

THE ORIGIN AND OVERCOMING OF EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Introduction

Peter Koslowski

The question of the origin and the overcoming of evil and suffering is one of the fundamental questions of religions. All religions attempt to explain how evil and suffering came into the world and continue to exist. The philosopher Friedrich Schelling wrote cogently in his *Philosophy of Revelation* at the middle of the nineteenth century that the concepts of the will and of evil and the belief that the world is transformed distinguish religion and philosophical traditions that have originated under the influence of religion from ancient philosophy, which recognizes neither evil nor the will nor the transformations of the world. One could extend this idea and say that the emphasis on the significance of the will and of human deeds for the condition of the world, the attempt to speak about evil and suffering and to “cope” with them, and the view that the world, as it is, is not original, but is instead the consequence of transformations caused by evil, represents the characteristic trait of the religions that most distinguishes them from philosophical traditions.

1. Evil as the Transformation of the World for the Worse, and Hope in the Transformability of the World for the Better

Religions do not accept the world simply as it is, but instead recognize in the world something that is not as it should be: evil and suffering. For the world religions, the evil and suffering in the world are contingent; they do not belong to its essence. Religions – in contrast to science and to the unreflective, everyday relationship of human persons to the world – recognize the world not only as it is, but also as it has become, as it has become in the religions’ interpretations of history. It is characteristic of religions and the religious understanding of the world that they accept a reality existing before and beyond evil and suffering, and a transformability of human persons and the world from a state of evil and suffering to one of the good and of freedom from suffering.

This conviction of the transformability of the world and human beings fol-

flows from the difference between God and the world, the absolute and the finite, which all world religions acknowledge in one way or another. God guarantees by his absoluteness that evil and suffering are not likewise absolute, that they have not always existed and will not exist for all eternity. The world religions' conviction, contrary to present appearances, that evil and suffering are not original and their assertion of the transformability of reality for the better correspond to the deepest hopes of humankind. The conviction of the transformability of the world is the precondition of the possibility of salvation. The hope in salvation from evil and suffering is, therefore, a second conviction that belongs, along with the conviction of the transformability of evil and the world, in one way or another to all of the world religions.

The question of how this liberation from evil and the changing of the world will take place distinguishes the religions from each other, of course, just as much as they are distinguished from one another by their stories and theories about the origin of evil and thus the world's need of salvation. But it is common to at least the three Abrahamic religions that evil has come into the world as a change, that it is not original, and that it can likewise be overcome by a second change. One task of this second Discourse of the World Religions is to clarify how Hinduism and Buddhism address this question.

If evil does not belong to the original and integral constitution of the world, but has entered into it as a disturbance and a change for the worse, it raises the question of how it is compatible with the existence of God. Although this question is frequently called the theodicy question, it is broader in meaning than the theodicy question and concerns all religions, even if not all of them have developed the specific form of the philosophical theodicy question. The theodicy question, as it is found in seventeenth-century European philosophy, is a very specific form of the answer to the question of evil and its compatibility with the conviction of the omnipotence and the goodness of God. In this philosophical theodicy discussion, it became the question of the compatibility of the assumption of God's omnipotence and perfect goodness with the undeniable existence of evil in the world. The critics of the thesis of God's omnipotence argued that God either is not omnipotent, if he could not create a world better than this one, or is perhaps omnipotent, but not perfectly good, because he obviously did not wish to create a better world.

Our discourse will not become lost in the *aporiai* of the compatibility of God's omnipotence and the existence of evil in his creation, but will instead pose the more modest and concrete question of how the deficient condition of the world, the evil and suffering in it, are compatible with the idea of God and which answers the world religions provide to this question, which concerns all of them in their core convictions.

2. God's Perfection and Suffering

The question in the world religions of the existence and origin of evil is closely related to the problem of how God's perfection and absoluteness relate to history and the occurrence of the contingent or accidental, and of evil in history. Does the perfection of God stand outside evil and history, or is God himself subject to history and, therefore, to the evil and suffering that occur in it? Is the Absolute or God a becoming-absolute or an unchanging-absolute? Does, for example, Brahman in Hinduism become Shiva and Vishnu in history, or is it super-historical, above and beyond the world and history? Is the creation seen as a self-realization or as a self-expression of God, as God becoming himself or as a free production outside God in the expression of his word?

The question of God's immutability or becoming is tied to the question of the relationship of God to suffering. Does God also suffer evil and becoming, or is he beyond all suffering and becoming? The world religions have given quite different answers to this central question. Islam dismisses the theological idea of the suffering God and reproaches Christianity for having God suffer and perish in the suffering Christ. Christianity itself, of course, has for the most part rejected and dismissed the idea of a God subject to suffering and, consequently, to evil. It maintains, against such conceptions of a God subject to suffering, that God in Christ only freely co-suffers with humans, but is not subject to suffering.

All three Abrahamic religions criticize the gods of polytheism or, as they call it, heathenism, which suffer contingency and evil, just as humans do. They see the finite gods of heathenism, which are subject to the world or the powers of the world, as false gods, or even idols. It will be seen in this volume how the world religions view this and how a discussion between the monotheistic religions and Hinduism and Buddhism, which at least do not exclude a multitude of gods, will develop.

The question of the perfection or imperfection of God is closely related to the question of his relationship to suffering. The Christian answer to the question whether God himself suffers or whether he, as a perfect being, does not share in human suffering at all, was to choose the intermediate, third alternative that God does not suffer, but sympathizes or co-suffers with us. How this Christian solution to the problem of the tension between the absence of suffering and the perfection of God, on one hand, and his love and compassion, on the other, relates to the solutions to the problem of suffering and the perfection of God in the other religions is another important aspect of the theme of this book.

3. Evil as a Consequence of Liberty and the Transmission of Evil

The religions that regard the world as creation begin by assuming that evil and suffering are not constitutive for the creation, but are instead the consequence of a contingent event in the creation, a fall. This event is seen both as singular, as an act and occurrence in history, and as continuing to have consequences. In Christianity, this interpretation of the origin of evil as a singular event and as a continuing disposition toward evil is linked to the doctrine of original sin, which is common to all human persons. From the doctrine of original sin, in turn, the doctrine of the need for redemption of *all* human persons follows.

The doctrine of original sin finds itself again and again the object of criticism, both from philosophy and from other religions. It is criticized for being tragic or pessimistic in nature. It does in fact contain a tragic element, because it assumes the guilt of the entire human race, which is not caused by every person individually as a result of morally free transgressions, but is inherited by all persons, as members of the human race, from their parents.

Two questions related to the doctrine of original sin appear to be of central importance to the reflections and the theme of this book. The first is its thesis that the origin of evil and every evil act are singular, because there is no substance and no universal of evil. Evil is instead a particular, singular reversal and “perversion” of the principle of the good. Its origin does not exist in a substance of evil, but in the will of the human person, who responds deliberately, singularly, and evilly to a singular situation of temptation and intentionally acts wrongly. Every other theory of evil that recognizes the origin of evil outside the human will or in a substance of evil leads into Manichaeism and dualism, which define evil as a substance of the world, as a universal power of evil in the world. Consequently, if one finds in the world something like a universal disposition toward evil or structures of evil, they cannot stem from a substance of evil, but only from free acts of evil. If, however, evil is not only individual, but also social, and can stem only from free deeds, it is completely sensible to assume that evil is transmitted individually in the entire human race, that it thus is inherited by children from their parents.

