fully acknowledged his interpretation of the Quran.[148] This also explains the profound influence of Rumi on Iqbal's views regarding the problem of evil. Like Rumi, Iqbal also viewed evil as relative and recognized its role as an instrument in the accomplishment of God's plan of creating this universe.

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[146] *Ibid,* 367-368.

[147] Richard S. Wheeler, "The Individual and Action in the Thought of Iqbal," *The Muslim World* 52, no. 3, (1962):197.

[148] Dr. Nazir Qaiser, "Why Iqbal regarded Rumi as his Guide," accessed March 05, 2021, http://www.iqbal.com.pk.

Iqbal was a prolific writer and produced many poetical and philosophical works during his lifetime. He wrote poetry in Persian and Urdu languages. His Persian work is more extensive than Urdu literature.[149] His Persian works include *Asrar-i Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self) (1915), *Rumuz-I Bekhudi* (The Secrets of Selflessness) (1917), *Payam-e Mashriq* (Message from the East) (1923), *Zabur-i Ajam* (Persian Psalms) (1927), *Javed Nama* (Book of Eternity) (1932), *and Armughan-I Hijaz* (Gift from Hijaz) (1938). His prominent Urdu works were *Bang-i Dara* (The Call of the Marching Bell) (1924), *Bal-i Jibreel* (Gabriel's Wing) (1935), and *Zarb-i Kalim* (The Rod of Moses) (1936).[150]

Apart from these poetical works, Iqbal wrote two major philosophical works in the English language, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.[151] The latter is a compilation of seven lectures, which were delivered by Iqbal, at various public forums and institutes, in cities such as Aligarh, Madras, and Hyderabad, during the period from 1929 to 1932. The book, published in 1932, is regarded as the most important philosophical work of Iqbal. It is argued that had Iqbal not produced this book, it would have been extremely difficult to understand the essence of his philosophy.[152] Both his poetry and prose are consistent in views about the problem of evil and his message or theme remains the same while writing in different languages like Urdu, Persian, and English. His works have been translated into many languages and remain a source of inspiration for leading scholars of all major schools of Islamic

[149] Saleem Kidwai, "Iqbal – the Philosophic poet," *Indian Literature* 18, no. 3 (1975): 81.

[150] Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, "Iqbal: An Analysis on his Life, Works and Mission," 372.

[151] *Ibid,* 373.

[152] Abdul Hafeez Fazli, "Iqbal's View of Omniscience and Human Freedom," 125.

thought in South Asia. His books, both in poetry and prose, have been widely read and liked even by common people across the world.[153]

3.2 Iqbal's Understanding of Evil

To start with, Iqbal considers 'the problem of evil' as one of the most pressing problems with which all theological systems, especially the monotheistic traditions, have to grapple. He frames the problem of evil in the following words,

> If then, the rationally directed Divine Will is good, a very serious problem arises. The course of evolution, as revealed by modern science, involves almost universal suffering and wrongdoing. No doubt, wrongdoing is confined to man only. But the fact of pain is almost universal; though it is equally true that men can suffer and have suffered the most excruciating pain for the sake of what they have believed to be good. Thus, the two facts of moral and physical evil stand out prominent in the life of Nature. Nor can the relativity of evil and the presence of forces that tend to transmute it be a source of consolation for us; for in spite of all this relativity and transmutation, there is something terribly positive about it. How is it, then, possible to reconcile the Goodness and Omnipotence of God with the immense volume of evil in His creation? This painful problem is really the crux of theism.[154]

In these lines, Iqbal hints at the inherent difficulty of reconciling belief in the Goodness of Divine will with an almost universal fact of human suffering, and terms it the crux of theism. His exposition of evil can be understood from several different angles:

3.2.1. The Source of Evil

In agreement with other Muslim theologians and philosophers, such as Rumi, Ibn-Arabī, and Al-Ghazālī, Iqbal subscribes to the viewpoint that God is the creator of everything in the universe.

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153 Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, "Iqbal's life, works and mission," 366.

154 Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 76.

He believes that God, being the creator of everything in the universe, is the author of evil as well. Iqbal argues that human beings have the potential of being attracted to both good and evil, and these two entirely distinct potentialities of human nature have been created by the same One God and not two rival or antagonistic powers.[155]

For Iqbal, since there exists only Unity in the universe, everything, including evil is just one of the infinite aspects of God's creative expression and activity. As a result, nothing in the universe is beyond God or has an existence independent of His creative expression. God is neither infinite in terms of infinite spatiality nor finite in accordance with human's perception of space. The limitation of these temporal and spatial infinities is that they are not absolute. Thus, for Iqbal, God's infinity finds expression in infinite possibilities of His power of creation. And the universe, as we understand it, is just a partial expression of His creative energy.[156] Iqbal summarizes his thoughts on God's infinitude by concluding, "In one word, God's infinity is intensive, not extensive. It involves an infinite series but is not that series."[157]

This explains why, for Iqbal, the universe does not have an independent reality, and the Infinite Self is the only reality that exists. The logical consequence of this argument is that we cannot view evil as having any absolute existence in the world. Without any independent realities, there exist only various modes of apprehending God's infinity and works.[158] This view of God's infinity leads Iqbal to argue, "The world of matter, therefore is not a stuff co-eternal

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[155] Abbadullah Farooqi, "The Problem of Good and Evil as viewed by Iqbal," *Iqbal Review* 13, no. 3, (1972): 74-75.

[156] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* 61-62.

