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THE ENIGMA OF EVIL: A PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

The existence of evil in the world poses a significant challenge to traditional religious beliefs, as they find it difficult to reconcile its presence with the Creator God, who is all-powerful and all-good. Epicurus suggests that an omnipotent being can abolish evil; an all-good being would want to abolish it. However, the existence of evil raises a severe challenge to the belief in an all-powerful, all-good God—the existence of evil challenges the belief in God's omnipotence

and perfection. If evil had been present before the creation, then God would have been limited by its presence. The existence of evil in the world is a significant problem for theists, as it contradicts the belief in God's omnipotence and perfection. Various philosophers have defined evil, from Greek to modern times, who all believed in the existence of evil and the existence of a world of unchanging ideas. These theories highlight the complexity of understanding the existence of evil and its relationship with the universe. This research paper deals with the problem of evil and how it can be categorized into different types. Further, this paper will also investigate the possible solution to the problem of evil and how evil can be considered as a part of the condition of good. At the end of the paper, a brief conclusion will be drawn from the ideas of different philosophers.

Keywords:

evil,
moral,
free will,
good,
pessimism,
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Nature and Definition

Malignancy within the world poses a significant dilemma for all theistic interpretations of the cosmos. The plight of evil engenders a troubling inquiry for conventional adherents of faith: if an omnipotent, omnibenevolent entity exists, how can malevolence persist? [12, p. 39]. This dilemma confronts theists as they grapple with the challenge of harmonizing the existence of evil with the concept of a Creator God characterized by ultimate goodness. The crux of the issue lies in how evil can manifest in a universe governed by such a deity.

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus articulates this concern succinctly: Is He (God) willing to prevent evil yet lacks the power to do so? If so, does this not suggest His impotence? Is He capable but chooses not to intervene? Then, one must question His benevolence. If He possesses both the capability and the desire to eradicate evil, from whence does malevolence arise? [7 p. 9]. The underlying premise is that an omnipotent being can eliminate evil, while an omnibenevolent being would inherently wish to do so. Consequently, if such a being existed, the manifestation of evil would be inconceivable. However, since evil is evident, one must ponder the existence of such a being. Thus, the problem of evil poses a formidable challenge to the conviction in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent deity [12, p. 39].

It is posited that a divine entity orchestrated the creation of the universe. It is inherently logical to inquire about the origin of hostility if a benevolent deity has fashioned it. If malevolence existed before the universe's inception, then the divine would have been constrained by its existence. If the deity is characterized as omniscient and supremely benevolent, what rationale exists for such a deity permitting malevolence to manifest within His creation? It is conceivable that despite His perfection and wisdom, He possesses limitations in His capacity to avert malevolence. Alternatively, He may embody omnipotence, omniscience, and

absolute goodness yet has deliberately incorporated malevolence into His creation to instruct humanity towards moral rectitude through admonition. However, if the deity is infinitely good, how can we elucidate the pervasive nature of suffering and hostility, the prevalence of sin, anguish, sorrow, and the multitude of unfulfilled aspirations manifest in various contexts? [16, p. 51]. The existence of evil presents a significant dilemma for theist philosophy, as it encapsulates a contradiction between the phenomenon of evil on one end and the conviction in the omnipotence and perfection of the divine on the other. A deity cannot simultaneously be all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is regarded as an absolute reality [19, p. 61]. Father G.H. Joyce writes:

«The existence of evil in the world must be the greatest of all problems that the mind encounters when it reflects on God and His relation to the world. If He is all-good and all-powerful, how has evil any place in the world He has made? Whence came it? Why is it here? If He is all-good, why did He allow it to arise? If all-powerful, why does He not deliver us from the burden? Alike in creating the physical and moral order seems so grievously marred that we find it hard to understand how it can derive from God» [19, pp. 62-63].

Recognizing the problem of evil as a severe challenge to theism, we should begin our discussion with a precise definition of 'evil.'

According to Plato, the realm of forms embodies pure, immutable ideas, constituting the good's essence. In sensory experience, change is deemed a manifestation of evil. The Sophists asserted that «Man is the measure of himself,» thereby allowing each individual to formulate his ethical framework, a doctrine that undoubtedly represents a dangerous path to pursue. For Philo of Alexandria, God epitomized perfect purity and served as the origin of all goodness. Conversely, matter was regarded as the progenitor of all hostility. Spinoza posits that evils arise from our limited perspectives, asserting that what we perceive as evil is merely a consequence of viewing phenomena

through a specific interest, dissipating into insignificance when we broaden our vision to encompass a holistic or divine perspective. According to Hegel, evils manifest merely as irrational components that are in the process of becoming excellent or rational, as Reality, being inherently rational, necessitates the incorporation of irrationality or evil into a sensible framework. Both Spinoza and Hegel effectively repudiated the ontological status of evil. In contrast, Leibniz attributed the existence of evil to the inherent imperfections present in constructing the finite constituents of the universe [16, p. 51].