If evil, understood as a reversal of the principles of being, reverses and corrupts the good singularly each time it occurs, this means that each evil act possesses within itself features of the singular reversal of the good. It does not react to a situation incorrectly and act wrongly in a universal way, but always in a specific way. However, if evil is at the same time so universal, it can only be a disposition that is inherited by persons individually in a universal way.

At the same time, the doctrine of original sin assumes a predisposition to wrongness in all human persons, not only in the Christian or only in the non-Christian. This reinforcement of the disposition of humanity toward evil in the world modifies the singular character of the evil act, in that original sin has cre-

ated dispositions toward evil that encourage the singular evil act, the realization of evil in the individual act, and make its occurrence more probable, but without negating the individual guilt of each evil act. The conviction of the change in character of the entire human race brought about by evil and original sin not only creates pessimism concerning the ability of human persons to act rightly, but also contains an encouraging and liberating statement about the equality and solidarity of human persons as sinners. The doctrine of original sin creates a solidarity of humanity in its equality as humanity endangered by the evil within its own heart.

All human persons are equal in the respect that they carry within themselves both a predisposition to good and a predisposition to evil. They not only mutually support themselves in the good, but also are in solidarity with one another in the struggle against the evil within themselves. They can also strengthen one another in their ability to perform and in their performance of evil actions. The doctrine of original sin rules out declaring themselves to be “pure” and others – whether other nations or other religions – to be “impure.” All human beings and all religions are affected by the inclination and the ability to become evil, and must be in the position to counteract this predisposition.

The ability of the entire human race to perform evil actions and the singular character of the evil act also forbid characterizing, for philosophical or theological reasons, a people or a nation as especially or singularly evil and a particular action as uniquely evil and beyond comparison to all other evil in the world. All nations are affected by the ability to be evil, and every evil act bears features of the singular in itself. Another theory of evil would attribute to a nation the substance of evil and, therefore, lead to a dualism that understands evil as an independent substance in the world, as a national or racist characteristic, and therefore as a power and substance independent of God.

A dualism of a good substance and an evil substance can be accepted neither in God nor in the world, however, without destroying the unity of God and of the world.¹

All religions deny that evil is the last word and the ultimate reality. The hopes of humanity in an end to evil are too closely related to the idea that evil is not an eternal substance equal to the eternity of God, but instead a singular and temporary disturbance of reality, which does not affect God in his essence. The world that is influenced and affected by evil is not imperishable and substantial. Everything evil in the world is singular, perishable, and insubstantial. For the world religions, the finite world, affected by evil, is only the veil laid over imperishable reality, which is determined by God alone.

If evil is neither a substance equal to God nor one created by him, the origin

¹ On the centrality of the problem of evil and overcoming it to the philosophy of religion, see P. Koslowski, *Philosophien der Offenbarung: Antiker Gnostizismus, Franz von Baader, Schelling* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zürich: Schöningh, 2001).

EVIL AND THE OVERCOMING OF SUFFERING IN BUDDHISM

Jae-Ryong Shim

1. Opening Remarks: The Diversity of Buddhist Traditions and the Universality of Suffering

It is impossible for anyone to describe and explicate the origin of evil and the overcoming of suffering in Buddhism, because nobody can legitimately claim to represent the whole of Buddhist traditions. I, for one, specializing in the Korean Seon Buddhist tradition and groping for an alternative way in the multi-faceted transformations of Mahayana Buddhism, can never write about the proposed topic of discussion in this epoch-making millennial meeting. But I dare say that the diversity of traditions would never efface the universality of suffering. However we may try to define it, we can never deny that we suffer, from the lowest degree of physical pain to the grave psychological pang of mortal anxiety, as long as we live an imperfect life in this conditioned world full of anxiety and danger. By dint of that universality of suffering, I venture to share my understanding of Buddhist approaches to the problem of suffering.

At the outset I would like to digress a bit by mentioning my subjective experience of suffering from the moment of my birth. Perhaps nobody can ever consciously remember what happens at the time of birth except the very laboring mother. This story of my birth was told again and again by my mother and my maternal grandmother. Whenever I visited my grandmother's house in my childhood days, I was constantly called by a nickname "Kkeokkuri," which means "a child born with his foot first." My left foot came out before my head was born, so I was told. Both a Western gynecologist and a traditional midwife were asked to come to the scene of my mother's labour. The Western doctor, it was reported, advised my father to have the newly born baby cut to pieces so that at least my mother's life could be saved. At that moment, the midwife in my home village interjected and implored my father: "Before you cut the child, let me try. If I fail, you can have your way." With his reluctant assent, the midwife tried almost an hour or so to help me come to the world. I could not even cry out, it was told, so exhausted during delivery. All the physical scars I carry along throughout my life until today still witness to that traumatic experience that I can never remember, and yet is so deeply built into my childhood memory

and onwards. My constant headache and fragile physique might be attributed to my early birth-condition. Later on, when I was initiated to the study of Buddhism, I learned that birth is the first of the eight kinds of suffering that the Buddha Sakyamuni enumerated in his first sermon on the Four Noble Truths. I wonder whether Gautama Siddharta himself might have gone through a similar experience: it is said that his mother, Maya, gave birth to Gautama on a street under a tree. Perhaps because of the difficult labor, she passed away a week later. When I was three years old, my father passed away, leaving my mother, a young widow, with three children in the whirlpool of the rocky modern history of the Korean peninsula in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Korea was “liberated” from the harsh colonial exploitation for half a century, and then immediately catapulted into the trajectory of ideological warfare, which is still going on in the only country in the world that is torn apart between North and South. The Koreans are still suffering, regardless of their religious affiliation. I can vividly remember my mother’s haggard face, a small photo of almost a skeleton with sunken eyes, juxtaposed with so many corpses along the street in the war-devastated port of Inchon. Even though I do not even remember my father’s death, during the short period of the twenty years of my teaching career in my *alma mater*, I could have eye-witnessed at least twenty young students falling from the rooftop, yelling for “democracy and freedom” in a sort of “fire ball” and burning themselves to death. The traditional Buddhists would never condone such suicidal attempts. Nonetheless, in the recent history of nation-building, the collective destiny of the Korean people is graphically portrayed in the late Ham Sok Hon’s spiritual history of Korea, entitled “Queen of Suffering.” Using very harsh words, he shouted:

Haven’t you all nailed my mother to a cross and exposed her private parts to her shame, Red China holding her one arm and Japan grasping the other, while the polar bear holds down her head and the eagle from the Rocky Mountains holds down her legs?¹

With this understanding of both a very private experience of this author’s childhood memory of suffering and the Korean people’s collective perception of historical destiny, this author would venture to deal with the problem of evil and suffering in Buddhism.

Though we ordinarily assume evil or badness to be similar to suffering, I believe we can distinguish the two notions and thus deal with them separately. My preliminary Buddhist understanding tells me that both evil and goodness, as

¹ This passage is from the author’s preface to Ham Sok Hon, *Queen of Suffering: A Spiritual History of Korea*, trans. E. Sang Yu, ed. and abr. John A. Sullivan (London: Friends World Committee for Consultation, 1985), p. x.

long as they do not last forever, can produce suffering. Hence, the following order of presentation.

First, an initial understanding of evil in the original Buddhist tradition, that is, among the Theravada Buddhists, will be presented. An additional T'ien-t'ai sectarian notion of radical evil in the Buddha-nature will be introduced in passing to clarify, as well as modify, the claim that there is no problem of evil in Buddhism. Also, the nature of suffering as conceived by the Buddha will be explained, in order to mitigate criticising Buddhism as pessimistic.

