

**ISCKMC 2022**  
**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****IS ISLAM THEODICY OR ANTI-THEODICY?**

Telman Emiralievich Kafarov (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Dagestan State Medical University, Makhachkala, kafarov.56@mail.ru

**Abstract**

The article shows that Islam is far from the extremes of theodicy and anti-theodicy, which equally take God away from responsibility for the existence of evil and suffering. Following Judaism, proclaiming God the primary source of both good and evil, it refuses theodicy, transferring all responsibility for evil to man, since the idea of divine omnipotence is incomplete. The Islamic worldview is not satisfied with all kinds of privatization theories that justify the all-goodness of God by the fundamental absence of evil for a variety of reasons, including the lack of good. Islam is also not a variant of anti-theodicy, which claims that monotheism is unable to explain the presence of evil. Therefore, it is necessary to abandon either the symbolism of divine omnipotence, which means a departure from monotheism, or the presence of evil and suffering, which is also absurd. This position makes it possible to preserve the foundations of Islamic tawhid and endow a human with responsibility for his intentions and actions. The roots of the confessional, theological and philosophical approaches to understanding the problem of evil lie in the misunderstanding of the nuances of distinguishing between the concepts “original cause” and “cause”, “source” and “original source”, which are meaningless in science, but extremely important for religion and theology. The article emphasizes the complex dialectic of the divine and the human in the understanding of evil that exists in Islam, which distinguishes it from classical theodicy and anti-theodicy, common in modern analytical theology.

2357-1330 © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Antitheodicy, christianity, islam, religion, theodicy

## **1. Introduction**

Philosophical and confessional interest in the issue good and evil has never weakened. But the bifurcation periods of social development are characterized by a revision of many values, as it was in antiquity by Socrates and Plato; in the Middle Ages – by Augustine; in modern times – by Leibniz. The current period is associated with the rejection of the communist, socialist and atheistic socio-political and spiritual-value orientations and the development of radicalism, extremism and liberalism. In connection with publications on classical and analytical theology, interest in the problem of evil has raised. These works generalize the Christian confessional experience, are written in the spirit of anti-theodicy, and do not touch on Islamic topics at all (Karpov, 2021). This article is one of the attempts to reveal the Islamic vision of evil through overcoming the extremes of theodicy and anti-theodicy, which will allow for a better understanding of other religions and cultural and confessional identities.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Different philosophical, confessional and theological approaches to understanding evil hinder an effective interfaith dialogue. Modern inclusive thinking requires finding common points of intersection. In philosophy, religious studies, and in classical, rational and non-classical, analytical theology, several main ways of understanding evil have been developed:

(1) through the symbolism of theodicy, a religious and philosophical concept that seeks to reconcile the idea of good and omnipotent God with the presence of evil, for which God is not responsible. It exists in a wide variety of forms, ranging from Manichaeism, the philosophical and ethical systems of Augustine Aurelius, Leibniz, Soloviev, Berdyaev and Florensky, and ending with numerous variants of modern theology. Some of its supporters allowed the existence of Satan, from which evil is derived; others believed that evil had no ontological grounds and was conditioned by a deficit of good: modern analysts give other rational arguments for substantiating divine all-goodness, including through irrational anthropodicy (the justification of a person through his freedom), demodicy (justification of the people and their spiritual culture), etc. Modern variants of these approaches include all kinds of privative variants of the concept of good and evil, according to which there is only good, and what is perceived as evil is actually a disadvantage good (Karpov, 2020).

(2) “anti-theodicy” understanding of good and evil, according to which traditional monotheism in the form of theodicy is unable to solve this problem, which became especially obvious after Auschwitz, the Holocaust, modern religious-political and cultural extremism, which showed the immorality of theodicy, making people insensitive to terrible manifestations of evil and indifferent to human suffering (Faul, 2021; Tilley, 1991). This created a conviction that it is impossible to eliminate the contradiction between the postulates of the omnipotence and all-goodness of God according to theodicy and the presence of evil in the world without eliminating one of the sides of this dichotomy: if the divine postulates are abandoned, this will destroy the structure of theism; in the case of refusal to recognize evil and suffering – to a contradiction with reality (Mackie, 1955; Rowe, 1979).