The philosophy of Vedanta posits that the Divine or the Supreme Entity remains impervious to malevolence and transcends the dichotomy of relative goodness, which serves as the counterpart to evil. Both relative goodness and relative evil are derived from a shared origin. They represent dual manifestations of the identical cosmic force, universal energy within phenomena. In the context of Christianity, the concepts of good and evil are notably salient. The deity has fashioned humanity in a state of goodness; however, humanity succumbed to bodily desires and consequently became ensnared in malice and sin. All subsequent generations have inherited the primordial transgression of the first man. All manifestations of malevolence and iniquity have been embodied in the figure of Satan. Therefore, within traditional Christian doctrine, two entities appear to operate—God, the embodiment of all that is good, and the Devil, the origin of all malevolence [16, p. 52].

Forms of Evil

Irrespective of how we conceptualize it, the prevalence and manifestations of evil are universally acknowledged. It is feasible to categorize a continuum of occurrences and experiences as «evil.» The compendium of widely acknowledged evils encompasses, at a minimum, phenomena such as intense pain and suffering, physical malformations, psychological anomalies, the flourishing of hateful individuals, the extinction of virtuous individ-

uals, disrupted societal interactions, unrealized potentials, a myriad of character flaws, and natural disasters. Evil undoubtedly presents itself in myriad forms with which we are all excessively acquainted. Given the extensive array of evils, which can often lead to confusion, numerous philosophers delineate useful distinctions between physical and moral evil [18, p. 11]. Augustine similarly differentiates between two categories of evil. «We typically articulate evil in two manners: firstly, when we assert that an individual has committed an evil act, and secondly, when an individual has experienced evil.»

1. Physical Evil: All forms of physical and psychological distress and anguish are encompassed within this category of Evil [16, p. 52]. Physical afflictions are intrinsic to the constitution of both the terrestrial and animal kingdoms. They manifest in arid deserts and frigid polar regions; there are also predatory fauna and venomous species, including scorpions and serpents. Furthermore, nuisances such as flies and fleas exist alongside a plethora of additional insect pests and an extensive array of lower-order parasites such as tapeworms, hookworms, and similar entities. Secondly, one must consider the myriad of natural disasters and the profound human anguish that ensues—these include fires, floods, storms, tidal surges, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, prolonged droughts, and famines. Thirdly, a considerable prevalence of diseases that afflict and devastate humanity exists. Conditions such as leprosy, cancer, and poliomyelitis appear *prima facie* to be phenomena that are inconsistent with the expectations of a benevolent creator. Fourthly, there are inherent evils with which many individuals are afflicted at birth—these encompass blindness, deafness, mutism, cognitive impairments, and mental disorders. While most of these evils exacerbate human suffering and distress, it is crucial to note that not all physical evils can be simplistically equated with pain. The crux of these evils pertains to whether they culminate in suffering. The dilemma does not arise from examining solely a singular facet of the universe. It

is conceivable that the aggregate of pleasure may overshadow pain; conversely, the opposite may also be true. It is practically and logically impossible to reach a definitive resolution to this inquiry. Nevertheless, the pertinent question is not 'which predominates, physical good or physical evil?' The quandary of physical evil persists irrespective of whether the equilibrium within the universe tilts in favor of physical good or not, for the central issue lies in elucidating the reasons for the existence of physical evil at all [19, pp. 63-65].

2. Moral Evil: In general, moral evil is immortality. Evil includes larger-scale sins like wars and the horrors they cause, as well as smaller-scale ills like cowardice, selfishness, jealousy, greed, dishonesty, brutality, and callousness. Most people agree that moral evil is a far more significant issue than physical evil [19, p. 65]. Joyce feels that way about it, noting:

«The man who sins thereby offends God.... we are called on to explain how God came to create an order of things in which rebellion and even final rejection has a place. Since a choice from among an infinite number of possible worlds lay open to God, how did He choose one where these occur? Is not much of choice in flagrant opposition to the Divine Goodness?» [19, p. 65].

Free will directly lead to moral evil. It involves transgressing moral laws. Wickedness and sin are examples of moral ills. Moral evil is an issue men cause; hence, men must find a solution. Pursuing moral perfection is not a process that happens on its own. The moral life is a conflict between the good and the bad, the real and the ideal, and the desire and the obligation. Man discovers his moral nature in and through every deed that springs from his nature. Man would not have a moral existence without room for error or sin [16, pp. 52-53]. John Hick similarly holds that the enigma of human freedom is inextricably linked to the source of moral evil. Moral evil is the evil we humans originated: cruel, unjust, vicious, and perverse thoughts and deeds.

Resolutions or the Elucidations by the Philosophers

The two philosophical schools of pessimism and optimism must be considered to understand and resolve the issue of evil. These represent the two halves of a single coin.

Pessimism: Pessimism is a philosophical doctrine that says life is evil and pain. Pessimists always see the dark side of the world. Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher of the nineteenth century, has propounded strong views in favor of pessimism. According to this, this world is the worst possible world. Life is eternal striving, a desire for the unrealized. Hence, life is entirely of unsatisfied longing, misery, and suffering. This is the worst possible world, for if the evil forces that prey upon us were any worse than they are, we could not survive [16, p. 53].