Secondly, the Buddhist ways of overcoming suffering will be explained, with special emphasis on the "engaged" Buddhists in Asia, in order to counter-balance the meek way of appeasing or purifying method of eliminating suffering in traditional Buddhism. By "meek" I mean a sort of psychological or mental approach to eliminating suffering without paying much attention to the structural or societal aspect of suffering.

As a tentative conclusion, I would like to point out a certain tendency in Buddhism toward a shift of perspective and practice, in order to catch up with the problem of suffering in the contemporary world, especially related to the sufferings of persons caught up in and created by the relentlessly mechanistic enterprise of capitalistic-consumer society, the evil of which is intricately wrought into the very nerve and skein of its structure.

2. Evil and Suffering in Buddhism

2.1. THE CONCEPTION OF EVIL IN BUDDHISM

The basic Buddhist attitude to evil is not to deny its existence nor merely to reconcile its presence in the world, but to observe carefully, and study its nature and causes in order to eliminate it. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha dictates: "Never commit any evils; but practice all the goods. Simply purify your mind/heart. This is the teaching of the Buddhas" (Verse 183). Perhaps this is the single most important passage we can find among the Buddhist scriptures, the *locus classicus* from which we can derive the Buddhist conception of evil. Both good and evil are posited as real, and the fundamental way of eliminating evil, i.e. the mind-purification method, is prescribed.

All sentient beings then, Buddhist would claim, are subject to evil in various forms, until they attain Nirvana, the highest state of well-being, characterized by bliss, perfection, and freedom, in which our finitude comes to an end. Everything that falls short of that Nirvanic reality is therefore ridden with the evil of unhappiness and suffering. Until we attain this *summum bonum* of Buddhist realization, while we are living in the world of repeated birth, death, and re-birth (*samsara*) *ad nauseam*, we are prone to experience all forms of evil. There are

external and physical evils (natural and man-made), such as floods, earthquakes, cancer, terminal illness, and nuclear weapons; internal and psychological evils, such as mental agony and remorse; moral evils, such as jealousy, hypocrisy, and ingratitude; social and political evils, such as poverty, injustice, inequality, and slavery. I will summarily examine two typically Buddhist notions of evil, namely, hell and *mara*. Hell is the worst state of being in the *samsara* world, and *mara* is a cluster of psychological hang ups. I will also pay special attention to the Buddhist notion of human nature, whether it is good, bad, or neutral.

It is noteworthy that in the Buddhist texts we cannot find any existence to be inherently evil. Even the most horrible existence in hell, for example, is understood as a term representing painful bodily sensations. The popular beliefs in hell are, therefore, denounced by the Buddha: "When the average ignorant person makes an assertion to the effect that there is a hell (*patala*) under the ocean, he is making a statement which is false and without basis."² Of course, there abound graphic portrayal of hells, from ancient India through medieval China to contemporary Korea, in almost every Buddhist temple. According to the Mahayana notion of expedient device (*upaya*), however, they serve ceremonial and didactic purposes only to commoners in order for them to alleviate suffering.³

We often hear of the "forces of Mara" being similar in stature to Satan in biblical religions. *Mara* literally means "death," and figuratively symbolizes all the oppositions and obstructions that spiritual seekers have to deal with on their paths to final liberation. *Mara* is, in this sense, the epitome of evil. Actually, the scholastic tradition classifies four kinds of *mara*: 1) physical death (Buddhism takes over the ancient Indian concept of *Mara*, personified), 2) constituents of personality which are decaying and destructive, 3) moral defilements which lead to the repeated birth and death, and 4) the evil one as a person who tempts and obstructs us humans who seek to liberate ourselves from the conditioned world. Hence we are told concrete examples of the forces of *Mara*, such as "lust, aversion, hunger and thirst, desire, sloth and torpor, fear, doubt about the truths, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, the gain of praise, respect and fame obtained by false pretense, as well as boasting of oneself while denigrating others." On the basis of this description, we are certain of the fact that the forces of *Mara* are nothing but the cluster of psychic hang ups.

What about the Buddhist conception of human nature? Just as there is no conception of "eternal hell" in nature, as in some forms of theistic religion, the evil in humans is considered to be an adventitious defilement. It is true that Buddhism recognizes that man is capable of sinning. But the evil that he com-

² See K. N. Jayatilleke, "The Buddhist Conception of Evil," in Jayatilleke, *The Message of the Buddha* (New York: Free Press, 1974), pp. 250-60, esp. p. 251.

³ See Stephen F. Teiser, "'Having Once Died and returned to Life': Representations of Hell in Medieval China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 48 (1988), pp. 433-64, esp. p. 461.

mits is not due to his inherent wickedness, but to his ignorance. This ignorance can be gotten rid of, because man is fundamentally good by nature. The mind of man is often compared in the Buddhist texts to gold ore, which is covered incidentally by defilements of iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver. If these impurities were removed, the gold could shine with its natural lustre. So shines the mind when the evil is removed.

In sum, denying eternal hell, and not regarding man as a sinner, Buddhism gives us a less pessimistic account of man and nature than is to be found in other theistic religions. The following claim is in agreement: "There is no problem of evil in Buddhism," for "Buddhism accepts the existence of both good and evil in the world of conditioned existence." Thus states the late K. N. Jayatilleke. For the reader who is interested in the problem of theodicy, it may be worth quoting his argument at length:

Evil becomes a problem only for a theist, who maintains that the world was created by a perfect Being, omniscient, omnipotent and infinitely good.... If God is good, whence comes evil?... What is the Buddhist solution? *The problem does not exist in the above form* for the Buddhist, since he does not start with the theistic presumption that the world was created by a perfect Being. Instead he accepts the fact of evil and argues on its basis that the world with all its imperfections could not be the creation of a perfect Being.... The Buddhist is under no compunction to deny or explain away the fact of evil. If we deny the existence of evil, there would be no reason nor even the possibility of getting rid of it. If we justify it, it would be still be unnecessary to try and eliminate it. But evil is real for the Buddhist and must be removed as far as possible at all levels of existence for the good and happiness of mankind, by examining its causal origins (emphasis added).⁴

One important addition is necessary to counterbalance the above remark about the Buddhist conception of human nature. In China, from the third to the tenth centuries, Buddhism took over the classical debate of the pre-Chin period about whether human nature is good, evil, or neutral. T'ien-t'ai, one of the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist sects, claimed that even the Buddha-nature has inherent evil, a rather remarkable feat considering the traditional Chinese penchant to insist on the inherent goodness of human nature. Some may call it a creative reinterpretation of Chinese Buddhism, distinct from the original Indian Buddhism.⁵

⁴ See, K. N. Jayatilleke, *ibid.*, pp. 252-53.

⁵ "What makes the Chinese doctrine of *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha Nature outstanding and unique is that Chinese Buddhists developed and reinterpreted it creatively. A good example of such creative reinterpretation is the T'ien-t'ai doctrine that evil inherently exists in Buddha Nature." Heng-ching Shih, "T'ien-t'ai Chih-I's Theory of Buddha Nature: A Realistic and Humanistic Understanding of the Buddha," in *Buddha Nature*, ed. Paul Griffiths and John Keenan (Tokyo : Buddhist Books International, 1990), pp. 153-69.

THE FALL AND THE OVERCOMING OF EVIL AND SUFFERING IN ISLAM

Adnan Aslan

We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself. He is the great danger, and we are pitifully unaware of it. We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied, because we are the origin of all coming evil.

