

THE PROBLEM OF GOOD AND EVIL AS VIEWED BY IQBAL

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The problem of good and evil is one of the most persistent problems in philosophy. Opinions differ as to the right criterion of good and evil. From the purely Islamic point of view evil is not self-existent (for it is against God's nature), but is created by decree and will, so that painful results are joined to evil actions by an external necessity. This gives the notion that certain actions are permitted, while others are prohibited.

From the Sufistic point of view, evil is imperfection: it limits human nature. Good, on the other hand, is perfection and proceeds from God. The aim of a Sufi is, therefore, to become perfect, as this is the path to God.

According to the Ash'arites, revelation is the criterion of good and evil. Reward and punishment are only the consequences of the pleasure and displeasure of God. But the Mu'tazilites hold that reason is the sole criterion of good and evil. We take a thing to be evil because we fail to account for it rationally. God is good. He is all-wise. Evil cannot be the negation of His wisdom. We see good and evil, but God sees harmony. Therefore, according to the Mu'tazilites, good and evil are two notes in God's diapason. Such is the Mu'tazilites, solution to the problem that the existence of evil is incompatible with belief in a God who is at once omnipotent and benevolent. They maintain that the rational

ordering and benevolent designing everywhere revealed in nature, unmistakably point to a divine source. These could not possibly be accidental. Not only do they prove the existence of God, they also prove His goodness. This teleological argument (adopted later by 18th century philosophy in Europe) has been seriously challenged by the doctrine of evolution, according to which the presence of order in nature is not to be attributed to the munificence of an external agency, but can be regarded as innate in it. To philosophers like Bacon and Spinoza, the appeal to final cause and divine activity appears unsound. Spinoza calls it the "refuge of ignorance".

Iqbal; who subscribes to the view of the Mu'tazilites, sometimes feels disgusted with the imperfect world in which he finds himself. Addressing God, he says:

صد جهان م میں روید از کشت خیال ما چو گل
یک جهان و آن هم از خون تمنا ساختی
طرح نو افکن که ما جدت پسند افتاده اہم
این چه حیرت خانہ امروز و فردا ساختی²⁰

A hundred worlds, beautiful as flowers,

Spring up out of my imagination:

Thou hast created only one world,

²⁰ پیام مشرق، ص ۱۸۳

And even that is steeped in the blood of desire.

Bring new patterns into being,

For our nature craves originality:

What is this labyrinth of to-days and to-morrows

that Thou hast created around us?

And again:

نقش دگر طراز ده آمد پخته تر بیار لعبت خاک ساختن می نسزد خدائے را²¹

Fashion a new pattern ;

bring a more perfect Adam into existence:

This making of playthings of clay

Is not worthy of God, the Creator.

The riddle thus remains as much a riddle today as it was in the past. Philosophers face difficulties in proving the absolute goodness of God owing to the existence of evil, suffering and ill-will. They say, "If God is the author of all that is good and benevolent in the world, the evil that undoubtedly exists must also be attributed to Him."

The Pantheists and Iqbal

²¹، پیام مشرق، ص ۱۲۹

Iqbal, like the pantheists, sometimes explains evil by denying its ultimate reality. Evil, according to him, is a result of our limited comprehension of things and has no absolute existence. We cannot know the universe as a whole. We see only parts and interpret them with reference to partial ends. But if we could see the whole of the universe and interpret every individual event by reference to the whole, we would find that there is no evil, no discord in the world--everything is harmoniously fitted to every other thing and as such tends to the good of the whole. He gives expression to this in the following lines:

چه گویم نکته زشت و نکو چیست زبان لرزد که معنی پیچدار است
برون از شاخ بینی خار و گل را درون او نه گل پیدا نه خار است

What is good and what is evil ? What shall I say:

The tongue falters, because the idea is intricate.

Thou seest thorns and roses outside the twig.

Inside it there is neither rose nor thorns.²²

Thus, evil arises out of the conflict of opposing individuals and is, therefore, relative to finite beings. God is the author of evil and yet is untouched by it.