Pessimistic thinkers rationally reject evil and view evil as a good fact. They reject the reality of good and bring about the devastation, death, and sorrow the universe seeks. They claimed that happiness and pleasure are unintentional and that sorrow and anguish are the prerequisites of human life. These optimists think life is not worth living. They don't believe that life can be good. Evil must be wherever they see. They reject that a benevolent, all-good creator created this universe of pain, suffering, grief, and evil [16, p. 56].

Classifying pessimism as an illness with identified causes and recommended treatments is possible. Leibniz contends that although evil is inherent in the essence of all created things, our world is the finest that God could have designed. The finite is inherently flawed. However, in the end, evil serves to further good. According to Swami Vivekananda, nothing in life is impossible or pessimistic. «Arise, awake, and stop until the goal is reached!» [16, p. 53].

Optimism: It is an optimistic outlook on life and the universe. The antithesis of pessimism is optimism, which views good experiences from the highest perspective. It is important to remember that the issue of evil can only exist in the realm of cow-

ardly existence. In actuality, the universe is quite beautiful. Augustine stated that everything is good only to the extent that it exists. According to Spinoza, everything was well. Good and evil are only personal concepts that arise from reflection; they cannot be based on the ultimate Reality, which is the flawless whole. According to Spinoza, evils stem from our limited perspective on the world and only arise when we view things through a specific interest. Still, they vanish into nothingness when we enlarge our outlook. According to Spinoza, evils stem from our limited perspective, appearing only when we view things through a specific lens and then dissipating into nothingness when our perspective broadens [16, p. 54].

Some optimistic thinkers reject the idea of evil in the world, arguing that a just, merciful, and good God would not create anything evil. They believe that everything in creation is inherently good and that any suffering, hardship, or misfortune we experience is ultimately for our benefit. These thinkers insist that all experiences, even the painful ones, serve a greater purpose and are part of an overall good. They deny the existence of evil by asserting that good is the only actual reality, while what we perceive as evil is merely the absence or lack of good. Although evil might seem apparent, they claim that good overwhelmingly prevails, even if it isn't always obvious. Rather than seeking to explain the origins of evil, they dismiss it entirely and choose not to acknowledge its existence [16, p. 56].

Defensive Approach to the Idea of Free Will

According to Spinoza, evils stem from our limited perspective on the world, meaning they only arise when we view things through a specific interest and vanish into nothingness when we broaden our perspective.

Augustine stressed the importance of free will, which he saw as a gift from God. He argued that for a person to be truly good, they must be able to choose to do what is right, which requires free will. He

clarified that God did not give free will to sin, even though sin can result from it. The essential point is that human nature has excellent value, and free will is crucial for our society. Humans have moral significance because we can make choices that are either right or wrong. However, God cannot grant us the ability to make morally sound decisions without also allowing the possibility of making bad ones. Therefore, God must permit the existence of evil to preserve the goodness of humanity and the potential for good decisions. Over the centuries, many theists have found Augustine's reasoning persuasive [18, p. 34].

Alvin Plantinga, an American analytic philosopher, developed what is now known as the Free Will Defense in response to the problem of evil. According to Plantinga, the basic idea behind the Free Will Defense is that a world with significantly free creatures—who can choose between good and evil—is more valuable, all else equal than a world with no free creatures. While God can create beings with free will, He cannot force them always to choose what is right without taking away their freedom. If God did this, it would undermine their meaningful freedom. Therefore, God can't create beings capable of moral good without allowing them the possibility of moral evil. Likewise, God cannot eliminate the possibility of moral evil without the possibility of moral good. The fact that some creatures have used their freedom to make wrong choices since the beginning of creation does not contradict God's omnipotence or goodness. The core idea of the Free Will Defense is that it is possible God could not have created a universe with moral good (or as much good as this one) without also allowing for the existence of moral evil [18, p. 35].

Evil as a Part or Condition of Good

Many observations suggest that evil can be partially understood as a component of a greater good, a necessary condition for balance, or as an unintended consequence of a structure that is itself

good [5]. In general, it can be argued that in the kind of world we inhabit, evil must exist, as it becomes part of the development of character and spiritual life, is overcome through divine and human acts of redemption, and is understood through its contrast with good. One form of evil that can be explained concerning good is not a part of a greater good but rather a by-product of conditions needed to bring about that good. A clear example of this can be seen in accidents. Accidents are distressing because they are sudden, catch us off guard, seem preventable, and are easy to imagine happening to ourselves or loved ones. Yet, despite their harshness, no form of evil is more easily explained and reconciled with God's love and power [5].

The human qualities we value most, such as courage, compassion, and tested loyalty, would likely not exist without evil or at least the strong possibility of it. Without the presence of evil, these virtues would have no real context. The deeper meaning of all virtues and genuine human connection cannot be imagined in our world without the existence of evil. However, it is not as though evil should be preserved solely to develop these qualities. These virtues only become authentic through the struggle to overcome evil. If there is even the slightest implication that evil is maintained to make us more courageous or compassionate, the resulting qualities would be mere sentimental imitations [5].