C. G. Jung¹

As human beings we are obliged to face much difficulty, hardship, pain, and suffering, since we are not angels and we do not live in Heaven, and we also arrive in an environment that has already been religiously and socially structured. There are natural calamities such as fires, floods, tidal waves, volcanoes, earthquakes, droughts, and famines that cause immense suffering. Diseases such as leprosy, cancer, and AIDS; physical deformities and impairments such as misshapen limbs, blindness, deafness, dumbness, mental deficiency, and insanity are additional misfortunes that kill or cause people to suffer. However, the greatest harm has come from the immoral behaviour of humankind itself. Selfishness, envy, greed, deceit, cruelty, cowardice, oppression, injustice, and despotism cause untold agony, as do certain human creations such as the “gift” of advanced technology, nuclear weapons, which *are* the most monstrous and horrifying ‘inventions,’ given their ability to wipe the human race off the face of the earth.

These causes of suffering do not discriminate between theists, atheists, and agnostics, either. They may strike all of us. In such circumstances, what should be done? What matters is *not* producing a consistent theodicy in order to defend a particular theistic belief, nor dethroning God, having found irreconcilable the ‘arbitrary’ existence of natural and moral evils with the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent Deity. *I believe that what matters is how each person can become psychologically as well as spiritually prepared or equipped to overcome particular instances of suffering.* This is the task the Quran undertakes.²

¹ C. G. Jung, *Jung on Evil*, selected and introduced by Murray Stein (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 1.

² Although rational theodicy may not seem central in the Quran, some writers have approached it from this perspective. For instance, a contemporary Muhammad al-Ghazali seeks the

As I see it, the Quran does not develop a sophisticated theodicy. It seeks to mould its believers in such a manner that they become able to combat instances of suffering, hardship, agony, and pain and able eventually to conquer evil-doing.

In this paper I shall argue that the Quranic approach to suffering and hardship brings more practical benefits than the way of contemporary philosophers. I also claim that these philosopher's judgements, based on conceptual analysis and logical arguments regarding the problem of evil, do not seem to represent the actual experiences of people facing instances of suffering. Also, because their arguments focus on whether a God who is both omnipotent and perfectly good can exist when there are evils in the world, the issue becomes the problem for them. From the perspective that I take, it is the existence of instances of suffering, hardship, pain, and agony that is the problem, and denying the existence of God or particular attributes of God because of them will not lessen our pain.

Focusing on natural and moral evils as the problem leads us to wondering how the occurrences of such evils can be reduced and to wondering about what characteristics people need to be endowed with in order to better deal with or even defeat or overcome such evils. Thus, I would like to draw attention to the role the Quran plays in bringing about the reduction of moral evil and overcoming physical suffering. Both the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet are important contributors in the "formatting" of the minds of Muslims, so that they pay attention to certain things and ignore others, leading to holding certain ideas and living certain lifestyles. The Quran points out the need for humans to improve their behavior and prevent evil through attending to their spiritual lives.

Although I do not attempt to solve the "problem of evil" in the way the philosophers do, let me briefly consider the way they present the problem. Some of them have seen the existence of evil and suffering as irreconcilable or incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, benevolent God. According to David Hume, Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered: "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil."³ Having brought up these questions, Hume answers them with more questions:

Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the Deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive except we assert that these sub-

possibility of developing a form of the Quranic theodicy. See Muhammad al-Ghazali, "The Problem of Evil from Islamic Perspective," *Dialogue & Alliance*, 8 (1994), pp. 65-74.

³ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 63.

jects exceed all human capacity, and that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them.⁴

For J. L. Mackie, the problem of evil is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. He claims that the problem of evil is *a logical* one and not a scientific problem that might be solved by observations, or a practical one that might be solved by a decision or an action.⁵ He maintains:

I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.⁶

Alvin Plantinga, in contrast to Mackie, attempts to demonstrate that there is no logical inconsistency in believing in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God along with the existence of evil.⁷ Here, I do not intend to take sides either with the line of thought presented by Plantinga, John Hick,⁸ and Terence Penelhum,⁹ or with the arguments presented by Hume and Mackie. In fact, in reading Hick, Plantinga, Penelhum, Mackie, and Nelson Pike¹⁰ with regard to the problem of evil, I have realised that the world they construct with the concepts and rational arguments they use seems different from the world of real people who face instances of suffering. This is my main objection to the arguments made by the philosophers. In the remainder of this people, I shall present my argument in six points.

⁴ Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 66.

⁵ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (first published in *Mind*, 64 (1955)), in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 25 (hereafter cited as *Problem of Evil*).

⁶ Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 25.

⁷ He developed further what is called the "freewill defence" in his book, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974). Some of his articles on the issue are: "God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom," in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 83-109; "The Free Will Defence," in *Readings in The Philosophy of Religion: An Analytical Approach*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp. 186-200.

⁸ His book, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Collins, 1968) has become almost a classic in the contemporary philosophy of religion. He also published many articles on this issue. The most important of them are: "An Irenaen Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in the Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), pp. 38-52; "Soul-Making and Suffering," in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 168-88.

⁹ In his article "Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil" (in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 69-82), he makes a particularly Christian defence of the existence of evil.

¹⁰ His article "Hume on Evil" (first published in *The Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963) and reprinted in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 38-52) offers a remarkable analysis of Hume's daring assertion on the existence of God and Evil.

1. The Problem of Evil Is Not Entirely Logical and Propositional, but Is Fundamentally Phenomenal or Existential

Let us consider a particular argument offered by Plantinga. My own reaction is that the instances of suffering, hardship, pain, or torture that many people face in their lifetime have little relevance (if any) to the kind of argument he makes:

If God existed at T1 and if God believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2, then if it was within Jones' power at T2 to refrain from doing X, then (1) it was within Jones' power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T1, or (2) it was within Jones' power at T2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He held at T1, or (3) it was within Jones' power at T2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at T1 that Jones would do X at T2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God – that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T1) did not exist at T1.¹¹

On the other hand, the sort of evil that can be found in everyday life is described in horrible detail in a passage written by Dostoevsky:

One day a serf boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound. "Why is my favourite dog lame?" He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. "So you did it." The general looked the child up down. "Take him." He was taken – taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback with the hounds, his dependants, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock up. It's a gloomy, cold, foggy autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry "Make him run" commands the general. "Run! run!" shout the dog-boys. The boy runs "At him" yells the general, and he set the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes! ... I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well – what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings?¹²

One wonders why evil and suffering is so real in life, while Western philosophers have dealt with them in ways so divorced from what is experienced? In fact, after Kant and Hegel, even more emphasis was placed on rationality and developing realms of abstract concepts. As I see it, the realms that have been created are like Plato's cave. These Philosophers have produced shadows from

¹¹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 69.

¹² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brother Karamazov*, trans. G. Garnett (New York: 1950), p. 288.

the existing phenomenon. Then they claim that the relations they see between the shadows must exist in the world of phenomenon as well.¹³

What is actually happening is that the philosophers have employed just two concepts, God and evil, and instead of describing evil as it is experienced by different cultural groups, they discuss their two concepts in the abstract, using logical propositions that ascribe certain predicates to them. Finally, one group of the philosophers sees a contradiction between the predicates of the concept of God and the concept of evil, while the other group does not.¹⁴

What I claim in this paper is that the rational arguments of philosophers benefit ordinary people in a limited way, while religion can play an important role in helping people in their struggle to defeat evil. I hope the rest of this paper will substantiate my claim.