[157] *Ibid,* 61.

[158] *Ibid,* 62.

with God, operated upon by Him from a distance as it were. It is, in its real nature, one continuous act which thought breaks up into a plurality of mutually exclusive things".[159]

To further clarify his argument about the Unity of God, Iqbal quotes the question of creation once discussed by the disciples of Bayazid Bastami, a renowned Persian mystical scholar who also believed in the Unity of Being. When one of the disciples inquired about a time when there was God alone and there was no one besides Him, Bastami answered that it is the same now as it was then.[160] This begs the question that if there exists only Unity in the universe, what is the rationale behind the existence of all these contrasts in the universe such as good and evil, finite and infinite, real and ideal, eternal and temporal? Iqbal offers an answer to this question by suggesting that all contrasts are a series of shadows[161]of the Infinite Self. More importantly, for Iqbal, in God, all things such as the act of knowing and the act of creating, are the same and there is no separation.[162]

3.2.2 Evil is Relative and Has No Absolute Existence

Since the challenge posed by the problem of evil largely focuses on its impossibility in the light of God's Omnipotence and Goodness, Iqbal's particular conception of Omnipotence and its intimate relationship with Divine wisdom helps us establish how these two apparently mutually exclusive realities can co-exist. He defines God's Omnipotence in the following words,

> Omnipotence, abstractly conceived, is merely a blind, capricious power without limits. The Qur'an has a clear and definite conception of Nature as a cosmos of mutually related

[159] *Ibid,* 62.

[160] *Ibid,* 62.

[161] This viewpoint emerges out of his Neo-Platonic interpretation of Islam. As mentioned in the introduction, on account of his father's influence, he had a liking for this category of interpretation.

[162] Abbadullah Farooqi, "The problem of good and evil as viewed by Iqbal," 67.

> forces. It, therefore, views Divine Omnipotence as intimately related to Divine Wisdom and finds the infinite power of God revealed, not in the arbitrary and capricious, but in the recurrent, the regular, and the orderly. At the same time, the Qur'an conceives God as 'holding all goodness in His hands'.[163]

This shows that we cannot completely understand God's Omnipotence without understanding how it works in conjunction with Divine wisdom. All kinds of disorders or evils that appear to our eyes are a consequence of our limited perception and inability to see the necessary link between Omnipotence and Divine wisdom. Because of this inadequacy on our part, we cannot perceive the wholeness of God's plan, and, thus, things do not appear to us in their true colour. With our intellect, we can only grasp a very small part of the Infinite Self, which causes us to see contradictions that do not really exist.[164] This is why Iqbal states, "Our intellectual constitution is such that we can take only a piecemeal view of things. We cannot understand the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc and at the same time sustain and amplify life".[165]

Iqbal does not make this argument in isolation; rather, his thought was heavily influenced by the views of many other Muslim theologians and philosophers. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jalal al-Din Rumi also argued about the relativity of evil. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya, an Islamic theologian and philosopher, argued that everything is good from the perspective of God and that evil is relative as it exists only from the viewpoint of creatures.[166] Along the same lines, Ibn Sīnā's theodicy suggested that absolute evil does not exist, but relative evil does. He argued that all this is necessary for the perfection of the created order. For instance, burning is essential

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[163] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction,* 76.

[164] *Ibid,* 77.

[165] *Ibid,* 77.

[166] Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 181.

to the perfection of fire but fire may sometimes burn someone. In Ibn Sīnā's view, if these things like fire do not involve evil, they would become something else. For the perfection of the order, these things must exist as they are.[167] Maulana Kamaluddin Sahabi Astarabadi[168] writes:

> The scholar is busy with the cry, "There is no god but God"
> The ignorant is in doubt whether it is a foe or friend
> The ocean breaks into waves of its own impulse
> But the straw thinks that this agitation is going up against it.[169]

Interestingly, many Western philosophers also argue along the same lines. William Payne Alston, an American philosopher, argues, "the magnitude or complexity of the question is such that our powers, access to data, and so on are radically insufficient to provide sufficient warrant for accepting the thesis that God could have prevented many instances of evil without thereby losing some greater good."[170] Alston further elaborates, "our cognition of the world, obtained by filtering raw data through such conceptual screens as we have available for the nonce, acquaint us with only some indeterminable fraction of what there is to know."[171] In his *Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being,* Spinoza, a noted Dutch philosopher, was intrigued by the question that "why did not God create men so that they should not sin?" Spinoza offered one possible answer to this question by showing how sinning or evil is nothing but only intellectual properties. Like

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[167] *Ibid,* 177.

[168] Muslim Persian poet of the 16th century. He has taken the title of Astarabadi from Astarabad, the place of origin of his father. Some scholars also call him Nadjafi as he lived at Nadjaf for forty years.

[169] Abbadullah Farooqi, "The problem of good and evil as viewed by Iqbal," 66.

[170] Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: Guide and Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 576.