The Western tradition's problem of evil looks at how Western philosophers have approached the subject of evil. Numerous Western philosophers, including Epicurus, Plato, Plotinus, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, J. S. Mill, Josiah Royce, John Hick, and many more, made explicit attempts to address the issue of evil in their ways.

St. Augustine viewed the problem of evil as a significant challenge to his faith and all Christians' beliefs. In his 'Confessions,' Augustine mentions that the main focus of his intellectual pursuits was discovering the «origin of evil» [10, p. 11]. St. Augustine is compelled to hold that God

is the source of all that occurs in the universe to uphold the divine omnipotence. However, God is a kind being. Therefore, evil must be eliminated from the world or rationalized away.

Augustine firmly upholds the Hebrew-Christian belief that the universe is fundamentally sound because a good God created it for a good purpose. He argues that the world contains an immense variety of higher and lower, greater and lesser goods, and that everything that exists is good in its way and to its degree—unless it has become spoiled or corrupted. According to Augustine, evil—whether it is an evil will, suffering, or some form of disorder or decay in nature—was not placed there by God. Instead, it arises from the corruption of something inherently good. He uses blindness as an example: blindness is not a «thing» itself but a deficiency in the eye, which is intrinsically good. For Augustine, evil always consists of the malfunction or corruption of something good. This understanding of evil as a negative reality means it is neither willed nor created by God. Augustine also maintains that the universe was originally in perfect harmony, reflecting God's creative intention [12, pp. 41-42].

So, how did evil come into existence? According to Augustine, it began in the parts of the universe where free will is present—specifically, the free will of angels and human beings. Some angels turned away from the supreme good, God, toward lesser goods, thus rebelling against their Creator. These fallen angels then tempted the first humans, leading them to fall. This rebellion by angels and humans marked the beginning of moral evil or sin. Natural evils—such as disease, earthquakes, and storms—are the consequences of sin, as humanity was meant to be the earth's caretaker, and their fall disrupted the natural order. Therefore, Augustine could claim that «all evil is either sin or the punishment for sin» [12, p. 42].

In *'Evil and the God of Love'*, British philosopher and theologian John Hick addresses the theological problem of evil, which raises the question: Can the existence of evil in the world be recon-

ciled with the belief in a God who is both all-good and all-powerful? This issue is significant for both believers and non-believers. For non-believers, it serves as a major obstacle to religious faith, while for believers, it creates a deep internal struggle that can disturb their faith and impose a constant burden of doubt [13, p. 3]. In his book "Philosophy of Religion", Hick approaches the problem of evil by considering it through the concept of deprivation or the privative notion of evil [12, p. 69]. He explains it as follows:

«Evil is thus loss and lack, a deprivation of good....it tends, by its inherently negative character, towards nullity and non-existence. As a characterization of evil within the framework of Christian theology, the privative definition must be accepted as wholly sound. It represents the only possible account of the creation of an omnipotent and good God» [12, p. 69].

John Hick argues that the problem of evil arises specifically for religions that claim the object of their worship is both supremely good and all-powerful. While this belief alone may not fully explain the theological issue of human evil, it does set the stage for it. Hick combines this notion of evil as deprivation with the familiar concept of sin, which he uses further to develop his understanding of the problem of evil [12, p. 69].

«And because sin thus belongs to our innermost nature and it is at the same time the source of so many evils, it has usually and surely rightly, been seen as constituting the heart of the problem of evil.» [12, p. 70].

Hick aligns himself with a branch of theodicy he refers to as «Iranian theodicy» or the «Soul-Making Defense.» This perspective can be summarized by stating that suffering is a means for spiritual growth. In other words, God permits suffering so human souls can mature and develop. According to Hick, while God is ultimately accountable for pain and suffering, these experiences are not inherently evil. With a broader understanding, one might recognize that the «evil» we encounter through suffering is not truly evil but rather good, as it enhances our souls.

Therefore, according to Hick, God's benevolent plan of bringing «imperfect and immature» humanity to itself in unforced trust and love is served by the evils of pain and suffering. Hick also admits that in our reality, this procedure frequently fails. However, in the afterlife, Hick asserts that «God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all men to Himself.» [11, p. 342].

Contemporary philosophers offer a distinct perspective that has shaped the debate on evil in a new way. Thinkers like Alvin Plantinga, William Rowe, and Marilyn McCord Adams have contributed significantly to the philosophical discourse on the problem of evil.