(3) moral nihilology, which substantiates the inexpediency of the evaluative approach in philosophy and analytical theology, especially in the categories of good and evil, since it is incompatible

with scientific rationality and objectivity. This approach was developed by Nietzsche. Earlier, this view was expressed by Spinoza, who argued that good and evil are only modes of thinking, formed by comparing phenomena with each other, and thus do not show their nature, since one and the same thing can be both good and bad at the same time, as well as indifferent. Good and bad do not belong to nature itself, they are the expression of human relations through thinking (Spinoza, 1957).

Varieties of this moral nihilology are kinds of naturalistic concepts of good and evil, offering to replace them with natural scientific mechanisms (e.g., the well-known work by Sapolsky “The Biology of Good and Evil. How does science explain our actions?”, where these categories are considered to be inherently vicious and unacceptable in science, since all moral judgments, depending on the circumstances are the result of either rationalization or intuitionism, which equally have neurobiological location) (Sapolsky, 2019).

In the literature, evil skepticism is also expressed by those who abandon these moral categories, since this involves the introduction of a number of metaphysical assumptions that give communication unwanted subjective socio-political and mythological meanings, leading away from rationality (Sidorin, 2021).

### **3. Research Questions**

Islam does not satisfy any of these concepts. It is close to the fourth position, in which good and evil are not separated from each other, but are considered in a dialectical unity. Almighty God is declared the primary source of good and evil. In the history of religion, a similar divine characterization was already given by Judaism, and it permeates all the books of the Old Testament: “Who can order that something be fulfilled (which) the Lord did not command? Is it not from the mouth of the Almighty that disasters and blessings come? (Bible, 2001, Lamentations 3); “I create light and darkness, peace and disasters. I, the Lord, do all these things” (Bible, 2001, Is. 45); “Is there a disaster in a city that the Lord did not create?” (Bible, 2001, Am. 3); “... Today I have offered your life and good, death and evil” (Bible, 2001, Deut. 30), etc.

Omnipotence must manifest itself in everything; otherwise it will not be omnipotent. Therefore, the Qur'an notes: “If God sends you something, then He alone can save you from it; And if He sends you any good, it is because He is omnipotent.” “... You give power to whom you wish, and you take away power from whom you wish, and you exalt whom you wish, and you humiliate whom you wish. In Your hand, there is good; You are powerful over everything!” (Quran, 1990, 6:17; 3:25 (26)).

We are also “forced” to draw this conclusion by the canons of dialectical logic, according to which good and evil act as paired opposites, presupposing and denying each other. One cannot be a creator of good, not to mention manifestations of evil. By this, it is emphasized that God is a constantly acting and active principle, asserting His existence in a continuous struggle against imperfection and evil, which is reproduced in the world in new forms. Theism differs from all kinds of forms of deism, which affirms a one-time creation, and hence the subsequent non-interference of God in the affairs, which makes a human responsible for everything that follows this creation in history. This role of God as a constantly acting creative principle means that the Almighty does not remove His responsibility for the past, present and future of this world, including for the existence of imperfection and evil.

This definition of Allah as a moral entity responsible for good and evil does not exempt a human from responsibility for evil. To assert the opposite means not to understand the semantic and substantive differences between the concepts “source” and “original source”, “cause” and “original cause”, which exist in the religions of revelation (unlike science, where their differentiation is absurd, since there is no original cause and primary source)

It is also important to distinguish between the divine source and the human source of good and evil; what can be perceived as evil at the level of humans, at the universal level, it can turn out to be good. Therefore, the Qur'an emphasizes that good is prescribed by the Divine Law. “It is prescribed for you to fight, and this is extremely hateful to you. Perhaps what is hateful to you, you will turn into a blessing. And maybe you like what will become evil (over time) – you (never) know what, truly, only God knows (Quran, 1990, 2:216). This is first.