[171] *Ibid,* 577

Iqbal and Rumi, Spinoza was of the view that good and evil do not exist in nature and are only relative to human beings.[172]

Another argument put forward by Iqbal to explain why our finite minds cannot peer at the goodness latent in everything and instead see inconsistencies in various manifestations of evil is that they tend to view the creation of this universe as a specific and isolated act in the life of God. Therefore, Iqbal inquires, "Does the universe confront God as His 'other' with space intervening between Him and it"? He disagrees with this view and states, "The answer is that, from the Divine perspective, there is no creation in the sense of a specific event having a before and an after."[173]

These views of Iqbal about our inability to understand the process of creation in its entirety betray the influence of more recent Western philosophers as well. For instance, Iqbal makes comparison of the optimism of Friedrich Naumann [174] and pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer[175]. Naumann is very optimistic in his approach and thinks everything is good with the present situation in the world. Iqbal cites an excerpt from Naumann's *Briefe Uber Religion*, which reads as follows,

> We possess a knowledge of the world which teaches us a God of power and strength, who sends out life and death as simultaneously as shadow and light, and a revelation, a faith

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172 Muhammad Kamal, "Spinoza and the Relativity of Evil in the World," *Open Journal of Philosophy,* 8, (2018), 150.

173 Iqbal, *The Reconstruction,* 62.

174 Friedrich Naumann, a socio-political theorist and reformer, who later emerged as one of the influential supporters of the German liberalism and imperialism. He was born in Prussia in 1860 and died in 1919. He also served as a pastor in the Church. He was the founder of National Social Union (1896), an organization that advocated for social and democratic reforms along with a call for national unity. Britannica.com/biography/Friedrich naumann.

175 Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a 19th century German philosopher. He argued that this universe is not a rational place to live in. He is well-known for his book *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). Plato.stanford.edu/entries/Schopenhauer.

> as to salvation which declares the same God to be father. The following of the world- God produces the morality of the struggle for existence, and the service of the Father of Jesus Christ produces the morality of compassion. And yet they are not two gods, but one God. Somehow or other, their arms intertwine. Only no mortal can say where and how this occurs.[176]

On the other hand, Schopenhauer, another German philosopher, offers a pessimistic view of this question. Schopenhauer likens this world to a sort of perpetual winter and argues that a blind will permeates this universe, which expresses itself through a wide variety of living things. These living things take birth in this world, exist for a particular span of time, bemoan the severity of circumstances and then disappear. Because of his focus on the inability of our intellect to completely understand the process of creation, Iqbal questions the merits of both arguments on account of their foundation on a piecemeal view of the universe. Our present state of knowledge does not allow us to take an absolute position between pessimism and optimism.[177]

Iqbal offers an optimistic future by relying on the principle of evolution operating in the universe, which suggests that after going through a continuous process of evolution, human beings may manage to acquire complete control over natural forces and, consequently, subdue the darkness of evil. Iqbal termed this phenomenon meliorism, which will also make possible the ultimate victory of humans over evil.[178] This is important because the principle of evolution suggests that humans are not bound to live through a perpetual winter of suffering. Rather, the development through this evolving course will enable us to realize our true potential and bring us closer to our Creator. This process of evolution also informs Iqbal's particular understanding

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[176] Iqbal*, The Reconstruction,* 76-77.

[177] *Ibid,* 77.

[178] *Ibid,* 77.

of the Legend of the Fall, which I discuss in more detail in the next section. Iqbal's view also demonstrates the profound influence of Rumi on the former's thoughts. In his poem, *The Dream That Must Be Interpreted,* Rumi refers to a similar process of evolution that is taking humanity towards its logical end,

> Humankind is being led along an evolving course,
> through this migration of intelligence,
> and though we seem to be sleeping,
> there is an inner wakefulness
> that directs the dream,
> and that will eventually startle us back,
> to the truth of who we are.[179]

3.2.3. The legend of the Fall

Iqbal claims that there are many clues in the legend 'The Fall of Man' that can help us better understand the questions related to the problem of evil.[180] He interprets the legend of the Fall in a highly unconventional style. He argues that the legend of the Fall has no connection with the first arrival of Adam on the earth; rather, it simply denotes a jump of human beings from the primitive stage of evolution characterized by instinctive appetite to an advanced one where they acquired the faculty of self-consciousness and the power of free will. Iqbal also contends that neither this Fall implies any moral depravity, nor this earth can be understood as a torture place where the human beings have been imprisoned or confined to live through evil and sufferings

[179] Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, *The Essential Rumi,* trans. Coleman Barks (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1997), 112.
[180] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction,* 77.

for the first act of disobedience. Iqbal interprets the first act of disobedience as the first act of free choice and the emergence of self-consciousness.[181]

More importantly, it appears from Iqbal's argument that he does not believe in the fall of Adam from any heavenly abode. He regards human beings to be the inhabitants of the earth from the very beginning. In Iqbal's words, "Nor is there any reason to suppose that the word Jannat (Garden) as used here means the supersensual paradise from which man is supposed to have fallen on this earth. According to the Qur'an, man is not a stranger on this earth. Iqbal cites the following Qur'anic verse to substantiate his viewpoint: 'And We have caused you to grow from the earth' (71:17)".[182]

Iqbal argues that the word "Adam", as used in the Quran, can be better understood as a concept rather than a concrete human individual. According to Iqbal, the Qur'an uses the word Adam more to describe man as a vicegerent of God. Moreover, the Qur'an employs the terms of *Bashar* and *Insaan* in the verses which provide a clearer account of the origin of human beings. Iqbal cites the following Qur'anic verse to establish this point: 'We created you; then fashioned you; then said We to the angels, "prostrate yourself unto Adam" (The Qur'an, 7:11). He also refers to the Qur'anic verses 2:30-31 to make the point clearer.[183]

To further explore the role of the legend of the Fall in informing his understanding of evil, Iqbal focuses on two episodes from the Quran. The first episode was described in verse 7:19

[181] *Ibid,* 80.

[182] *Ibid,* 79-80.