Alvin Plantinga is best known for his *Free Will Defense*, which addresses the logical problem of evil. His argument aims to show that evil is logically compatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God. In his seminal work, «*God, Freedom, and Evil*,» Plantinga proposes the Free Will Defense, arguing that it is possible that God could not create a world with free creatures who never choose evil. The logical problem of evil, as formulated by J.L. Mackie, argues that evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good God. Mackie argues that if God were omnipotent, He would have the power to eliminate evil; if He were wholly good, He would desire to eliminate evil, yet evil persists. According to Mackie, this creates a logical inconsistency that cannot be resolved without abandoning one of the propositions. He critiques traditional theistic responses, such as the free will defense, by arguing that an omnipotent God could have created free beings who always choose good, thereby eliminating the possibility of evil. Mackie concludes that the existence of evil provides strong evidence against the existence of such a God. In his essay, Mackie writes:

If God had made men such that in their free choices, they sometimes preferred what was good and sometimes what was evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely chose good? Suppose there is no logical impossibility

in a man's freely choosing the good on one or several occasions. In that case, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion [15, p. 209].

In *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974), Plantinga writes: «A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all» [20, p. 30]. He further introduces the concept of «transworld depravity,» which suggests that free creatures would commit at least some evil actions in every possible world. Thus, God could not have created a world with free will and no evil. He states: «It is possible that every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity» [21, p. 186]. Plantinga counters this by arguing that it is possible that God could not create a world with free creatures who always choose good. Evil, therefore, is a result of the misuse of free will.

On the other hand, William Rowe is known for his formulation of the *evidential problem of evil*, which argues that the existence of evil provides strong evidence against the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good God. Rowe's argument centers on «*gratuitous evil*» that serves no greater good or purpose. He uses the example of a fawn suffering in a forest fire, which appears pointless and unnecessary. In *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (1978), Rowe writes:

There exist instances of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse [23, p. 91].

Rowe's argument is inductive rather than deductive. He does not claim that the existence of evil disproves God's existence but instead that it makes God's existence unlikely. In his paper, *The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism*, Rowe opines:

In light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering, it is reasonable to believe that there is no morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent, omniscient be-

ing to permit such suffering [24, p. 336].

Rowe critiques traditional theodicies (e.g., the free will defense, soul-making theodicy) for failing to explain gratuitous evil's existence adequately. He argues that these theodicies cannot account for the sheer amount and intensity of suffering in the world.

Similarly, Marilyn McCord Adams, American philosopher, and Episcopal priest, focuses on the problem of «*horrendous evils*» evils so extreme that they seem to defy any meaningful justification. Her approach is more theological than philosophical, emphasizing the importance of a personal relationship with God in addressing the problem of evil. She defines horrendous evils as «evils the participation in which constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could be a great good to him/her on the whole» [1, p. 26]. Examples include genocide, torture, and natural disasters that cause immense suffering. Adams argues that traditional theodicies fail to address the existential impact of horrendous evils on individuals. Instead, she emphasizes that God's goodness must be understood in terms of God's ability to redeem and integrate horrendous evils into a person's life story. She writes: «God's goodness is not primarily about justifying evil but about defeating it through personal participation and redemption» [1, p. 32]. She further highlights the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, arguing that God's participation in human suffering through Christ provides a framework for understanding how horrendous evils can be overcome. She states: «In the person of Christ, God shares in human suffering and transforms it into a means of union with the Divine» [1, p. 45].

While Plantinga's Free Will Defense addresses the logical coherence of God's existence alongside evil by emphasizing the necessity of free will, Rowe challenges the plausibility of God's existence given empirical instances of unnecessary suffering. On the other hand, Adams delves into the existential impact of extreme suffering and seeks resolution through the relational and redemptive aspects of the

divine-human relationship. Collectively, these perspectives enrich the philosophical discourse on the problem of evil by addressing its logical, evidential, and existential dimensions.

Views of Indian Thinkers

Indian philosophers such as Swami Vivekananda, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and Rabindranath Tagore engage with the issue of evil from their unique viewpoints.

Swami Vivekananda posits that the concepts of good and evil are omnipresent. At times, malevolence may be perceived as benevolence; conversely, benevolence can also manifest as malevolence. Our sensory perceptions occasionally yield malevolent outcomes. Vivekananda asserts that the consumption of wine may not initially be deemed harmful; however, continued indulgence will inevitably lead to adverse consequences. A person born into affluence may be considered fortunate, yet they risk becoming foolish if they neglect the exercise of both their physical and intellectual faculties. This illustrates the phenomenon of benevolence engendering malevolence. Therefore, the notions of good and evil are fundamentally relative. What is considered beneficial for one individual may be perceived as detrimental by another. Furthermore, an identical action may be advantageous at one stage of life and harmful at another.

Vivekananda contends that evil was not divinely orchestrated; instead, it is a construct of human agency, and it is incumbent upon us to transform it into benevolence. Ethical methodologies for conducting oneself are often in direct opposition to unethical approaches. Affirmative consequences characterize virtuous actions, whereas malevolent actions yield harmful repercussions. Moral philosophers frequently engage in discourse regarding the dichotomy of good and evil. The moral valuation of an action—whether it is deemed virtuous or vice-ridden—hinges upon its inherent capacity to be beneficial or detrimental, specifically regarding its contribution to the welfare

of various entities. The advantageous and the destructive are intrinsically linked to the subjects involved. Vivekananda articulates this perspective as:

«Here the earth soaked sometimes with widow's tears, there in the West, the air is rent with sights of the unmarried. Here, poverty is the greatest bane of life; the weariness of luxury is the great bane of the race. Evil is everywhere; it is like chronic rheumatism. Drive it from the foot, and it goes to the head. Drive it from there, and it goes somewhere else. It is a question of chasing it from place to place, that is all. Our philosophy teaches that evil and good are eternally conjoined; they observe the rivers of the same coin. Nay, all life is evil. No breath can be breathed without killing someone else. Not a morsel of good can be eaten without depriving someone of it. All this work against evil is more subjective than objective, more educational than actual, however big we may talk» [27].

