

The Good Logic of Evil

The Bridge

Introduction

One of the key reasons that many people give for not believing in God is the prevalence of evil in this world. Even for those who believe in God, the power and the dominance of evil in our lives sometimes makes people to doubt whether God is indeed as good as the religious texts make us to believe. After all, the argument goes, if God is all powerful and good, then why is there so much evil in this world? This is the so-called problem of evil. It has baffled many minds and has led others to doubt either the reality of God or His goodness. For some people, the only logical conclusion that they can draw from the existence of evil is that there must be no God. For, they say, if there were God or that if God were all good and powerful then He could not have created a world like this. Then there are others who posit that there are two forces at play. The good and the bad and that right now the evil “God” is in control. These people look forward to a momentous day when the evil “God” will be destroyed. Still, others say that all this talk of evil is an illusion. They say that there really is no suffering or evil, but a serious illusion that makes us think that this is so. Once are free from this illusion, we would see that all that we thought was evil is nothing but self inflicted wounds.

My theses is this. The creator of this and all other worlds is all good and all powerful. The world does not exist because God is weak or because God is not good. Rather, this world of evil exists because in God’s endless possibilities, a world like this must exist. This world is a manifestation of the logic of God’s endless creative powers in endless time. If you had all the powers in the world to create; and if had forever at your disposal, you would not be creating the same world over and over again. Instead, you would create different worlds. Some of those worlds would necessarily be better or worse off than the rest. Variety is the mark of power and of creativity. The more resources you have; the

more creative you are; and the more time you have, the more different things you would create. This is why the good and powerful God can create and has created a world like this. Please follow me.

Evil As a Precondition to Goodness and Pleasure

What we call “evil” is simply the hurts that we all experience as a result of our vulnerabilities. For example, you meet a bully on the road and he demands that you hand over your wallet. You try to resist, but alas, you have insufficient resisting qualities. Of course, the wallet just sits there, perhaps quietly contemplating whether you should have taken some serious courses on combat. Your resistance is futile. So you go home broke and hurt. It is our relative powerlessness in the face of undesirables that gives rise to our experience of evil. All hurts result from only two things:

The capacity of someone or something to inflict hurt on you; and
Your inability to resist or to overcome the hurt.

Hunger, for example, is not called evil when you have plenty of food lying around. In fact, when you have a lot of food, hunger becomes something good. What people call “appetite” is just another word for hunger. For it is this hunger that enables you to consume and to enjoy the food. The same goes for every other need. When you have no means of fulfilling the need, that need becomes evil. But when we can easily satisfy the need, we don’t think of it as evil, but as a precondition to consumption, to creativity, to enjoyment and so forth. If no one or nothing could hurt you, you would not have any problem with evil. If you had no needs or if all your needs could be easily fulfilled, you wouldn’t be talking much about evil. To ask the question of why there is evil, therefore, is simply another way of asking why we have the capacity for suffering and not endless powers to overcome them. There are two answers to this question.

Evil Makes Individuality, Creativity, Productivity and Society Possible:

I have already hinted at the first answer. The needs that create our “evil” are the very reasons we are motivated to work, to think, to fluid communities and relationships and to

do all the things that make us human. All needs prompt action. Without needs, there is no reason to do anything. For example, when you are hungry, you suffer. Because you do not like to suffer, you look for food. If you are not a farmer, this means that you must find a means to get some food. In other words, the capacity for hunger pushes you to work. If we could not be hungry, there would be no need for food and there would be no farmer. Let us take another example. You have the capacity to feel lonely. When you are alone, you feel hurt. Of course, you do not like to be hurt. So, in response you look for acceptable company either through family, work, community or whatever. Your capacity to be lonely has compelled you to communicate, to fraternize and to build a society. Let's look at things from another angle. You have the capacity to be hurt by your ignorance of many things. For example, when you are ignorant of how to float and you jump into the lake, you end up with a disproportionate share of water in your system. You of course, do not like this. So, as a result you exert your self to learn about the mechanics of water and of floating. You learn about how to swim or, in the alternative, you build or buy yourself a floatation device. Why have you done all this? Why do we build families, cities, factories, schools, temples, playgrounds and so on?

The only answer is that we are responding to our needs. Take away the need for these things, and they would not exist. Because the world is set up to favor the intelligent, we are always forced by our needs to use our faculties systematically and regularly. Not only does the use of our faculties enable us to fulfill our needs, but it is the very use of our faculties, that define our unique identities and personalities. It is the way you needs force you to respond and act that sets you apart from all others and makes you identifiable as an individual. We do not all suffer the same things and certainly not at the same time. Your different hurts and your different responses to various hurts set you apart from others and makes your experience unique. Individuality is possible only because none of us has suffered the same hurt as the other has suffered. Without our different vulnerabilities and our different responses to same, we would lack our individual personalities. We are each shaped by our vulnerabilities, be they of wealth, health or gender. Because I have not gone through what you have gone through, you think and feel things differently from me. You are in other words, the hurts that you have suffered and

your responses to these hurts. For humanity as a whole, we are no more than our responses to our needs and hurts. Take away our needs and hurts and we are no longer human beings.