Secondly, this differentiation of the primary source and source of good and evil is also important because without turning to Divine guidance, the human is not able to understand what is true good and what is evil.

Thirdly, the importance of this division is due to the fact that the human is often inclined towards evil. Therefore, he “... calls out to evil just as he calls out to good; because man is hasty (Quran, 1990, 17:12 (11)). “And if Allah hastened evil to people, as they hasten good, then their limit would have already been decided for them ...” (Quran, 1990, 10:12 (11)). The consequence of this haste is human impatience, manifested in the fact that “... the human is not burdened by prayer, asking for good for himself; when evil touches him, he despairs and is hopeless (Quran, 1990, 41:49 (49)).

Fourthly, the division between the sacred and personal sources of good and evil is important, because the human often forgets about the divine grace in overcoming evil: “And when the human is touched by evil, he calls to Us on his side, and sitting, and standing; when We remove the evil that has befallen him, he passes away, as if he had not called Us against the evil that touched him ... ”(Quran, 1990, 10:13 (12)).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of our study is to show that the Islamic project removes the extremes of theodicy and anti-theodicy. God possesses exceptional omnipotence, which makes Him a responsible moral subject in relation to good and evil, and allows Him to be consistently combined with the obvious presence of evil and suffering. Other confessions have not been able to explain this, and therefore have been “entangled” in the extremes of theodicy and antitheodicy, between Divine omnipotence, His omnipotence and dramatic reality, where evil is encountered at every step.

Islam argues against the belief that “Good is from God, and evil is from man”.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Of fundamental importance for this study is the use of:

- i. the inclusive thinking methodology focused on finding common points of convergence among all religious denominations;

- ii. the comparative approach, which makes it possible to reveal the methodological possibilities of various conceptual approaches to the study of religion in general, and Islam in particular;
- iii. the synergetic methodology for studying the mechanisms of self-organization and multifactoriality, non-linearity of the entire religious dynamics;
- iv. the systematic approach and traditional methods of dialectical thinking, with the help of which various religious phenomena and processes are analyzed;
- v. the principles of historicism and concreteness, with the help of which a meaningful analysis of social and religious instruments was carried out.

## 6. Findings

The main results obtained in this study on the uniqueness of the Islamic approach to the problem of evil are as follows:

1. The only unconditional attribute of God is his omnipotence in creation and action, including in relation to evil, which makes him a moral subject (certainly not in the anthropological sense) responsible for the presence of evil in the world.

2. Evil is not attributed to the Almighty as His action or attribute of His essence. Evil is in the object of action (*maf'ulihi*), rather than in its action (*fi'lihi*). This means that evil is not inherent in the Creator Himself, and the existence of evil is the purpose of creation. In this regard, He is not the creator of evil, He allows his presence as:

- the result of an unfair and incorrect disposal of human free will;
- a necessary and forced means of educating and punishing the human for his sins;
- a means of testing in the fortress of faith in the only God.

3. This circumstance does not exclude the divine attribute of all-goodness, which is manifested in the fact that He is the absolute creator of goodness, and in His creations there is no absolute or predominant evil (*sharrun mahd* and *sharrun golib*).

4. The absoluteness of the divine primary source of goodness is not grounds for denying the human as an important source of goodness. Without this recognition, the mechanisms of individual human responsibility cannot operate effectively. In this regard, the Islamic worldview differs from the theodicy of Augustinism, according to which the human is not responsible for good, since it is from the all-good God, but only for evil. In Islam, the human acting in synergy with God has been a source of goodness and justice. Therefore, he is worthy of punishment for sin and evil, and of rewards for good deeds.