According to Vivekananda, the Divine is conceptualized as the epitome of supreme benevolence. Within the Divine, no dichotomy exists between virtue and vice. He posits that one must confront the profound paradox that vice must also be present in any instance of virtue. Conversely, where life exists, death inevitably follows as its inevitable counterpart.

Sri Aurobindo examines the notion of evil within the framework of his foundational metaphysical theory, which asserts that the issue of evil is a transient phenomenon essential to the evolutionary trajectory. In his endeavor to address the problem of evil, Sri Aurobindo argues that this dilemma stems from a fundamental misunderstanding. Specific individuals erroneously perceive Brahman as a transcendent, personal deity detached from the cosmos. They envision the Divine not as the very cosmos itself but as an entity that has fashioned this universe with evil, suffering, and affliction for its inhabitants, remaining aloof and indifferent. He further contends that the enigma of evil and suffering cannot be resolved through the lens of a transcendent deity. Nevertheless, he upholds a Vedantic interpretation of

the Divine, which he asserts is non-dual. He is intrinsically united with the cosmos and all entities within it.

Consequently, if evil and suffering exist in the world, He experiences this through the beings in whom He has manifested Himself. Thus, from this vantage point, the nature of the problem has transformed. Assigning that the Divine has orchestrated evil for His creations is untenable. Should evil exist, He is, in fact, the one who endures the suffering.

Now, this concern and the problem appear differently: Sachchidananda, being all-Bliss, how does He come to admit pain and suffering to Him? Being free, why does He not reject the pain and suffering? [25, p. 70].

Sri Aurobindo posits that Sachchidananda has imparted His delight within each form during the manifestation process into diverse forms, akin to the distribution of His consciousness force [3, pp. 151-152]. One can perceive delight underlying every form when viewed from a genuine perspective. Given that Sachchidananda has opted to manifest Himself within a tangible world, executing practical actions in this realm necessitates a pragmatic viewpoint. Consequently, we encounter variations of unadulterated delight—pleasure, pain, and indifference. Thus, the integrity of the omnipresence of pure delight remains obscured in the context of ordinary or quotidian existence. However, a profound Bliss-self underlies the superficial and constrained mental self. A superficial self cannot be regarded as the true self. Hence, when we can revert to our authentic existence, we solely experience pure delight as a replacement for pain and suffering [3, p. 158].

Suppose the critical comparison of both thinkers can be analyzed. In that case, we can find that Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda offer profound insights into the nature of evil. Still, their approaches differ in terms of emphasis and methodology. Like as:

Firstly, from the metaphysical Foundation point of view, Aurobindo's concept of evil is deeply tied to his evolutionary metaphysics, where evil is a necessary

stage in unfolding the Divine in the material world. His view is more optimistic, as he sees evil as a temporary phase that will be resolved in the Supramental Consciousness [3]. While as Vivekananda, on the other hand, views evil as a product of ignorance and illusion, rooted in the individual's failure to recognize their true nature. His approach is more immediate and practical, focusing on self-realization as the remedy for evil.

Secondly, the ethical Implications of Aurobindo's evolutionary perspective suggest that evil has a constructive role in the grand scheme of things, providing the necessary contrast for growth and transformation. On the other hand, Vivekananda's ethical stance is more straightforward as he interprets evil as a misperception that can be corrected through spiritual practice and self-knowledge.

Thirdly, from the practical solution perspective, Aurobindo's solution to evil lies in the collective evolution of humanity toward a higher consciousness, which is a long-term process. Vivekananda's solution is more individualistic and immediate, emphasizing the need for personal transformation through meditation, selfless service, and realizing one's divine nature [27].

Research from Cognitive science, Psychology of Belief, and Evolutionary Ethics

Incorporating empirical and interdisciplinary insights from cognitive science, psychology of belief, and evolutionary ethics provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of suffering and evil. These fields explain why humans perceive and experience evil, how beliefs about suffering are formed, and how evolutionary processes may have shaped moral and ethical responses to suffering.