[183] *Ibid,* 79.

whereas, the second episode can be found in verses 20:120-22.[184] These three verses read as follows:

> O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise, and eat from wherever you like, but do not go near this tree, otherwise, you shall join the transgressors (The Qur'an, 7:19).
>
> But Satan whispered to him (Adam): said he, O Adam! Shall I show thee the tree of eternity and the Kingdom that faileth not? And they both ate thereof, and their nakedness appeared to them, and they began to sew of the leaves of the garden to cover them, and Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray. Afterwards, his Lord chose him for Himself and was turned towards him and guided him (The Qur'an, 20: 120-22).

In verse 7:19, the Qur'an mentions only the tree; whereas, in verse 20:120, the Qur'an mentions both 'the tree of eternity' and 'the kingdom that fails not'. Iqbal contends that the word Jannat mentioned in the Qur'anic verse 7:19 cannot be interpreted as the place that will be the everlasting abode for the righteous people; instead; it refers to a primitive state in which humans can live free of the sting of human wants.[185] He presents this argument in the following words:

> In the sense of the eternal abode of the righteous, Jannat is described by the Qur'an to be the place 'wherein the righteous will pass to one another the cup which shall engender no light discourse, no motive to sin'. It is further described to be the place 'wherein no weariness shall reach the righteous, nor forth from it shall they be cast'. In the Jannat mentioned in the legend, however, the very first event that took place was man's sin of disobedience followed by his expulsion. In fact, the Qur'an itself explains the meaning of the word as used in its own narration. In the second episode of the legend, the garden is described as a place 'where there is neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor nakedness'. I am, therefore, inclined to think that the Jannat in the Qur'anic narration is the conception of a primitive state in which man is practically unrelated to his environment and consequently does not feel the sting of human wants, the birth of which alone marks the beginning of human culture.[186]

[184] *Ibid,* 79.

[185] *Ibid,* 80.

[186] *Ibid,* 80.

Iqbal further argues that it is inherent in the nature of the human self to seek knowledge, and desire for self-multiplication or immortality, and power. Regarding the desire for knowledge, Iqbal believed that,

> Firstly, the episode is mentioned immediately after the verses describing Adam's superiority over the angels in remembering and reproducing the names of things. The purpose of these verses is to bring out the conceptual character of human knowledge. Secondly, Madame Balvatski who possessed a remarkable knowledge of ancient symbolism, tells us in her book, *Secret Doctrine,* that with the ancients the tree was a cryptic symbol for occult knowledge.[187]

In Iqbal's view, Adam was commanded not to eat the fruit of this tree because of incompatibility between the particular nature of his inner self and that sort of knowledge. Adam's self was harmonious only with the kind of knowledge that could be acquired through a process of slow learning and patient observation.[188] Iqbal concludes in the following words,

> Satan, however, persuaded him to eat the forbidden fruit of occult knowledge and Adam yielded, not because he was elementally wicked, but because being hasty by nature, he sought a shortcut to knowledge. The only way to correct this tendency was to place him in an environment which, however painful, was better suited to the unfolding faculties. Thus, Adam's insertion into a painful physical environment was not meant as a punishment; it was meant rather to defeat the object of Satan, who as an enemy of man, diplomatically tried to keep him ignorant of the joy of perpetual growth and expansion. But the life of a finite ego in an obstructing environment depends on the perpetual expansion of knowledge based on actual experience. And the experience of a finite ego to whom several possibilities are open expands only by the method of trial and error.[189]

[187] *Ibid,* 81.

[188] *Ibid,* 82.

[189] *Ibid,* 82.

This shows that, for Iqbal, the experience of finite ego can be open to more possibilities and growth only through a slow process of evolution, which involves the method of trial and error. Iqbal's heavy reliance on the principle of evolution allows him to develop a different interpretation of the legend of the Fall and the essential role of sufferings or obstructions placed in our path.

However, Iqbal's views have drawn severe criticism from Muhammad Maroof Shah, a well-known scholar of Iqbal's philosophy.[190] In Shah's views, Iqbal, in his bid to harmonize the Islamic accounts of things with modernism, chose to give too much importance to the theory of evolution, which has caused him to go off the track in more ways than one.[191] Contrary to Iqbal's view of the first man on this earth as primitive, Shah further contends that the first man on this earth, according to the Qur'anic account, was actually a prophet, who was endowed with the highest levels of spiritual, moral and intellectual capacities. Thus, Iqbal puts too much emphasis on psychological or biological aspects of the process of creation and fails to appreciate much deeper religious and spiritual dimensions. Shah also cites the viewpoint of the traditionalist school of thought to solidify that notion. "From the traditionalist perspective, it is modern man rather than the so-called primitive man who deserves the derogatory title of primitive man".[192]

This view leads Shah to differ from Iqbal's interpretation of the word Adam as a concept rather than a concrete human individual. On the contrary, Shah argues that Muslims, throughout

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190 An author interested in exploring the inter-relationships of religion, philosophy, literature, and mysticism. He is a noted commentator of Iqbal's works.

191 Muhammad Maroof Shah, "Iqbal's Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall: A Critique," *Intellectual discourse,* 2009. Vol. 17, No. 2, 202.