Such a standpoint requires perfect knowledge, which is possible only to God, to whom all things appear in their true light. He knows the things perfectly because He sees them in their

²² پیام مشرق، ص ۵۴

proper relation to one another and to the world as a whole. God's knowledge is not limited to the present only. but extends equally over the past, the present and the future, which are all present to His consciousness in one eternal "now". He knows the absolute good and sees that all things are tending towards the realisation of that good. To Him, therefore, the world appears as a system of parts perfectly adjusted to each other, as a cooperating factor in a harmonious whole. But human knowledge, being confined to the present and to a limited number of things, cannot grasp the world as a whole. Man sees only parts and understands the world from a finite point of view. The absolute good being unintelligible to him, he cannot see the full significance and meaning of things. Thus, there appears evil in the world, because of our limited knowledge. But all evil and discord would at once disappear and melt into a sweet harmony of the good and the beautiful, if we could raise ourselves to the level of universal reason and look at things from an eternal and universal standpoint. This idea is beautifully explained by Sahabi Astarabadi²³ in the following lines:

²³ Maulana Kamaluddin Sahabi, the pious recluse of Najaf, as he has been called, was, according to his contemporary biographer, Taqi Awhadi (تقی واحدی), born in Shuster, sometime during the first half of the 16th century. As he originally belonged to Jurjan(جرجان) the former capital of Astarabad, he became better known as Astarabadi, On account of the fact that the spent the years of his life in meditation at the holy shrine of Caliph Ali in Najaf he is also sometime styleds Najafi.

عالم به فظان لا اله الا هوست جاهل بگمان که دشمن است ایس یا
 دریا به وجود خویش موجے دارد خس پندارد که ایس کشاکش با
 دوست
 اوست

The scholar is busy with the cry "There is no God but God"

The ignorant is in doubt whether it is a foe or a friend

The ocean breaks into waves of its own impulse

But the straw thinks that this agitation is got up against it.

Iqbal puts it differently, but no less beautifully:

گفتم کہ شر به فطرت خامش نہادہ اند
 گفتا کہ خیر او نشناسی ہمیں شر است

I said, "Evil lies hidden in its nature",

He replied, "what is evil is that you do not know its goodness".

Iqbal thus maintains that there is unity and not duality and hopes there is no such thing as permanent evil. The infinite Self is the only reality, and as such the only good. Says he:

خودی کا سر نہاں لا اله الا اللہ خودی ہے تیغ فسان لا اله الا اللہ
 یہ نغمہ فصل گل و لالہ لا نہیں پابند بہار ہو کہ خزان لا اله الا اللہ

خود ہوئی ہے زمان و مکاں کی نہ ہے زمان نہ مکاں لا الہ الا اللہ²⁴
زنی

The hidden essence of Khudi is, "there is no God but God",

Khudi is a sword; its whetstone is "there is no God but God."

This song is not dependent on a season of flowers.

Spring or autumn, sing, "There, is no God but God."

The intellect worships time and space.

There is neither time nor space and there is no god but God."

This obviously means that the universe cannot be regarded as an independent reality standing in opposition to God. It is only when we look at the creation as a specific event in the life-history of God that the universe appears as an independent other. In Him thought and deed, the act of knowing and the act of creating, are identical. (Lectures, p. 73).

As a believer in the religion of unity, Iqbal lays stress on the contrast between the eternal and the temporal, between the absolute and the phenomenal, between the finite and the infinite, between good and evil, and treats all phenomena as a succession of shadows cast by one eternal substance. According to him good and evil are not absolute but relative. The absolute value of good and evil is a characteristic of dualistic faith.

²⁴ ضرب کلیم، ص ۸۰۷

According to dualism the world is a combined effect of two or more self-existent independent principles or is a result of the activity of two opposing self-existent personal powers, one all good and the other all evil, viz. God and Satan (Yazdan and Ahriman), so that all that is good and beautiful in the world comes from God and all that is evil and ugly comes from Satan. In the dualistic system good and evil possess absolute value, not relative.