Cognitive Science and the Perception of Evil

Cognitive science explores how the human brain processes and interprets suffering and evil. Research in this field suggests that the perception of evil is deeply tied to cognitive mechanisms such as pattern recognition, agency detection, and moral intuition. Humans have evolved to detect agency in their environment, even

when it may not exist. This tendency, known as the Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device (HADD), may explain why people often attribute suffering to intentional agents (e.g., gods, demons, or evil forces). Justin Barrett, in *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (2004) argues that «the human mind is predisposed to perceive intentionality and purpose in the world, which can lead to the attribution of evil to supernatural agents» [4, p. 31]. Cognitive scientists like Jonathan Haidt propose that moral judgments are often driven by intuitive processes rather than rational deliberation. This can explain why people perceive specific actions or events as inherently evil, even without a logical basis. Haidt, in *The Righteous Mind* (2012), writes: «Moral intuitions arise automatically and effortlessly, shaping our perceptions of good and evil long before reason has a chance to intervene» [9, p. 46].

Psychology of Belief and the Experience of Suffering

The psychology of belief examines how individuals and communities construct meaning in the face of suffering and evil. This field highlights the role of cognitive dissonance, meaning-making, and coping mechanisms in shaping beliefs about evil. For example, when individuals experience suffering, they often face cognitive dissonance, a conflict between their faith in a just world and the reality of evil. People may adopt theodicies (explanations for evil) that reconcile suffering with their worldview to resolve this dissonance. In *The Psychology of Religion* (1997), Bernard Spilka and others note: «Theodicies serve as psychological coping mechanisms, allowing individuals to maintain their beliefs in the face of suffering and evil» [26, p. 215]. Research in positive psychology shows that individuals often seek to find meaning in suffering, a process known as meaning-making. This can lead to post-traumatic growth, where individuals emerge from suffering with a stronger sense of purpose or spirituality. Crystal Park, in *The Meaning Making Model* (2010), states: «The search for meaning in suffering is a central aspect of human resilience, enabling individuals to transform

their experiences of evil into opportunities for growth» [17, p. 12].

Evolutionary Ethics and the Origins of Moral Responses to Suffering

Evolutionary ethics explores how moral responses to suffering and evil may have evolved as adaptive mechanisms for social cohesion and survival. This field emphasizes the role of empathy, reciprocal altruism, and group selection in shaping human morality.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that empathy evolved to promote cooperation and reduce suffering within social groups. This capacity for empathy underpins moral responses to evil. Frans de Waal, in *The Age of Empathy* (2009), writes: «Empathy is a biological imperative for social species, enabling individuals to respond to the suffering of others and fostering group cohesion» [6, p. 87]. On the other hand, 'Reciprocal altruism' is the idea that individuals help others with the expectation of future reciprocity, which may explain the development of moral norms that condemn evil and promote good. Robert Trivers, in *The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism* (1971), argues: «Reciprocal altruism provides an evolutionary basis for moral systems that discourage harm and encourage cooperation (Trivers, 1971, p. 35). «Some evolutionary theorists, such as David Sloan Wilson, propose that group selection traits benefit the group and may explain the development of moral systems that address suffering and evil. Wilson, in *Darwin's Cathedral* (2002), states: «Moral systems evolved to regulate behavior within groups, promoting actions that reduce suffering and enhance collective well-being» [28, p. 123].

We can develop a more comprehensive understanding of suffering and evil by integrating insights from cognitive science, psychology of belief, and evolutionary ethics. These fields suggest that Cognitive mechanisms like agency detection and moral intuition shape the perception of evil. Beliefs about suffering are influenced by psychological processes such as meaning-making and cognitive dissonance. Ethical responses to evil may have evolved as adaptive mechanisms for so-

cial cohesion and survival. This interdisciplinary approach challenges traditional philosophical and theological explanations of evil by grounding the discussion in empirical research and evolutionary theory.

Comparative Analysis

To address the problem of evil from both Indian and Western perspectives comparatively and interactively, it is essential to engage with primary texts, scholarly analyses, and philosophical critiques. Suppose we analyze whether Indian perspectives offer unique insights overlooked by Western theodicies. Then, we can trace that the Indian philosophical traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, often approach the problem of evil differently from Western theodicies. For example, Indian traditions frequently explain evil through the lens of *karma* and rebirth, suggesting that suffering is a result of past actions rather than an inherent flaw in creation (The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse 17–22). This contrasts with Western theodicies, which often grapple with the existence of evil in a world created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God [29, pp. 120–125]. Furthermore, in Brahma Sutra Bhashya, the *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualism) of Shankara, evil is often seen as a product of ignorance (*avidya*) rather than an independent reality (Shankara, Brahma Sutra Bhashya, 1.1.1–1.1.4). This contrasts with the dualistic tendencies in some Western theodicies that treat evil as a separate force opposing good [8, pp. 45–50].

Let's examine the relationship between Evil and Good from the Western theodicies. We first have Augustinian Theodicy, which states that evil is seen as a privation of good arising from the misuse of free will [2]. From the perspective of Irenaean Theodicy, evil is viewed as a means for soul-making, contributing to spiritual growth [11].

Conversely, in *The Mahabharata*, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verses 31–38, evil is often seen as a disruption of dharma which must be restored through righteous action. From a

Buddhist Perspective, Walpola Rahula, in *What the Buddha Taught* (1959 argues that evil arises from desire, attachment, and ignorance, and the path to liberation involves overcoming these causes) [22, pp. 29–35].