192 *Ibid,* 205.

history, have taken a view of Adam as the first man, a concrete human individual and a prophet. Shah goes a step further and suggests Iqbal's account is not even compatible with the Quranic narrative. In support of his view, Shah suggests several reasons including:

> There are significant reasons why traditional Islam opposes the theory of evolution. The first man is seen by the Quran as a vicegerent of God. Adam is the first *bashar* or *insan.* Man did not evolve (especially his spiritual faculty) according to the Qur'anic worldview. His bodily evolution could be conceded as Maurice Bucaille argues in his *What is the Origin of Man: The Answers of Science and Holy Scriptures* from the Qur'anic viewpoint but his psychological and spiritual evolution cannot be unproblematically derived from the Qur'an. Darwinism, especially its philosophical naturalism, is not reconcilable with the traditional Qur'anic picture of man, his origin and destiny.[193]

Iqbal's interpretation of the word *Jannat* in the legend of the Fall has also been the subject of criticism from Shah. Shah quotes the words of Vahidudin Khan, an Indian Islamic scholar and commentator of the Qur'an: "While it is perfectly legitimate to raise the question whether the *Jannah* which man has lost is identical with the *Jannat* to which the righteous are destined, it is not legitimate to convert it into an earthly abode."[194] Shah also takes exception to Iqbal's viewpoint that man belongs to this earth from the very beginning and interpretation of the Fall in terms of an evolutionary stage where human beings acquired the power or capability of self-consciousness.[195] Shah explains his objection to Iqbal's viewpoint in the following words,

> The Quran says that man was created in trouble and that he was thrown out, disgraced, from paradise to this earth. The earth by no means appears to be his original home. There was definitely some kind of fall and, man has been punished in some significant sense for his original act of disobedience. Man did lose something worthwhile by eating the forbidden fruit. It was not an unmixed blessing for him to lose his original home. Adam wept bitterly and mourned this loss, as the Prophet's traditions testify. This fall may have been some kind of rise or gain as Iqbal says, but from a purely religious or spiritual

193 *Ibid,* 205-206.

194 *Ibid,* 206.

195 *Ibid,* 209.

> viewpoint, it was definitely a fall, a loss, and Adam committed a great sin by eating this forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve did usurp the Divine privilege. They placed themselves outside the Divine centre and cut themselves off in practice, though in an illusory sense, from God.[196]

3.2.4. Iqbal's Conception of Free Will and Evil

Iqbal argues that human beings have been granted the power of free will, which distinguishes them from other creatures under the rigid control of God. More importantly, man's freedom of will is not just a theoretical concept; rather, it is fully operational in many respects. Iqbal argues that human beings have been given the power to choose and act in many aspects of life,[197] and this ability to exercise freedom is what endows human life with creativity.[198]

Iqbal is of the view that God (the Ultimate Ego) has endowed human beings (finite egos) with many latent powers, including the capability to accept or reject God's guidance. He cites the following Quranic verse to substantiate his viewpoint: "The truth is from your Lord; wherefore let him who will, believe and let him who will, be incredulous" (The Qur'an, 18:19). Human beings have been given the option to go for good or evil and they will be requited correspondingly on the day of accountability. Therefore, the Quran also says, "If ye do well, yet will ye do well to your own souls; and if you do evil, ye will do it unto the same" (The Qur'an, 17:7). Apart from the Qur'an, Iqbal's views were also influenced by an Italian philosopher, Dante Alighieri, who viewed the freedom of will as the greatest gift God has endowed human beings with.[199]

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196 *Ibid,* 209.

197 Riffat Hassan, "Freedom of Will and Man's Destiny in Iqbal's Thought," *Islamic Studies* 17, no. 4, (1978): 207.

198 *Ibid,* 208.

199 *Ibid,* 209.

However, unlike Dante, Iqbal goes a few steps ahead and highlights how the freedom of will is fraught with many responsibilities and risks. In his view, God has taken a risk by putting His faith in man and granting him freedom of will because there is every possibility of its use in violation of God's commandments. Iqbal states, "But to permit the emergence of a finite ego who has the power to choose, after considering the relative values of several courses of action open to him, is really to take a great risk; for the freedom to choose good also involves the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good. That God has taken this risk shows His immense faith in man; it is for man now to justify this faith."[200] However, this act of taking a risk on the part of God should not be viewed as any limitation on God's Omnipotence since Iqbal also views it as an act of God's creative freedom, "No doubt, the emergence of egos with the power of spontaneous and hence unforeseeable action is, in a sense, a limitation on the freedom of the all-inclusive Ego. But this limitation is not externally imposed. It is born out of His own creative freedom whereby he has chosen finite egos to be participants of His Life, Power, and Freedom."[201]

This is because God chooses to take a risk[202]of endowing human beings with the power of doing both good and evil to offer human beings the space to prove themselves good and

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[200] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction,* 81.

[201] *Ibid,* 76.

[202] Iqbal's observation that God has taken a risk by granting free will to human beings does not imply that God has limited knowledge and does not know how human beings may misuse the power of free will. Iqbal's observation should be read in the light of the following Qur'anic verse: "The One who created death and life, so that He might test you as to which of you is better in his deeds. And He is the All-Mighty, the Most-Forgiving" (The Qur'an, 67:2). The Quran further says that "Everyone has to taste death, and We test you through bad and good (situations) with a trial and to Us you will be returned" (The Qur'an, 21:35). God already knows how human beings will behave through good and bad situations, but despite that, He is giving them an opportunity to act so that they can be punished or rewarded for their actual acts. All this should be construed in terms of the creation of Paradise and Hell. Thus, Iqbal suggests that God, by granting freedom of will to human beings, has chosen not to exercise his authority right away in certain aspects of human life.

righteous.[203] Iqbal explains this argument, at another place in his writings, in the following words, "Now goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of willing cooperation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of goodness."[204]

Iqbal's views on free will seem to be greatly inspired by the Mu'tazilites school of thought. As explained in the introductory chapter, the Mu'tazilites emphasize the importance of free will. They regard human beings as responsible for their actions and liable to be held accountable on the Day of Judgement. Thus, if there is no free will, how will human beings prove themselves righteous or wicked? In the absence of free will, God cannot hold human beings accountable for their deeds. Apart from the Mu'tazilites, many other Muslim philosophers including Rumi and Al-Farabi argued along the same lines that God has granted the power of free will to human beings and they are free to act or behave as they like in many aspects of life.