METAPHYSICAL DUALISM

Metaphysical dualism does not believe in the existence of two rival personal powers, but maintains that the world is derived from two self-existent principles, viz. the formal and the material. The formal principle is the idea of the good or the creative energy of the world, and the material principle is self-existent matter. The tendency of the formal principle is to make the world all good, beautiful and harmonious, but this transforming power of good is opposed by matter, so that there appear evil, discord and deformity. In the same system the idea of the good is identified with God. But then the God of dualism is a finite God, for there is another self-existent principle, viz. matter. God must necessarily be limited by it. By acting upon the self-existent stuff of matter God produces the world of finite things and mind, but being opposed to matter He cannot make the world as good and beautiful as He pleases. Thus there spring up in the world all sorts of evil and discord as a consequence of the opposition of matter to the activity of God. Pluralism goes further than this and maintains that the world is a result of a chance conglomeration or

an accidental juxtaposition of an infinite number of self-existent, independent substances. In a consistent pluralism, therefore, there can be no place for God.

The dualist's solution of the problem is that though God is the author of the world, He did not create it out of nothing, but fashioned it out of persistent matter. But matter, being opposed to form, obstructs the power of God, so that in spite of His infinite power, He cannot perfectly conquer matter and produce a world all good and beautiful. Thus evil in this world is not due to God but to the opposition of matter to the transforming power of God.

Iqbal, who believes in creative evolution, repudiates this concept of matter and points out that, unlike the traditional philosophers and moralists who regard the actual world of physical realities either as a mere illusion or as a hindrance to the development of the spirit, he holds that the real and the ideal are not mutually exclusive. According to him, the real is the starting-point for the realisation of the ideal. The growth of the self, he says, implies that the individual should evolve the inner richness of his being. This cannot, however, be brought about by withdrawing from the world of matter into the seclusion of one's environment. Life, according to Iqbal, consists in an incessant struggle between the ego and the environment. The ego invades the environment and the environment invades the ego. Matter, 'according to Iqbal, is not a fixed product, incapable of development; rather the world of matter is a reality in progress.

Matter, far from being inert and static, is ever-flowing and ever-changing. The universe is not a thing but an act and a passage from chaos to cosmos. The appearance of life and conscience is the result of a process of evolution. This process can never have any limit because there is no end to progress. The world is a unique self, endowed with a free and creative will. Hence what appears evil is not real, but relative.

As an advocate of creative evolution Iqbal regards the world as imperfect and holds that God is improving this imperfect universe through man. It is man who has brought order and beauty unto the chaotic world. He claims to have improved God's handiwork beyond recognition.

تو شب آفریدی چراغ آفریدم سفال آفریدی ایغ آفریدم
بیابان و کوہسار و راغ آفریدی خیابان و گلزار و باغ آفریدم
من آنم کہ از سنگ آئینہ سازم من آنم کہ از زہر نوشینہ سازم²⁵

Thou createst night, I the lamp,

Thou createst clay, I the vase.

Thou createst jungle, mountains and deserts;

I created gardens, orchards and flower plots.

I who make glass out of stone:

I who extract elixir out of poison.

²⁵ پیام مشرق، ص ۱۳۲

The world, therefore, according to Iqbal, is a growing universe capable of increase and evolution.

گمان مبر کہ بہ پایاں رسید کار مغان
ہزار بادۂ ناخوردہ در رگ تاک است²⁶

Imagine not that the tavern-keeper's work

Has come to its appointed end:

For there are thousand wines still,

Untasted in the veins of grapes.

Deism, theism and pantheism, though they may differ from one another in many essential points, yet agree on this that the world ultimately proceeds from a single self-existent principle, viz. God. They are, therefore, different types of monism and are all opposed to dualism and pluralism. Deism conceives of God as wholly transcendent. According to it, though the world is the creation of God, it can go on without any assistance from Him. Hence God is not responsible for the evil that pervades the universe.

Theism conceives of God as both transcendent and immanent—transcendent in the sense that He is the creator of the universe and immanent in the sense that the universe after creation is maintained by His energy, so that the forces of the world are not mere mechanical forces, but are manifestation of

²⁶ پیام مشرق، ص ۱۰۸

God's, represented as a means for the realisation of the good and perfection.