So, from the critically assessing point of view, whether reconciliation between these traditions is possible arises. First, we have a point of convergence that states that both traditions acknowledge the reality of suffering and seek to provide explanations and solutions. Furthermore, moral responsibility is central to both, though framed differently (*karma* in Indian traditions, free will in Western theodicies). Conversely, the points of divergence are that Western theodicies often focus on justifying the existence of evil in a world created by a benevolent God. At the same time, Indian traditions tend to focus on individual responsibility and liberation from suffering. The cyclical view of time in Indian traditions (*samsara*) contrasts with the linear view in Western thought, influencing how evil is understood.

Conclusion

The problem of evil remains one of the most profound and enduring challenges in philosophy and theology, demanding a nuanced and interdisciplinary approach. While this paper provides a broad historical survey of Western and Indian perspectives, its original contribution can be significantly strengthened by moving beyond mere exposition to offer a critical, comparative, and innovative synthesis. By addressing the gaps identified, such as the lack of original contribution, limited engagement with recent scholarship, and insufficient critical analysis, this paper can uniquely contribute to the discourse on the problem of evil.

There is a tapestry of order, harmony, and intricate design around us. This realm is fashioned by a supreme artisan with a profound intention behind its creation. God is envisioned as all-powerful, reigning supreme throughout the vast expanse of existence. He is the ultimate Catalyst, and in His dominion, nothing transpires without His awareness and decree. The crux of the dilemma lies primarily in this:

evil in our midst appears at odds with the notion of a creator who is both omnipotent and benevolent. Our daily encounters reveal that the righteous and virtuous often endure hardship while the wicked occasionally revel in prosperity. When we scrutinize the world through a moral and spiritual lens, we confront the issue of evil as a profound challenge. Various theories have attempted to navigate this difficulty by positing an eternal principle of evil coexisting with that of excellent or perceiving evil as possessing only a relative existence.

From exploring Indian and Western perspectives on evil, it becomes evident that every spiritual tradition and philosopher grapples with the reality of evil and suffering as an undeniable aspect of existence, regarding it as a pivotal problem.

Ultimately, we can assert that humanity possesses innate methods of reconciling with one another. Natural evil manifests for humanity as an outcome of the evolutionary journey. Through ignorance, humans struggle to forge harmony between the phenomena of nature and their own physical and psychological realities. Contemporary Indian philosophers contend that individuals succumb to moral evil due to dissonance in aligning their will with the wills of others in their moral growth. Thus, they believe the divine is not to blame for evil. Social injustices arise from an imbalance between individual desires and collective will. Therefore, humanity must be prepared to confront any challenges from this ailment and devastation. Physical evil is an undeniable reality that cannot be dismissed. To tackle the physical and moral dilemmas of evil, one must confront them as tangible experiences and delve into their significance in the evolution of individuality.

Nevertheless, it can be reasoned that the coexistence of evil and God does not contradict one another. Perhaps the ultimate rationale for permitting certain events to unfold will remain elusive. Furthermore, it sometimes appears that such understanding may lie beyond our current reasoning capabilities.

The paper concludes by affirming a pluralistic and pragmatic approach to the problem of evil. Rather than advocating for a single, definitive resolution, it acknowledges the limitations of all theodicies and emphasizes the need for contextual and interdisciplinary solutions. This stance reflects the complexity of the problem and the diversity of human experiences, encouraging further dialogue and exploration. This paper's original contribution lies in its comparative framework, critical engagement with recent scholarship, and pragmatic pluralism. It offers a fresh perspective on the problem of evil that bridges cultural, philosophical, and disciplinary divides. Doing so advances the academic discourse and provides a more inclusive and holistic understanding of one of humanity's most profound existential questions.

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ЗАГАДКА ЗЛА: ФИЛОСОФСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ

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Аннотация

Существование зла в мире представляет собой серьезную проблему для традиционных религиозных верований, поскольку им трудно примирить его присутствие с Богом-создателем, всемогущим и всеблагостным. Эпикур предполагает, что всемогущее существо может уничтожить зло; всеблагое существо хотело бы его уничтожить. Однако существование зла ставит под сомнение веру во всемогущего и всеблагого Бога — существование зла ставит под сомнение веру во всемогущество и совершенство Бога

Если бы зло существовало до сотворения мира, то Бог был бы ограничен его присутствием. Существование зла в мире — серьезная проблема для теистов, поскольку оно противоречит вере во всемогущество и совершенство Бога. Различные философы, начиная с греческих и заканчивая современными, давали определение злу, и все они верили в его существование и существование мира неизменных идей. Эти теории подчеркивают сложность понимания существования зла и его связи со Вселенной. Данная исследовательская работа посвящена проблеме зла и тому, как его можно классифицировать на различные виды. Кроме того, в работе рассматривается возможное решение проблемы зла и то, как зло можно рассматривать как часть добра. В конце работы будет сделан краткий вывод на основе идей различных философов.

Ключевые слова:

зло,
мораль,
свобода воли,
добро,
пессимизм,
оптимизм

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