3.2.5. Role of the Devil in Iqbal's Understanding of Evil

Iqbal's description of the devil plays a critical role in his philosophy of evil and the process of evolution that he envisions human beings are bound to go through. According to Iqbal, the devil has five main characteristics: a) He is persistently striving to accomplish his goal and no one can defeat him in deceit and cunningness; b) He entered into a confrontation with God; c) He has the distinction of being the first lover of God's Unity; d) He is proud and arrogant beyond all bounds; e) His strategy is political in the sense that he prepares earthly devils in the shape of

[203] Riffat Hassan, "Freedom of Will and Man's Destiny in Iqbal's Thought," 210.

[204] Iqbal, *The Reconstruction,* 80-81.

political leaders and prompts them to carve out the plans for waging wars on the earth. All this, in turn, leads to misery, deaths, and widespread destruction.[205]

In line with Qur'anic understanding, Iqbal also views the devil as being created from fire, full of pride, and the principal agent of evil. He argues that it was the devil's pride that made him rebel and refuse the commandment of prostrating before Adam.[206] In *Payam e Mashriq,* Iqbal explains the pride and arrogance of the devil in the following words:

> I am not a creature of mere light that I should bow to man.
> He is a base-born thing of dust, and I of fire am born.[207]

> The stars' bodies were made by you,
> I am their motive force.
> I am the substance of the world,
> I am life's primal source.
> The body draws its soul from You
> But I arouse the soul.
> While You waylay with blissful peace,
> I lead with action's call.
> That low-born creature of earth, man,
> Of mean intelligence,
> Though born in Your lap, will grow old
> Under my vigilance."[208]

These lines show that the act of disobedience of the devil helps us understand the link between the devil and the presence of evil in this world. However, for Iqbal, the devil's power is not by virtue of being close to God but in terms of taking his mission of leading human beings astray on

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[205] Javid Iqbal, "Devil in the Triangle of Rumi, Goethe and Iqbal," 12-15.

[206] Tanvir Ahmad, "Satan in the poetry of Dr. Iqbal: An Overview," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development,* Vol. 4, No. 2, 50.

[207] Muhammad Iqbal, *Payam e Mashriq,* trans. Hadi Husain (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1971), 42.

[208] *Ibid,* 42-43.

the earth in a confident manner and not getting discouraged after the downfall. The failures of human beings to resist the temptations of the devil make him further powerful.[209]

This is also what makes Iqbal's views on this subject more interesting because he views the devil as feelings a kind of shame on being an enemy of man, a highly weak creature. In the poem 'Satan's Lament,' Iqbal narrates the devil's complaint to God that he had higher aspirations, but this frail man's company has devastated him. The devil says that this ambassador of God on the earth is so weak that he has never tried to resist his temptations. The devil further laments that he wanted a strong opponent who could have withstood his trickery and would have forced him to make great efforts to succeed. Thus, the devil requested God to provide him with a bold enemy having strong resolution and strength of character. By narrating the feelings of the devil, Iqbal highlights the frailty of the modern man and the weaknesses of their character. He seems greatly disappointed with the levels of the moral degradation of mankind.[210]

This understanding of the devil as an agent of evil lines up perfectly with views of the Qur'an. As discussed in the first chapter, God instructed human beings to avoid the temptations of the devil as he is an open enemy to them. God has made it clear in the Qur'an that the devil will use every trick to make human beings go astray and lead them towards destruction. The devil requested God for a period of respite to deceive human beings and lure them away from the commandments of God until the Day of Judgement. God gave the devil that respite as a great test for human beings.

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[209] Tanvir Ahmad, "Satan in the poetry of Dr. Iqbal: An Overview," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development,* 51.
[210] *Ibid,* 52.

However, for Iqbal, this is not a complete analysis of the presence of evil. Because of his belief in the principle of evolution and human progress, Iqbal views the devil also as a principle of activity. In his view, the devil has a role to play in the process of man's conquest of natural forces after going through the process of evolution. Once humanity goes through evil or suffering-laden situations, which exposes them to more knowledge and possibilities over time, it will be able to subdue natural forces and reach its logical conclusion. Building on this argument, Iqbal portrays Adam returning to God both triumphantly and penitently. Adam will feel triumphant for accomplishing his mission on this planet of the earth but also penitent because he allowed himself to be lured by the devil. However, Iqbal can trace some satisfaction even in this penitence since failures on parts of Adam, which Iqbal regards a sort of intellectual evil, also contributed to humanity's evolutionary development. Had there been no evil, there would have been no struggle or striving and therefore no improvement.[211]