The tendency of pantheism is to deny the reality of evil, as of the finite altogether. The result is to deny the reality of good as well, for that is only intelligible by contrast.

Pantheism presents God as wholly immanent in the world and presents the world as thoroughly permeated by divine energy. It thus leaves no room for a personal God. The chief charge against pantheism as a theory of religion is that it denies the human personality. According to it, the only reality is God and all else is merged in Him. What we call freedom of the human will is an illusion. Against pantheism, Iqbal says that life is individual; it is real and not a mere illusion. When individuality develops, it becomes a self-contained exclusive centre, but it is not yet "perfect individuality". "He who comes close to God", Iqbal explains, "is the perfect person, not absorbed fully in Him, but absorbing God into himself. The true individual cannot be lost in the world, it is the world that is lost in Him.

کافر کی یہ پہچان کہ آفاق میں گم ہے
مومن کی یہ پہچان کہ گم اس میں ہیں آفاق²⁷

The unbeliever is one who is lost in the universe.

The believer is one in whom the whole universe is lost.

²⁷ ۳۹ ص ضرب کلیم،

Iqbal revolts against Indian philosophical thought also according to which evil exists so long as we identify ourselves with the personal, the illusory. It maintains that suffering or pain belongs to the human personality. It, therefore suggests that we can overcome evil by with-drawing ourselves from the personality into the real individual (the inner self or ego) that persists from life to life and is trying to realise that which is divine. Unlike the Indian philosophers Iqbal lays stress on both the material and the spiritual aspects of the self, without the combination of which neither self-realisation nor God-realisation is possible. Iqbal further holds that evil is power because it develops the latent capacities of our being as no other influence can. This is Iqbal's challenge to mankind.

یہ ہے مقصد گردش روزگار کہ تیری خودی تجھ پہ ہو آشکار
تو ہے فاتح عالم خوب و زشت تجھے کیا بتاؤں تیری سرنوشت²⁸

What is the purpose of this whirling of time?

That thy ego may be revealed to thee:

Thou art the conqueror of the world of good and evil.

I dare not reveal the great destiny ahead of thee.

Though it may seem a fallacy to credit evil with good, Iqbal recognises the real value of a spur, without which many of our noblest activities would cease:

گفتش کہ سود خویش زجیب زیاں بیار
گل از شگاف سینه زر ناب آفرید
درماں ز درد ساز اگر خسته تن شوی
خو گر به خار شو کہ سراپا چمن شوی²⁹

Get thy profit out of loss.

The rose has created pure gold by rending her heart.

If thou art wounded make the pain thy remedy.

Accustom thyself to thorns that thou mayst become entirely one with the garden.

Thus the question of the authorship of evil has agitated the world's mind from the very earliest times. The Qur'an's answer to it is that God Himself is the author of it. Following this, Iqbal vigorously holds that God -permits evil in the world. He has no evil in Himself and yet if there is evil, He is the author of it. Against the dualism of two rival powers Iqbal definitely believes in the unity of God.

اے کہ خوردستی زمینائے خلیل گرمئی خونت ز صہبائے خلیل
برسر ایس باطل حق پیرهن تیغ لا موجود الہو بزن³⁰

You have drunk out of the flagon of Khalil

²⁹ بال جبریل، ص ۱۳۷

³⁰ پیام مشرق، ص ۲۳۵

Your blood is warmed up by his wine:

Strike the sword of 'There is no God but God'

Over the head of this untruth masquerading as truth.

Under the conception of the unity of God, the antagonism of good and evil evidently disappears, as it makes abundantly clear that man, who is inherently and potentially capable of both good and evil, was created by one God and that it was God who armed him with that capability. According to Iqbal, therefore, these two opposite characteristics of human nature are not the creation of two independent and mutually antagonistic powers, but of one and the same Divine Being. He, therefore, comes to the conclusion that there is a unity in nature and no duality ; that God is one and not two; that the soul is potentially capable of both good and evil.