2. The Perception of Evil Is Culture-Specific

Here, I will argue that perceiving something as evil is, *to a certain extent*, culture-specific. At the same time, some degree of agreement between various cultures on which events are seen as evil exists, and the cross-cultural similarities need to be borne in mind. However, the way a culture equips its people to deal with and overcome evils is not partially but *totally* culture-specific. A joke mentioned by C. G. Jung on the subject of good and evil illustrates the point clearly. He says:

¹³ A brief demonstration may show my intention. Evil is a concept and death is one of the species of the content. To indicate whether the concept corresponds to the content, I will first quote a passage on evil, then replace the word "evil" with "death" and see how the passage sounds: "The existence of evil in the world must at all times be the greatest of all problems which the mind encounters when it reflects on God and His relation to the world. If He is, indeed, all-good and all-powerful, how has evil any place in the world which He has made? Whence came it. Why is it here? If He is all-good why did He allow it to raise? If all-powerful why does He not deliver us from the burden?" H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: An Analytical Approach*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 169.

Now let us read the same passage having changed the word "evil" with "death": "The existence of death in the world must at all times be the greatest of all problems which the mind encounters when it reflects on God and his relation to the world. If He is, indeed, all-good and all-powerful, how has death any place in the world which He has made? Whence came it. Why is death here? If He is all-good why did He allow death to raise? If all-powerful why does He not deliver us from this burden."

¹⁴ Having briefly considered the way philosophers present the issue, as one Muslim, I can speak for others and state that the God Muslims worship five times a day has nothing to do with the philosophers' concept of God. Muslims would also not see much of a connection between philosophers' concept of evil and the suffering they face.

THE ORIGIN AND OVERCOMING OF EVIL

Original Sin and God's Suffering in Christianity

Julio Terán Dutari

1. Articulating the Christian Statements

1.0. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The statements of the Christian faith that we shall discuss philosophically in the second part, will be first exposed in an articulation corresponding to our particular theme. The contents will be taken from the present day Church's self-understanding; that is, we shall not merely take the text of Sacred Scripture according to one's own interpretation, nor shall we take the works of individual theologians or the witnesses of faith in the rich Christian tradition. With respect to confessional differences within Christianity, I have decided to present the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church, to which I belong and which I know the best. This will provide us with a basis and a framework for the exposition that will follow. Because we are searching for an updated and standard comprehension of the Catholic viewpoint, we will refer to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church."¹ Here in this Catechism are gathered into a corpus of four main parts, with continual references to Sacred Scripture, the most relevant texts of the Second Vatican Council, which are an updated and synthetic formulation of Church doctrine, together with other significant Conciliar texts, plus the testimony of the tradition of the Church fathers, theologians, and spiritual writers.

Certainly, we will carefully attempt to take into account the viewpoint of the other great Christian confessions, as far as this will be possible. Nevertheless, once in a while this theological synthesis of our theme may appear incomplete and very general for the faith-consciousness among the Christians in the particular Churches – even in the Catholic Church. In any case, I hope that at least this synthesis will not appear artificially arranged.

¹ Quotations will be taken from the volume *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (St. Paul's Books & Media, 1995). This English translation is based upon the original Latin text: *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997). In this paper our numbers, mostly in square brackets, refer to this same *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (henceforth abbreviated CCC). The quotations and references of the first part will often omit CCC.

Our study will proceed according to the exegetical principle that the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament has to be seen as the center of all God's revelations; in such a way that the Old Testament is presupposed by the New Testament; but is also explained and completed by the New.

1.1. THE TESTIMONY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE ORIGIN OF EVIL IN THE DISOBEDIENCE OF THE CREATURE; THE PROMISE OF OVERCOMING EVIL IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1.1.1. The creation of a developing and limited world with free creatures brings forth the presence of the physical and moral evil

The so-called theodicy problem has become critical precisely for the Christian faith: "If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist?" [309]. "Why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it?" [310].² The answer of the Church sees the existence of evil in connection with the developing character of the world. The Church distinguishes *physical evil* (the disappearance of certain forms of existence and the appearance of other less perfect forms) from *moral evil* (free deviation from the ultimate destiny, which is called sin³): "Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned." "God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures." God even knows, in a mysterious way, how to bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures; but for all that, evil never becomes a good [310-12].

1.1.2. The origin of evil is disclosed only with the light of faith in the love of the Creator and Savior

The deepest insight into the origin of evil can only be gained by a conversion towards the living God, in the light of the 'mystery of the faith': "The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested at the same time the extent of evil and the superabundance of grace (Cf. Rom 5:20)" [385]. The Christian understanding of moral evil (in German, *das Böse*) as something that has its center in sin, presupposes faith in the deep connection between the created free human being and God as the Creator, a free and loving God, who gives to the rational human be-

² Cf. also CCC 385: "God is infinitely good and all his works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: and above all to the question of moral evil."

³ Concerning the concept of sin, cf. "Sünde," in Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 10 (Basel: Schwabe, 1998), cols. 598-615.

ing an interior destination toward the love for God and for one another. So sin appears as a refusal of God and his plan of salvation; and moral evil is unmasked as something worse than merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure [386-87; cf. 1846-51]. But all this, which was already known by the people of God in the Old Testament through the revelation of Scripture, yields its ultimate meaning only in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who sends the Holy Spirit to “convict the world concerning sin” (Jn 16:8) [388].

1.1.3. Evil begins with an original sin of the created freedom by the angels and the first parents of the human race

“Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents” [390]. But behind that disobedient choice lurks a seductive voice opposed to God, which makes the human being fall into death out of envy: the voice of one of the fallen angels, one of those, who at the beginning were created good by God, but through their own doing, became evil because they sinned (cf. 2 Pet 2:4) [391]. Their ‘original sin’ consists in the fact that they radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign. This is why the ‘Devil’ or ‘Satan’ is a “sinner from the beginning” (1 Jn 3:8), a “murderer from the beginning” and “the father of lies” (Jn 8,44) [392]. In both cases (that of the first parents and that of the fallen angels) the essence of sin appears as a failure in the test of freedom. And this, because God created free creatures in his image and oriented toward his friendship. The creature is dependent on God when using his freedom and is subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom [396].

1.1.4. Evil works further in history, from the beginning and in all dimensions: as original sin, personal sin, and sin of the world; out of this arises a permanent spiritual battle

When speaking of the initial ‘falling into sin,’⁴ the Church also speaks of ‘original sin’: “Although set by God in a state of rectitude, man, enticed by the evil one, abused his freedom at the very start of history. He lifted himself up against God and sought to attain his goal apart from him” [415].⁵ Through their sin, the first parents lost the original holiness and justice they had received from God, not only for themselves but for all human beings [416]. Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called “origi-

⁴ Concerning this notion and also the concept of original sin, cf. “Sündenfall,” in J. Ritter and K. Gründer, *op. cit.*, Vol. 10, cols. 616-18.

⁵ The quotation is a formulation of Vatican Council II, GS 13,1.

nal sin" [417]. As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering [cf. 1521] and domination of death [399-400] and inclined to sin. This inclination is called "concupiscence" by the tradition [405-18]. The original sin is transmitted together with human nature – but not as personal fault – and it is proper to each individual person [419], until God redeems it, although the bad consequences persist [405]. Because of this continual influence of original sin [401-6], one can explain the increasing multiplicity of personal sins within humanity [1852-64] and also the spreading of evil ("sin creates a proclivity to sin" [1865]), including the social responsibility for the faults of others and even the 'sinful structures' of society, which are expressions and effects of personal sins [1865-69, cf. 845, 953]. So, the phrase "sin of the world" (John 1:29) can be understood finally as a summary of every evil, objectively and subjectively expressed [408, 1505]. This dramatic situation of the whole world, which is in "the power of the evil one," makes man's life a hard battle [409; 1426]. Furthermore, "the evil one," Satan, is active in this battle against God and his kingdom which is founded in Jesus Christ, in as much as he can bring "grave injuries of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature to each man and to society" [395; cf. 410]. Lastly, human persons could, through their free and definite choice, turn away from God and completely succumb to evil and forever be condemned [1033-37].