3.2.6 Role of Suffering in Iqbal's Understanding of Evil

In line with the views of Rumi, Ibn Taymiyya, Al Farabi and many other Muslim theological philosophers, human suffering plays an essential role in Iqbal's understanding of evil and human development since it serves as an instrument to allow the unfolding of latent capabilities and new avenues of spiritual development for humanity. Human suffering, as Iqbal sees it, is not necessarily a curse that hangs over mankind and only God with His infinite mercy can lift. Rather, suffering makes humans strong and enables us to master new challenges. Based on this view, Iqbal suggests that had humanity not known sufferings, we could not have recognized God. Thus,

[211] Riffat Hassan, "Iblis in Iqbal's Philosophy," *Iqbal Review,* Vol. 25, No.3, (1984), 25-28.

when evil presents itself in the form of suffering, individuals should see it as an opportunity to achieve a stronger personality.[212]

In other words, the problem of evil, in the form of suffering, plays a critically important role in bringing maturity or development to an individual's self. Iqbal, like Rumi and Ibn Arabī, regards suffering as a gift from God that enables a person to broaden his vision and experience life in its wholeness. The suffering can go a long way in sharpening the insight of an individual. Therefore, many other Islamic theologians like Al-Ghazālī have also believed that evil, in its form of suffering, carries the seeds of good within itself. If this view is correct, life would not have been worth living without the possibility of efforts to overcome the various manifestations of evil.[213] This particular view of evil and the spiritual value of human suffering is in accordance with the Qur'anic understanding of this subject. As the Quran states, "It could be that you dislike something when it is good for you; and it could be that you like something when it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know" (The Qur'an, 2:216).

Iqbal argues that suffering, through difficulties and predicaments, enables an individual to discover their hidden potentialities and reach that level of perfection that is required to be a vicegerent of God on earth. To reach that level of perfection, in Iqbal's view, an individual self has to pass through three distinct phases of "obedience to the law", "self-control – the highest form of self-consciousness", and "Divine Vicegerency". Though human beings have already been endowed with the qualities of Vicegerency (Quran 2:28), in Iqbal's thought, no human being

212 Abbadullah Farooqi, "The Problem of Good and Evil as viewed by Iqbal," 76.

213 *Ibid,* 77.

except those purified through sufferings, obedience, detachment, and self-control, can attain that highest level of God's Vicegerency.[214]

Iqbal explains the importance of suffering in the following verses:

> Understanding the world is harder than looking for it,
> It is when the heart bleeds, that vision is born.[215]

> Even if one petal is missing, it is not rose,
> If the nightingale has seen no autumn, it is no nightingale,
> The heart's tale is coloured with the blood of desire
> The song of man is incomplete without sorrow
> For the seeing eye, the grief's scar is the lamp of the heart
> For the spirit, the mirror of a sigh is an adornment
> Man's nature acquires perfection through unhappy accidents
> For the heart's mirror, the dust of woe is like rouge.[216]

> Don't keep protecting it – for your mirror is that mirror
> That broken it is dearer to the eye of the mirror-maker.[217]

Riffat Aman, an Assistant Professor, Government College for Women, Srinagar, India, encapsulates Iqbal's view of suffering in the following words:

> Iqbal describes the perfect man in superlatives, he is the completest ego, the goal of humanity, of life, both in mind and body; in him and the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony. This highest power is united in him with the highest knowledge. In his life, thought and action, instinct and reason, become one. He is the last fruit of the tree of humanity, and all the trials of a painful evolution are justified because he is to

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214 Rifat Aman, "Iqbal's Concept of man," *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research* 2, no. 3, (2017), 13.

215 Muhammad Iqbal, Bang-e-Dara (Lahore: Shakir Publications, 2015), 270. (Verses translated by Riffat Hassan)

216 *Ibid,* 162.

217 *Ibid*, 282.

> come at the end. He is the real ruler of mankind, his Kingdom of God on earth. Nature must undergo long and painful travels to bring to birth the perfect man.[218]

This shows that Iqbal would not approve of any philosophy of life that allows humans to run away from the adversities and difficulties in the form of self-negation, ascetic inaction, or withdrawal from active life. Since the Quran teaches us to be patient in the face of difficulties, Iqbal can be best understood as an impassioned advocate of self-assertion and self-realization. He pleads individuals to stand tall during trials or travails and never let themselves lose their identity. However, Iqbal concedes that at the present level of evolution, human beings are not capable enough to understand the full importance of the discipline that is nourished by the phenomenon of pain, which makes us immune to dissolution.[219]

Iqbal's argument of standing tall during the trials or difficulties is similar to how the Quran instructs believers to respond in the face of difficulties. While mentioning the modes of trials and tribulations faced by the earlier prophets or people of faith, the Qur'an instructs the believers to be steadfast and patient. And there are glad tidings for those who are able to behave in accordance with such expectations. The Qur'anic verses, in this regard, read as follows:

> There have been many prophets with whom many men of Allah have fought; they did not lose heart for what they suffered in the way of Allah, nor did they become weak, nor did they yield. Allah loves the steadfast (The Qur'an, 3:146).

> Surely, We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger, and loss in wealth, lives and fruits, and give good tidings to the patient. Who, when suffering visits them, say, 'We certainly belong to Allah and to Him we are bound to return. Those are the ones upon whom there are blessings from their Lord and mercy as well; and those are the ones who are on the right path (The Qur'an, 2:155-157).

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[218] Rifat Aman, "Iqbal's Concept of Man," 13.

[219] Iqbal, *Reconstruction,* 83-84.

