



THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN SUFFERING

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Abstract

The problem of why we suffer. God is the best creator. He allows humans to face the problems of evil so that humans can be perfected. Suffering arises because we desire or long for. This result in actions and its effects. It is the goodness and truth that is eternal. God has given freewill to man to choose between good and evil.

Key words: God, creator, suffering, desire, effects, truth, freewill, good and evil.



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Why do we suffer? Is a very big question that has perplexed the mind of human beings from time immemorial. Why are we born? And if we are born why this pain and suffering on this earth. We find suffering, pain, problems, old age and death. These to some extent can be said that there exists evil on this earth. Evil can be divided into two types. We find evil caused by nature like earthquakes, flood, storm etc. and evil created by man like fights, greed, insincerity, unfaithfulness, disloyalty etc. This paper tries to search the answer to the problem of evil and the questions related to it with the help of various religions of the world. The problem of evil in the various religions of the world:

According to Islam:

Allah is the Creator and He is the Best Creator.” Glory be to Allah, the best Creator. (Al-Mu'minun: 14) But the question still arises as to why there is pain and suffering in this world. This could be said and is only one side of the story as a whole. On the other hand we can also see health, prosperity, life, intelligence, progress and growth. So it is wrong to say there is only evil

in this world. Goodness is the rule of the world and evil is the exception. But then the question arises why does God allow evil on this earth as goodness is a part of Himself .

To know this we have to keep certain points in our mind.

1. This world that Allah has made is not a permanent world. Here on this earth everything has a time limit. That means neither the good things or bad things will last for ever.

2. Allah has placed a moral and a physical law for this universe. Anyone who breaks these laws suffers. Physical laws are based on cause and effect. "If Allah were to punish people according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the (earth) a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated Term: when their Term expires, verily Allah has in His sight all His servants." (Fatir:45)

3. Suffering can also be treated as a test and trial for some people. Allah or God allows some people to suffer in order to test their patience and steadfastness. Even Allah's or God's Prophets and Messengers were made to suffer. Prophet Ayyub as mentioned in the Qur'an as a Prophet who was very patient and God fearing man. Good people suffer but their sufferings heal others and bring goodness to their communities. People learn lessons from their good examples.

Martyrs die for their faith, soldiers give their lives for their nations and this brings liberation and freedom for their people.

4. Allah or God sometimes allows some people to suffer to test others, how they react to them. When you see a person who is sick, poor and needy, then you are tested by Him. He is there with that suffering person to test your charity and your faith. In a very moving Hadith Qudsi (Divine Hadith) the Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

Allah will say on the Day of Judgment, 'O son of Adam, I was sick and you did not visit Me.' He will say, 'O my Lord, how could I visit You, when you are the Lord of the Worlds.' Allah will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was sick and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me there?' Allah will say, 'O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not.' He shall say, 'O my Lord, how could I feed you as you alone are the Lord of the Worlds?' And Allah will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was in need of food and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him, you would have found that to have been for Me?' 'O son of Adam, I asked you for water and you did not give Me to drink.' The man shall say, 'O my Lord, how could I give You

water, when You are the Lord of the Worlds?' Allah will say, 'My servant so-and-so asked you for water and you did not give him to drink water. Did you not know that if you had given him to drink, you would have found that to have been for Me.' (Muslim, Hadith no. 4661)

Problem of suffering in Buddhism:

Let us now see what Buddhism has to speak about evil.

The first sermon that the Buddha preached after his enlightenment concerned the Four Noble Truths. The one of the most well known of Buddhist doctrine is "Life is suffering. The cause of suffering is desire."

Suffering:

The word suffering is a phrase which might seem to indicate that "life is miserable," but only that some pain is inevitable in life. Birth is painful, sickness is painful, aging is painful, death is painful. It is painful to experience unhappiness and displeasure; it is painful to want something and not be able to have it; it is painful to have something and lose it; it is painful when a pleasurable experience ends.

What the Buddha had been seeking when he became enlightened was a way out of Samsara, the endless cycle of death and rebirth and hence some kind of suffering. The Hindu texts, the Upanishads, which were written at around the same time, had argued that the way out of the endless cycle of death and rebirth was to realize that one's individual self or soul (atman) is a part of the world soul (Brahman).