One can, therefore, clearly discern that, unlike the religion of unity, the religion of duality originated as a recoil from a bad form of unity. It lays stress on the incessant contrast between good and evil. So far as men are concerned, they are equally persistent and are, therefore, practically eternal. It is worth notice that Iqbal, who believes in the constant evolution of the self, believes also in the eternal conflict between good and evil. But with him this is not dualism, for he believes in the relativity and not the absoluteness of good and evil.

' It is hardly too much to say that in one or other of its various aspects every human being has need of evil for the full

development of his character. We are unable to conceive of progress without it. We enter into life through the travail of another. We live upon the death of the animals beneath us. The necessities, the comforts, the luxuries of our existence are provided by the labour and sorrow of countless fellowmen. Our freedom, our laws, our literature, our spiritual sustenance have been won for us at the cost of broken hearts and wearied brains noble lives laid down.

Thus evil is useful and, therefore, consistent with the beneficent design of God. So far from being our enemy, evil is our ally in the battle of life. Evil, as Iqbal sees it, is not something that hangs over mankind as a curse which only God in His infinite mercy can lift. Rather, it is a challenge to be met and mastered by each acting in his own way. Had we not known evil, we could not, he thinks, recognize God. If evil did not present itself as a factor to be overcome, the individual would not have the opportunity to achieve a personality me in Iqbal's words,

پیش باطل تیغ و پیش حق سپر امر و نہی او عیار خیر و نشر

A sword against untruth

and a shield for truth,

His affirmation and negation

The criterion of good and evil.

Iqbal thus regards Khudi as the criterion of good and evil. In the Introduction to the English translation of *Asrar-e-Khudi*, he

says that which fortifies his personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. He, therefore, revolts against pantheism and pseudo-mysticism, as they have tended to belittle the reality of the self, regarding it as a mere illusion of the mind, and not possessing abiding significance of its own. Evil according to Iqbal, is no doubt undesirable, but from another aspect it is useful, as it has remedial effects upon our nature. In evil man is confronted with hindrances and obstructions which serve to sharpen the insight and the power of the ego. Thus in apparent evil lies the secret of all good. No evil, no good. No life is worth living when there is no evil and no struggle against evil.

Iqbal, therefore, says:

Never reside in a world lacking in taste,
which has a God but no Satan.

Iqbal has a living and passionate faith in the unlimited possibilities of man's development, which is impossible without the existence of evil. Thus, viewed from this angle of vision, evil has an important place in the evolution of the self.

Yet the fact that moral and physical evils stand prominent in the life of nature makes Iqbal feel dissatisfied and he often raises his voice in challenging lament to God against this.

ہو نقش اگر باطل تکرار سے کیا حاصل
کیا تجھ کو خوش آتی ہے آدم کی یہ ارزانی

If the pattern is poor, what does repetition avail ?

Does it please Thee to see so many poor specimens of humanity?

Iqbal explains this in his Lectures:

"The Quran has a clear and definite conception of Nature, as a cosmos of mutually related forces. It, therefore, views Divine omnipotence as intimately related to Divine vision, and finds the infinite power of God revealed, not in the arbitrary and the capricious but in the recurrent, the regular, and the orderly. At the same time, the Quran conceived God as 'holding all goodness in His hands'. If, then, the rationally directed Divine will is good, a very serious problem arises. The source of evolution, as revealed by modern science, involves almost universal suffering and wrongdoing. No doubt, wrong-doing 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 to 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."³¹

31 رموزبيخودی، ص ۱۶۳

Nobody can deny the existence of evil in this world. No process of thinking gets rid of the problem of evil. Nor does any kind of ethical discipline enable man to realise with logical thoroughness his ideal conception of justice and benevolence. No matter what arrangement men may make with a view to promoting justice and mercy, some-one's rights are bound to be ignored. Thus, social progress and moral evolution must have their victims. No community can conduct its social, ethical or religious life without sacrificing something, or somebody, to be treated as outside the pale of its association. Iqbal admits these facts, but expresses the hope that they are incidental to a passing phase in the development of man's selfhood. "This", he says, "is the point where faith in the eventual triumph of goodness emerges as a religious doctrine. 'God is equal to His purpose, but most men know is not'. (12: 21)³²

³² Reconstruction, p. 88 2. Reconstruction, pp. 80-81