3.3 Conclusion

Iqbal's approach towards interpreting evil is modernistic and unconventional. He considers scientific observations and evolutionary viewpoints while trying to explain the existence of evil in the presence of God's Omnipotence and Omnibenevolence. The central point of his argument is that evil is relative and exists only in relation to human beings. He explains that human beings, with the present level of their knowledge of the universe, are incapable of resolving the issue of evil or suffering. Finite minds do not possess the breadth of vision required to understand the Divine Wisdom behind all that is happening in the universe. Through the interpretation of the legend of the Fall, Iqbal argues that it was necessary after the creation of Adam to put him into such a kind of painful environment that could help unfold his latent potentialities. His philosophy of evil also considers the power of free will and the role of the devil. More importantly, Iqbal argues that evil, in the form of sufferings and predicaments, has played an important role in the evolution of favourable circumstances on this planet. These difficulties also prepare a man for the position of the Vicegerent of God upon this earth.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

'The problem of Evil' has continued to survive as one of the most contested issues in the history of philosophy of religion. Over the past two millennia, this problem has been used to raise doubts about the existence and benevolence of God, representing a major challenge to theologians and philosophers who attempt to ground religious beliefs within the realm of reason alone. In its most basic form, the pervasiveness of rampant evil in our everyday lives makes it increasingly difficult to secure rational foundations for the possibility of faith in an Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent God. The challenge posed by the existence of evil has evoked responses from holy scriptures of different religious traditions. Apart from these holy scriptures, theologians, mystics, and philosophers have offered solutions to this puzzle from diverse perspectives. Yet, a conclusive answer to the question of the existence of evil remains to be found.

This thesis is an attempt to explore the notion of evil in the Qur'an and Islamic Mystical thought as expressed in the writings of Rumi and Iqbal. Both thinkers, whose mystical views are largely rooted in the Quran, agree that God is the creator of everything, including evil, in this universe, and that evil exists to serve as an instrument in the actualization of God's plan of creating this universe. Their main argument is that evil is relative, that is, things are bad only in relation to human beings and not in relation to God, and that evil has an essential role to play in the spiritual development of an individual.

As the Qur'an is considered by the Muslims to be the most fundamental and primary source of Islamic thought, any attempt to explain a particular phenomenon from an Islamic perspective starts with the guidance offered by the Qur'an on that issue. A noteworthy feature

of the Qur'an is that it does not treat the problem of evil as a theoretical problem. The Qur'anic narrative, apart from explaining the semantic field of *sharr*, delineate various manifestations and implications of the problem. The semantic field of *sharr includes* transgression, defamation, breaking the treaties, miserliness, going astray, disbelieving in God, associating partners with God, and turning away from God.

The Qur'an sheds light on various shades of moral evil and argues how it is manifested through the actions of various agents such as *nafs,* seductions of the devil, etc. When it comes to natural evil and human suffering resulting from it, the Qur'an provides a utilitarian place for it in human life. The Qur'anic narrative explains natural evil from two different perspectives, that is, as tests or trials for the believers and as warning or punishment for the wrongdoers. According to the Qur'an, this world is a temporary place for humans and not an actual reality. During the transient phase of this life, God allows problems or suffering into our lives to put our resolve to test and strengthen our faith. The Qur'an promises great rewards for those who stay patient during these trials and tests. In addition to that, God also uses trials or tribulations, on certain occasions like the battle of Uhud, to differentiate sincere believers from hypocrites. The second perspective from the Quran suggests that evil is used to punish the disobedient or transgressors in this world when their actions cross a certain limit. The Qur'an clarifies this view through many examples that God subjected the people to punishment for refusing to believe in His message and guidance. The pages of history illustrate this view through detailed accounts of punishments meted out to Pharaoh and peoples of prophets Lot, Noah, Thamud, Salih and Ad.

Rumi argues that God has created this world to manifest His names and attributes. For Rumi, if there would have been no evil in this world, God's names such as 'the Forgiver' and 'the

Avenger' would have remained hidden or unexpressed. He also argues that the presence of evil is a logical necessity for the functioning of this world. His view is that evil exists because things become known through their opposites. In the absence of evil, it would have been difficult for human beings to identify good in this world. Rumi also uses this argument to explain why God is not visible to human beings. God is not visible since He has no opposite. However, for Rumi, things, despite being opposite in nature, are joined and work for the same purpose.

Rumi argues that 'absoluteness' belongs to God only and that is the reason for not having absolute things in this world. Rumi also explains the existence of evil through the necessity of free will. According to him, God has granted the power of free will to human beings and that the misuse of free will by human beings is responsible for many shades of moral evil in this world. He also highlights the role of the devil in his philosophy of evil, explaining how the devil employs deceit and argumentation to lead human beings astray. The solution Rumi suggests is that human beings should always invoke the grace of God to avoid the traps of the devil.

As far as Iqbal's view of evil is concerned, the limited intellectual constitution of human beings enables them to take only a piecemeal view of things. Human beings see disorder or evil because they have a limited vision and cannot comprehend God's Wisdom behind all this. Through his interpretation of the legend of the Fall, Iqbal suggests why it was necessary, after the creation of Adam, to put him in such an environment that could help in the unfolding of his hidden or latent capabilities. Like Rumi, Iqbal also believes in the role of free will and the devil in the proliferation of evil in this world. He views evil as an instrument of spiritual advancement of human beings and states that sufferings enable an individual to discover their hidden talents and reach the level of perfection required to be a vicegerent of God on earth.

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