Longing: Humans tend to long for what they do not have, or to wish for their lives to be different than what they are; they often fail to fully appreciate what they do have. This longing (craving, desire) gives rise to, or *causes*, a new cycle of life and death.

Problem of suffering in Hinduism:

The key to understanding the existence of suffering and evil in Hinduism is the central concept of Karma. It is the simplest of concepts and even the most complex one. The word simply denotes to mean "action." It was originally referred for the sacrificial action that was at the center of the Vedic world. Karma gradually took on the meaning of both action and the effect of action. Karma is the fundamental and universal law of cause and effect. When a person does something, it has an effect: good actions have good effects, bad actions have bad effects. Thoughts too have effects. An individual person carries around these accumulated effects, this karma. Over the

course of a single lifetime, an individual performs countless actions, has countless thoughts; all of these are part of karma—good and bad—are something like spiritual baggage, or some kind of deposits in a spiritual bank account. When a person dies, all of his/ her karma is, in a sense, added up. A "positive balance" leads to a more positive rebirth; a "negative balance" leads to a more negative rebirth.

Here two concepts are essential : the first is that of the Atman, the permanent self; the second is that of samsara, the cycle of rebirth or reincarnation. Hinduism holds that just as the world is created, maintained, destroyed, and recreated endlessly, so also people are born, live life, die, and are reborn again which continues forever. Although samsara is often called "reincarnation" in the West, it is important to note that it is not the "person" who is reborn, but the permanent self, the atman which also includes elements of one's personality.

The quality of each rebirth depends on the accumulated karma of prior rebirths; this karma "sticks" to the atman, and determines what sort of form it will take in each rebirth. Thus if a human being does particularly good deeds while he is alive, he/ she might be reborn as a "better" human being: for example a good shudra might be reborn as a Brahmin, in his next rebirth. But if one does particularly "bad" deeds, called papam, he/ she might be reborn into a lower life form—a member of a lower caste, to say, or even as an animal or insect. One might also be reborn outside of the earthly realm, as a demon or even, according to some schools, as a god or goddess. According to this worldview, there is no such thing as evil. There are "bad" people, who are bad because they have done or continue to do bad things; bad events happen as a result of karma.

The problem of suffering in Zoroastrianism:

In Persian philosophy, Zoroastrians have the most noteworthy contribution to religious philosophy on good and evil. According to this philosophy, not only good and truth are eternal, but evil and falsehood also share their eternity with them. Both have separate gods who have their own independent orders of management. There is, Ahura Mazda a god of goodness, also known as the god of light and there is a god of evil, Ahraman, also known as the god of darkness; each has his own well-defined role to play. All activity within the universe results from the collision and interaction of these two combatant gods, who are eternally locked in a grim battle of survival and supremacy. The powers of the god of goodness are constantly endeavouring

to dominate the powers of those of the god of evil. Like a see-saw, or a climatic change the outcome of this struggle is always changing sides sometimes in favour of goodness and sometimes in favour of evil. Thus Zoroastrian philosophy presents a simple explanation for the coexistence of evil and suffering, goodness and happiness, by attributing their origin to two different sources. All the ills in the world—pain, grief, distress, ignorance and suffering—are believed to ensue when the god of evil gains the upper hand.

It should be noted that what Zoroaster (c. sixth century BC) really taught was that the force of good and evil coexist to enable man to exercise his free will. Thus, man would ultimately be judged in accordance with his good or bad intentions and deeds. Zoroaster also taught that the universe was created by the god of light and that the forces of good will ultimately prevail. Thus in reality, evil is only another name given for the absence of goodness. Its absence only becomes conspicuous when light and shade play hide and seek. Yet shade is not a substantial thing. It is only light that matters and it is this light that seems to create shadows which is obstructed by something. Shadows however are not created by light but are the name given for its absence. Thus sin will appear by itself whenever goodness is eschewed. So if Ahraman is the god of darkness, he himself is the outcome of the negation of light and virtue, and not a creator of them. In the light of what has been discussed, we can safely conclude that Zoroaster believed in the God of goodness and in Him alone.