1.1.5. Nevertheless, God seals from the beginning a covenant with humanity for the remission of sins, with the promise of a full triumph over evil in God's kingdom

After the fall into sin, God lifted up humanity through the promise of redemption and raised once more the hope of salvation. Again and again, God offered his Covenant to man [55]. God, "in a mysterious way, heralds the coming victory over evil" [410]. Though "disfigured by sin and death, man remains 'in the image of God'" [705]. The promises already began at the time of the original fall [411] and were renewed many times; in a unique manner, they were addressed to Abraham and to his progeny and were confirmed through the progressive revelation of the covenant with the chosen people. In this way, God has awakened the hope of redemption from evil through a universal redeemer, and by his Spirit has kept alive the expectation for his kingdom [706-16; 56-63]. Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all. They proclaim a radical redemption, purification of all their infidelities, a salvation that will include all the nations [64].

1.2. THE TESTIMONY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE OVERCOMING OF EVIL BY MEANS OF THE SACRIFICIAL SUFFERING OF JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, WITH THE FAITHFUL MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH, FOR THE BUILDING UP OF GOD'S KINGDOM

1.2.1. *The Achievement of Jesus Christ*

1.2.1.1. *Through the Holy Spirit, God sent his Son in the person of Jesus Christ, as the Savior of all humanity, in order to fulfill the promise of salvation.* The Apostle Paul proclaims about Jesus: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law"⁶ (Gal 4:4-5) [422]. This happened through the Holy Spirit of God, who is sent by the Father for the mission of the Son [484-86]. This was proclaimed by the apostle Peter about Jesus of Nazareth: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16) [424]. The main task of the Messiah is this: to achieve the salvation of all mankind from the slavery of sin and evil, in order to inaugurate God's kingdom definitively [436]. When Jesus accepted Peter's confession of faith, he also announced his imminent passion and the fulfillment of his redemptive mission as the suffering Servant of God. But "only after his Resurrection will Peter be able to proclaim Jesus' messianic kingship"; hence, the true meaning of this kingship (and actually of all redemption) is revealed only when he is raised high on the cross [440]. In Jesus, whose name in Hebrew means "God saves," "God recapitulates all of his history of salvation on behalf of men" [430; cf. 2812].

1.2.1.2. *Through his life and his death on the cross, Jesus Christ freely takes upon himself the sin of the world and of the whole of humanity, he expiates this sin, and thus achieves the universal redemption from evil.* "Christ's whole life is a mystery of redemption. Redemption⁷ comes to us above all through the blood of his cross, but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life" [517]. Surely Christ's death has brought about redemption "from the transgressions under the first covenant" (Heb 9:15) [580], but also from those transgressions of all other sinners [605]. "By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God 'made him to be sin who

⁶ Here we are dealing with the law of the Old Covenant: "According to Christian tradition, the Law is holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect. Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage. According to St. Paul, its special function is to denounce and disclose sin, which constitutes a 'law of concupiscence' in the human heart" [1963; cf. 587-92].

⁷ Concerning the meaning of the New Testament concept of 'Redemption' and its additional use in theology and philosophy, cf. "Erlösung," in J. Ritter, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), cols. 717-19.

DISCUSSION OF THE ORIGIN AND OVERCOMING OF EVIL AND SUFFERING IN BUDDHISM, ISLAM, AND CHRISTIANITY

Presentations:

JAE-RYONG SHIM: Evil and the Overcoming of Suffering in Buddhism

ADNAN ASLAN: The Propositions of the World Religions about the Origin and Overcoming of Evil: An Attempt at a Synthesis from an Islamic Perspective

JULIO TERÁN DUTARI: The Origin and Overcoming of Evil: Original Sin and God's Suffering in Christianity

Moderator: PETER KOSLOWSKI

Summary: FRIEDRICH HERMANNI

1. What role does philosophy play in the answers to the question of evil in the religions represented here?

The theodicy question is also discussed in Islamic theology, but this theoretical discussion does not play a role for those who are suffering. It is, nevertheless, important to eradicate evil. Islam is similar to Buddhism at this point: In the Qur'an there are many practical hints about how the human person can cope with and overcome suffering. The rational perspective should not at all be neglected, but what we really need is practical assistance in dealing with evil and suffering. (ASLAN)

Buddhism also includes attempts to examine the question of evil and suffering philosophically. Ultimately, however, only praxis, not speculation, can liberate from suffering. The historical Buddha placed value on not discussing the so-called metaphysical questions about the origin of the world, finiteness, suffering, etc., but instead treating the problem of suffering practically and seeking ways to overcoming it. (SHIM)

The meaning of liberation (for instance, from suffering) cannot be understood if the dogmatic statements of the Church regarding sin and redemption are

not taken seriously, and indeed in their anthropological and anthropological-social dimension. A rational understanding of faith, however – according to the opinion of the Church – does not need Marxism as a tool (as many representatives of liberation theology believe), but instead corrects its understanding of faith with the same result of a social engagement. – The most important differences between Christianity and Islam have to do with the philosophical background. The position advocated by Islam, to push thinking aside in speculative difficulties and to ask only about how to deal with it practically, is an attempt to which Christian theologians are often liable. In the end, however, one cannot combat evil forcefully if one does not deal with certain intellectual questions here. Bad thinking often also leads to evil thinking. (TERÁN DUTARI)

In the question of dealing with the problem of evil practically, we can come to a union of the religions. In the domain of praxis, we have to rely more on traditional rules and concepts that can help ordinary people. Religion as such has the task of eliminating moral evil. Of course, it can give no simple answer to the question of why God tests people to such an extent, for instance by (non-moral) physical evil such as natural catastrophes, but in the traditional teaching it offers a concept of how one can cope with evil. The Qur'an interprets moral and non-moral evil as tests of the individual who needs patience and trust in God. (ASLAN)

In Buddhism there is no problem of theodicy in the form in which Christianity or Islam know it, since there is no concept of a personal creator. (SHIM)

Faith in a good Creator-God (as a rational core expression of Christian faith) is of central importance to answering the question of evil and suffering. Within the context of an interreligious conversation, one should not emphasize so much the exchange of intellectual viewpoints, but instead the testimony of the faith and of religious experience, which draws from the tradition and also emphasizes the value of the respective faiths within the intellectual confrontation. The same truth appears in the different religions, because the lives of their believers testify to it powerfully. (TERÁN DUTARI)

2. How do the religions understand, from their own perspective, the essential answers of the other religions to the question of the discourse? For instance, how does Buddhism assess Christianity, how does Islam assess Buddhism?