5. Evil is not abstract, timeless and extra-spatial, it is a concrete historical value that requires its assessment taking into account the place, time, situation in relation to each human. This also expresses divine wisdom, since there can be good behind the apparent evil, and vice versa, as shown in the plots of the sura "The Cave", where the outwardly seeming barbaric and immoral actions (damage to the poor man's boat, murder of a young man, etc.) turn out to be the best intentions. This divine wisdom is often unpredictable. Ignorance speaks of its absence. Therefore, the biggest mistake is the literal reading and

understanding of each divine institution, the unwillingness to see the deep multiple meaning of the Holy Scripture and the Sunnah, which is oriented towards the symbolism and practice of ijtihad and mujtahid.

6. All-goodness of Allah manifests itself in the significant dominance of good over evil, good – over suffering and disasters of people. Without this, His assessment as omnipotent and merciful, loving all people without exception, is not convincing.

## 7. Conclusion

No matter how much Islam emphasizes that Almighty Allah is the primary source of good and evil, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that evil present in His deeds is a means (murad li-gairikhi) of establishing the correct tawhid. The Almighty allows evil, because it is followed by good. Since good and evil are inseparable, good is possible only through overcoming and limiting evil. Therefore, the presence of good that follows evil is more beloved to Allah than its absence. And the omission of that in which good predominates is the affirmation of that in which evil predominates. This and only this can be the only answer to the question "Why does Allah allow the existence of evil?" (Abu Muhammad, 2020).

## References

- Abu Muhammad, R. (2020). *Why does evil exist? The problem of evil*. [https://toislam.ws/aqidah/pochemu\\_sushhestvuet\\_zlo\\_problema\\_zla](https://toislam.ws/aqidah/pochemu_sushhestvuet_zlo_problema_zla)
- Bible (2001). Old and New Testaments. Synodal translation. In: *Bible encyclopedia arch. Nicephorus*. <http://dic.academic.ru/contents.nsf/biblerus/?f=0JrRgS40&t=0JrRgdGFLg%3D%3D&nt=910>
- Faul, B. (2021). Relational dimension of the problem of evil and mystical theodicy. *State, Religion, Church in Russia and abroad*, 39(4), 125–141. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/relyatsionnoe-izmerenie-problemy-zla-i-misticheskaya-teoditsey>
- Karpov, K. (2020). Privatial interpretation of evil in the religious and naturalistic worldviews. *Christian reading*, 6, 134–146. [https://doi.org/10.47132/1814-5574\\_2020\\_6\\_134](https://doi.org/10.47132/1814-5574_2020_6_134)
- Karpov, K. (2021). After theodicy: the problem of evil in the analytical philosophy of religion. *State, Religion, Church in Russia and abroad*, 39(4), 7–17. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/posle-teoditsei-problema-zla-v-analiticheskoy-filosofii-religii>
- Mackie, J. L. (1955). *Evil and Omnipotence*. *Mind*, 64, 200–212. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-4423%28195504%292%3A64%3A254%3C200%3AEAO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2>
- Quran (1990). SP IKPA Publishing House.
- Rowe, W. L. (1979). The problem of evil and some varieties of atheism. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16, 335–341. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009775>
- Sapolsky, R. (2019). Biology of good and evil. How does science explain our actions? *Alpina non-fiction*. <https://www.rulit.me/books/biologiya-dobra-i-zla-kak-nauka-obyasnyayet-nashi-postupki-read-544015-1.html>
- Sidorin, V. (2021). The Phenomenon of evil in atheistic discourse: the illusion of heuristic advantage. *State, Religion, Church in Russia and Abroad*, 39(4), 92–106, 100. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/fenomen-zla-v-ateisticheskoy-diskurse-illyuziya-evristicheskogo-preimuschestva>
- Spinoza, B. (1957). Ethics. In: Spinoza B. *Selected Works., in 2 volumes*. (Vol. 1, pp. 108–109, 523). Publishing House of Political Literature.
- Tilley, T. (1991). *The Evils of Theodicy*. Georgetown University Press.