Problem of suffering in Taoism:

When we see Chinese Religions which are derived from the same ancient source of spiritual and religious experiences of the great Chinese sage prophet Fu Hsi. In the subsequent ages, many a great sage and thinker pondered over the works of Fu Hsi and studied them in-depth. Based on their study they presented to the Chinese people new philosophies, sciences, religions and moral teachings. The way of life presented by Lao-tzu (6th century BC), a contemporary of Confucius, is known as Taoism. In Taoism, eternal truth is embodied in a being known as Tao whose attributes are spiritual and holy rather than material. Tao can be aptly defined as a personification of eternal virtues. They are precisely the same attributes as ascribed to God in Islam and other Divinely revealed religions. Taoism teaches man to completely submit to Truth (Tao), and to strive to modulate Tao. Tao is the model, and Taoism is the way to gain nearness to this model.

The same is the treatment in the Holy Quran regarding the relationship between God and man:

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ * 2:139

The hues of God! And who is more beautiful in hues than God?—and Him alone do we worship. ¹

In Islam God is described and introduced through His attributes and the goal set for Muslims is to emulate them to modulate their lives. The description of Tao, presented by Lao-tzu, is quite similar to the attributes of God mentioned in the Quran. He writes:

'The great Tao is vast. He is on the left and He is on the right. All creatures depend upon Him, and the care of them tires Him not. He brings creation to completion, without seeking reward. He provides for all His creation, but requires nothing for Himself, so He may be considered small. All creatures turn to Him for their needs, yet He keeps nothing for Himself, thus He may be named 'the Supreme'. He does not consider Himself great and because of this He is truly Great.' ²

This shows that each person has to strive for eternal truth or goodness by his freewill given by god. It is god alone who has the attributes of goodness and we as humans should strive to achieve it.

The problem of suffering in Confucianism:

When we speak of Confucianism being treated as a mere philosophy, we particularly have in mind the question of the existence of God and evil. Few followers of Confucius (550–478 BC) today have a clear belief in any Divine existence.

According to some interpretations of Confucianism, suffering and evil are inevitable in human life, and can promote learning and growth. A mistake cannot be treated as "sin," but an opportunity to learn and do better in the life in future. Deliberate sinning is to be avoided as it can lead to problems in this as well as the other life.

Problem of suffering in Christianity:

Christianity believes in a God who is benevolent and who created the universe and all things in it. The genesis of creation was God's overflowing love, and God's plan for creation is rooted in divine goodness. God created humans in order to have fellowship with them just as a parent wants to spent time with his/ her children.

But how do Christians understand suffering and evil on this earth? Why should God, a benevolent creator who loves all creatures, especially God's human children, allow evil and suffering to exist? Christians have faith in a good and loving Creator. His plan for creation is also good and loving. This seeks an explanation or justification for suffering. Human suffering takes many forms: emotional, natural, and moral. Emotional sufferings like Loneliness, anxiety, and grief. Fires, tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunami, and physical illnesses (e.g. T.B) are examples of natural suffering. Moral suffering is brought on by the deliberate acts of fellow human beings to cause suffering, something Christians call a moral evil.

God created humans in a morally and spiritually perfect state but he gave free will to choose between good and evil, so that they can grow into full fellowship with God with full perfection. This argument continues to influence Christian thought and belief.

Another argument that theologian Augustine of Hippo formulated, that, since God endowed people with free will, we were able to freely choose to do evil as well as good. But in general it is stated, there is evil in the world because humans choose to do evil things. "Free" will is not free if we can only choose the good, so God does not prevent us from choosing evil. Suffering is the price we pay for this freedom to choose.

G.W. Leibniz a philosopher who believed that despite our suffering, and the tragic and catastrophic events in our lives, we are living in the best of all possible worlds. God is in control, Leibniz believed. When something terrible happens, it is not because God is not involved. God allowed it in order to prevent an even more terrible event from occurring. God is able to anticipate and prevent consequences that we cannot see. Since God is good and loving, we can trust that God creates and sustains the best possible world.

Thus as quoted in the Bible Psalm 53:1 "Fools say to themselves, There is no God." It is not true. God is very much present to see what we search for good or evil. Thus the problem of evil was present right from the inception of the world and will continue to be there till the world ends. It is up to each individual so take good or bad what he thinks is better for him.

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