Christianity and Islam place the emphasis on trust in a good Creator-God. The tension between reason and faith, however, still exists. An answer to the question of the origin of evil and suffering still remains to be found today. One cannot accept faith and trust in God as a real answer. (SHIM)

As far as the emphasis on the practical side of the question of evil is concerned, Buddhism and Islam are similar. It appears, however, that Buddha's

teaching may indeed have been helpful for earlier societies, but must be and also is reinterpreted in the present age to conform with the conditions of a completely changed society. Traditional Buddhist teaching is, for instance, modernized along the lines of Christian liberation theology or socialism; as Buddhism borrows from other systems, however, it gives up its own religious tradition. (ASLAN)

3. What role does the idea of evil as “God’s punishment” play in the religions represented here?

According to the testimonies of the Old and New Covenants, evil is not only the consequence of sin, but also God’s punishment, imposed by him. Understanding and interpreting this is a task for the rational philosophical interpretation of the content of our faith. There have been various attempts in the tradition to interpret this. From the contemporary Christian perspective, punishment is understood as a consequence contained within the sin itself, for which God is not responsible, but which he leads to the good. (TERÁN DUTARI)

On one hand, Islam holds the interpretation of evil as a warning and stimulus to the good. Evil is more warning than punishment. The latter comes only after this life. On the other hand, evil is also interpreted as an aid in the spiritual development of the individual, as a process of purification of the soul. The perception of evil and dealing with it are to a certain degree culturally specific. The example of holy wars shows this. The believing Muslim actually understands the holy war as a mission of God, not as evil. From the European point of view, that seems to be unacceptable. With the Arabic word “Jihad” (effort, struggle), however, the struggle against moral evil in one’s self is meant above all. Many interpret it as a struggle against persons of other faiths, but it primarily means, according to the teaching of the Qur’an, fighting against evil in one’s self. (ASLAN)

Buddhism understands the interpretation of evil and suffering as a consequence of ignorance. The category of punishment assumes the concept of a personal God, which does not exist in Buddhism. In the discussion of the question of evil, the representatives of Islam and Christianity move between two extremes: TERÁN DUTARI holds a universalistic position, ASLAN a so to speak postmodern position. However, we do not live in these extremes. Neither the universal claim nor perceptual relativism help us with the practical solution of this question. Habits, rules, and laws of ethics exists at the level of praxis. We must find a middle way, which we can discuss theoretically in the common conversation. (SHIM)

4. How do the representatives of the religions evaluate the thesis of the necessity of mediation between theory and praxis in the faith?

The current tense situation in the Christian Church and also the inner-ecclesial praxis require in fact a middle way between absolute (universal) and relative positions. This middle way lies in the acceptance of the historicity of truth. Does Islam not strive for a middle way between theory and praxis, when it presupposes and pursues an interpretation of the Qur'an? (TERÁN DUTARI)

Of course, there must be mediation between theory and praxis. The faith itself is the theory, which is interpreted concretely (practically). As Abrahamic religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have a common basis for the dialogue. Islam tends to unite the traditions of all three in itself and to develop universal laws from them. What is the case with the identity of Buddhism? Can one still attribute its own tradition to it, when it borrows from other traditions? (ASLAN)

The problems of contemporary society force Buddhism to include other traditions, which are originally foreign to it. One can help oneself as a student of Buddhism with the concept of the bodhisattva: Thus one can as a Buddhist also recognize Jesus, for example, as a bodhisattva, and thus borrow from Christianity. That means that one uses the same concept for completely different interpretations. That is disturbing at times, but is explained by the fact that in Buddhism it is not primarily a case of a certain system, but instead of how one can help other people cope with evil and suffering. This flexibility of thought creates more difficulties for the Christian or Islamic religion. (SHIM)

5. Answers to Questions from the Audience

In response to a question about how Islam concretely deals with suffering, ASLAN explained that this is a psychological problem. Concretely experienced suffering can elicit both the reaction of denying God and the optimistic attitude of understanding the suffering not only as evil, but also as a challenge to more patience and trust in God.

In contrast to TERÁN DUTARI, who believes within certain limits in the existence of anonymous Christianity and, therefore, in the possibility of a discussion of the question of the causes of evil at the general-religious level (question from the audience), ASLAN emphasizes that the religion of Islam could not represent its viewpoint realistically without talking about God. He granted this to philosophy, but not to religion.

Concerning the theme of Hans Küng's project, "Global Ethic" – "No world peace without religious peace" – TERÁN DUTARI said that the understanding of the other religions must proceed with every activity in approximately the sense

of the idea of mission. Each religion must draw for itself the practical consequences from this process of understanding with the intention of discovering the one common truth that we (ideally) have.

Concerning that, ASLAN remarked that Islam also recognizes mercy, compassion, and peace as the highest commandments. But no theory of faith can be constructed upon them. The dialogue could indeed move at the level of these aspects of faith, which are thoroughly compatible with the principles of the Qur'an and the history of Islam, but this could not be permanently satisfying.

When asked about evil in the field of contemporary technology (genetic technology) and in the Church's past, TERÁN DUTARI emphasized the meaning of the papal public confession of guilt, which belongs as such to the core of the Christian faith. To be sure, the Church as the "Body of Christ" cannot sin; but since its members are sinful human beings, the admission of guilt must also officially take place by the representative of the Church.

JOB AND SUFFERING IN TALMUDIC AND KABBALISTIC JUDAISM

Oliver Leaman

Deine Augen sind tief in deinen Schädel gesunken
wie Höhlentauben in der Nacht
die der Jäger blind herausholt.
Deine Stimme ist stumm geworden,
denn sie hat zuviel *Warum* gefragt.

(Nelly Sachs, *Hiob*)

Of all the books in the Bible, the text which has often been regarded as the most enigmatic is the Book of Job. An enormous amount of attention has been applied to this text, both within and without the Jewish tradition, and most commentators have found the prospect of reorganising its verses almost irresistible. Some have gone further and have literally rewritten it, in such a way as to bring out, in their view, its real structure and meaning. I am going to resist this temptation, and my aim here is merely to point to some of the main features of the text and how they have been understood within Jewish theological and philosophical thought. But before doing this, given the problematic nature of the text in the view of many commentators, it is incumbent on me to say something about the nature of the text itself, since otherwise it will be unclear on what I am commenting. I take the Masoretic text to be accurate and the arrangement of the verses accurate also. I regard the content of the Book to be no more or less problematic than anything else in the Tanakh, and it is from that standpoint, which will be regarded as terribly ingenuous by many commentators, that I am proceeding.

I think there are two main reasons for fascination with Job. One is that he touches on concerns which strike every human being, namely, why the innocent suffer. Even those operating outside of a religious framework will find this an important and difficult issue. The other aspect of the Book is its beauty. It consists of a sharp and dramatic dialectical text in which arguments between Job and his companions go back and forth, and in a magnificent poetic response by G-d, which resolves the issue as far as G-d and Job, but hardly anyone else, is concerned. It is not surprising, then, that so much controversy should have arisen.

en over the Book. It is a bit like a detective story in which the police say the case is solved but no one else can see why. The temptation to explain why the case has been solved, or why it has not, and what might solve it, has intrigued thinkers for thousands of years.¹ And of course that is the nature of scripture, that it continues to play a role in the life of its audience as part of the continuing conversation between G-d and his creation from generation to generation.²

1. Maimonides on Job

I am going to discuss in particular the views of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), the greatest Jewish thinker, on Job, since his views are especially interesting.³ He makes two important points about Job. He notices that it never says in the Book that Job is intelligent, and from that he concludes that in complaining about his misfortunes Job reveals intellectual failings which lead to his complaints. Right at the start of the Book we are told that Job is good and so whatever leads to his suffering cannot be a reflection of something evil which he has done. That is something that his friends try to tease out of him, the evil action on his part which he fails to acknowledge and which serves as the cause of his misfortunes. His friends are operating on the naive calculus of good and evil, according to which there is a supernaturally determined balance between them, and justice will decide precisely how that balance is to be struck. Although by the end of the Book his friends are chided for this belief, there can be little doubt but that it represents the ordinary understanding by most people of the nature of divine justice. If someone has been good, then she deserves to flourish, and if someone has been evil then the reverse is the case. Of course, rewards and punishments can be left to the next world, but this is not much of a prospect in Judaism, and the weakness of the notion of the next world is actually directly mentioned in the Book of Job. The point about divine justice is that in some way or another one would expect that G-d would be behind the allocation of benefits and penalties in proportion to moral worth, and Job bitterly complains that this does not seem to be happening. Why does Maimonides think that this common view held by Job is evidence of his dimness?

¹ O. Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), which contains a bibliography of some of the main discussions of the Book of Job.

² O. Leaman, "The Future of Jewish Philosophy," in D. Frank & O. Leaman, eds., *The History of Jewish Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 895-907; and "The Philosophy of Religion," in O. Leaman, ed., *The Future of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 120-33.

³ For background information, see O. Leaman, *Moses Maimonides* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997); "Maimonides," in R. L. Arrington, ed., *A Companion to the Philosophers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 683-85; "Maimonides," in Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 64-101.

One thing which Job gets entirely wrong, according to Maimonides, is to think that the sorts of misfortunes which have been occurring to him are important. The other thing which he gets wrong is to think that just because he is good, these misfortunes should not happen to him at all. Let us look at the second point first. The argument here is quite simple, and rather compelling. It is that we are material creatures, and as such we cannot rationally expect to escape from the confines of materiality, at least not while in this life. In his discussion of providence Maimonides suggests that the more intelligent individual will manage to use his intelligence in order to escape certain sorts of problems, but not all problems.

He gives the example of setting out on a sea journey. Any ship can sink, as Maimonides himself knew to his cost in his commercial enterprises, but some ships are more likely to sink than others. If we are considering a sea journey and we see that the ship is leaking, the captain is drunk and the crew short-handed, we would be well advised to use our reason not to get on it. On the other hand, however sound the vessel and the crew, it is always possible for something material to suffer the fate of matter and be destroyed. No amount of intelligence on my part will prevent this happening. But should not G-d prevent it happening if the people on the ship, or some of the people on the ship, are good? Is this not what is meant by divine providence?

Maimonides answers in two ways here. One way is to argue that whatever divine providence is, it is very different from human notions of providence. He argues that we can say nothing positive about G-d, and we must not think that even negative statements give any real information. So we cannot say that the failure to save the good people on the boat is contrary to divine providence – we have no idea what divine providence is. The other argument works from the nature of matter. It is the nature of material things to be destroyed eventually, and one cannot complain when this happens with any expectation of rational understanding. It is just how things are, that is what is meant by “matter”.

Are these answers any good? The argument from the nature of matter is appropriate, it is true that we could not reasonably expect something material to remain impervious to other material and natural forces. People who discover that despite a lifetime of prudent and healthy activity they eventually fall foul of a dread disease are often surprised, as if they do not deserve to have the disease since they applied themselves to avoiding it. Yet the point of providence and the choice of a ship is relevant here. While it is a good idea to use our rationality to determine the most prudent course of action, that course of action will never be guaranteed to succeed. Given our materiality, all sorts of things can go wrong, and it is very sad that they do go wrong, but hardly something which we can rationally regard as unjust. For example, I ride a bicycle, and sometimes I get a puncture. I do get annoyed when it happens, but I cannot rationally say it is unfair. I may think it is unfair if I get lots of punctures, or a lot more than I did in

the past or more than most people get, but of course there will be an explanation as to why this has happened and that explanation will be in natural terms. It will take the form that “given the material and finite nature of x, x is prone to decay, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly”. As Spinoza argues, we may be ignorant of precisely why something has happened and as a result regret its happening, but once we know or accept that there is a natural explanation, it is not rational to be sorry about it. It had to happen and it did happen, and once we understand this we understand that it is futile to regret it. Such regret merely deepens the negative aspect of the original event, whereas what we should be doing is trying to master it by understanding it.⁴

The argument from negative theology which Maimonides uses to show that we cannot identify divine providence with our notion of providence does fit in nicely with the Book of Job. After all, G-d tells Job towards the end of the text that the limited view of reality is far too limited to understand why things are as they are. This seems reasonable. And yet, it also seems like a rather convenient way of avoiding a vital issue, the inability of the way in which the world is organised to reflect a notion of justice of which we can make sense. G-d tells Job that G-d is much more powerful and intelligent than Job, which is not exactly new information to him, so it is perhaps surprising that it manages to convince him of the inappropriate nature of his complaints. The trouble with the theory of negative theology is that if it is valid, it proves too much. It proves, for example, that there is no point in rationally examining any theological issues such as that of theodicy, since the answer will always be that our language does not work when we apply it to G-d.

This might seem rather harsh, and inappropriate when applied to Maimonides, who after all constantly emphasises in his work the importance of theoretical enquiry and intellectual work. What Job lacked was rationality, something he came to realise and acquire at the end, and once he had it, he appreciated the limits to which that rationality could be applied. In other words, he came to understand the principles of negative theology. But according to Maimonides, before he became enlightened, as it were, Job was not only not intelligent, but his very ethical character was at fault. He had acted in accordance with morality, not for morality, to use a Kantian phrase. This is actually an important point, that there is little merit in acting in a way which is virtuous but where the motivation is habit or conformity to everyone else. But do not many believers act in this sort of way, out of this sort of motivation? Surely Maimonides is not arguing that they are all not really virtuous due to their lack of intelligence? If only the intelligent can really become virtuous, then this is going to limit the possibility of salvation to a relatively small group in society. Yet when talking about providence, he says he agrees with Aristotle that we can only talk of individual

⁴ See “Spinoza,” in Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 121-45.

providence when it is a matter of rational beings and that it is “dependent upon the intellect and linked with it” (III:17: p. 474), and “divine providence does not watch over all individuals of the human species equally, but in proportion to their human perfection” (III:18: p. 475).⁵ It is pretty clear that this human perfection is understood primarily in intellectual and not physical or social terms, so that the most important thing about us is our capacity to use our rationality, not anything else, and it is that capacity which links us with the flow of providence which is continually emanating from the higher intelligences above us and our world.

This was an issue of great debate within medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy, as indeed it was in a different form within Greek philosophy itself. It would not be true to say that according to Maimonides there was no merit in Job’s ethical behaviour before his meeting with G-d, but that the merit, such as it was, is limited until he managed to put it within a wider theoretical perspective. That is the significance of prayer and ritual behaviour, it puts the individual on the route to exploring in more detail the nature of his faith and what lies behind it, a route which is not entered onto by everyone but which is there in religious practice and which calls out to the believer for investigation. Job finally understands this when he appreciates that a simple answer from G-d is not going to be given to the question of why he suffers, and an answer is not going to be given because the question is wrong. Job suffers because he is material and material things do fall apart at one point or another. So the question Job should have asked is why there are material things at all, how they fit in with divine providence, and to that question G-d gives what might be thought to be a reasonable reply, in terms of his plan for the structure of the natural world and what lies within it. Of course, we might not understand what that plan is, but then we should not expect to understand it, given the differences between us and G-d.

According to Maimonides, once Job understands that there is such a gulf between us and G-d, “all misfortunes will be lightly accepted” (III:23, p. 497). But why is this? It is one thing to suggest, as Maimonides does, that there is more to life than health, wealth and children, yet these are surely important aspects of our lives, and we should be concerned about them to some extent in anything which passes muster as an acceptable human life. It is one thing to agree that Job is mistaken to expect G-d to reward him personally for his virtue, and quite another to agree that the ways in which Job expects to be rewarded are of no significance at all. Why would realising that children, health and possessions are not really the ultimate goal of life cheer Job up? He might come to realise that coming to know G-d through intellectual means is superior to any-

⁵ References to the translation by S. Pines of Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).