Without our vulnerabilities we could not be human. If you think of yourself, you will see that you are no more than your experiences. These experiences are no more than your hurts and responses to them. You learned this and that and you did this and that only because you needed to do so, or you wished to avoid or remove a real or potential hurt. Since you act because of these hurts, it follows therefore that if you lived in a world without suffering, that is, a world in which you did not suffer hunger, loneliness, sickness, shame, poverty, insecurity and so forth, you would not act. Where there is no fear, there can be no heroism. Where no one is weak, there can be no sense or act of compassion. Where one is happy alone, there is no need for need for the company of others and thus no need for love; no need for sharing, of patience, of trust and of all the things that follow from a needy relationship. Simply put, every form of human pleasure is possible only because of the presence of the needs that we have. When these needs are not fulfilled, they become our hurts. If there was no possibility of being hurt, there would have been no need for action and for pleasure. To enjoy a thing, you must need it. Would you rather be born in a world in which you experienced no need for any one at all and therefore lived all alone or would you rather be born in a world in which because you feel the need to be loved, you live with the beloved in a companionship?

If we had no need to eat, to build, to heal, to love and so forth, we would not do these things. If we had no need to act and did not act, we would not have any inventions, no creative works, no communication, no society, no individual uniqueness and achievement, nothing: we would just be sitting there or lying there, like the mountain. I am sure that none of us would like that. The important thing here is that not only would we not act, but our faculties for doing these things would also be unnecessary and absent. If you have no need to walk, you will have no use for legs and so you would have no legs. If you have no need to chew, eat, laugh, drink or speak, you will have no need for the mouth and therefore, you would be toothless and mouthless. The same goes for all our other faculties. In a world without hurts, you would be an eyeless, mouthless, earless,

legless, stomachless, toothless...human being. You would just be a motionless blob, sitting there all alone. Just imagine that animal! The conclusion, therefore, must follow that some type of suffering or so-called evil is logically necessary as a precondition to goodness, to pleasure, to human creativity, productivity and to society. A world of “evil” is therefore no more than a world that makes it possible for each one of us to be unique to be human and to have joy. Looked at this way, one can easily see why a Good God would create such a world to be and allow it to continue. You can see how inestimably brilliant He is.

Evil As A Possibility of Knowledge:

The second reason for the existence of evil is as follows: God's Creative Powers are endless. He is not called the Almighty for no reason. In addition, God has forever to create stuff. That means that God has endless possibilities. If you can think of God's possibilities as numbers, you can easily see how it is that each possibility, however, small or however great must exist. In God's worlds or possibilities, a planet like this with living things like us must exist. Just as all logical numbers must exist in an infinity of numbers, so too must all possible things that God could create come into being in one place or another. Of course, I am not saying that God has no choice. He does. But when you have eternity, creating paradise after paradise gets to be boring after a while. Throw in an earth and some hell, and voila, there is some excitement! So, not only does our earth represent a manifestation of an eternal possibility, this world adds unique colors, sounds, movements and stories to reality in way that makes the world different without it. God can plant a garden of roses, but why should He do so for all eternity? What is wrong with having another garden of bushes and wild berries? Can we say that the gardener must be terrible because he chooses to plant different gardens at different places, instead of the same garden everywhere? If God did not create a world like this, He would forever have denied us the possibility to be what we are. He would also would have denied Himself the opportunity to express the part of His creative will that manifested itself as us.

As Muslims and Christians we believe that the great God has created many worlds besides the earth. The earth is where the life of the human being begins, but the destiny of

the human being is not the earth, but in many other worlds. It costs God nothing but His will to make anyone of us. All that God has to do to make you live in the hereafter is to will that you live hereafter. And God knows that you will love to live hereafter. Now God is the Most Generous and the Most Compassionate Being. It is His nature to give and to give abundantly, over and over again. In addition, God loves those who love Him. Their companionship gives God Pleasure. So, it follows that if you love or please God, you are guaranteed to live hereafter. Because there is a hereafter, it has an impact on the significance of our experiences here on the earth. Our experience here serves as an introduction to the many possible worlds of God.

Of God's many worlds, none is like the earth. Each world is unique in the same manner as each human being, each leaf and each day is unique. On the earth, each day presents us with opportunities to hear, see, feel and know a great many curiosities of unparalleled proportions. From some people or events we come to know courage, kindness, patience, love, goodness and so forth. And from others, we learn anger, hatred, stupidity, ugliness and so on. There is always something to be learned from any experience no matter how unpleasant or unwanted. We each must shun evil for our own sake, but we must also learn from things that happen to us. My conduct and my fortunes educate my neighbours and I about the many sides or possibilities of being and their experiences too, educate them and I about other possibilities. Every dream, every nightmare, every act, every effort, and in short every life event educates us, shapes our views of reality and enriches our perspectives along the way to God, our Goal.

Because I live on the earth I know what it is to be hungry and to lose a dear one. I also know what it is like to laugh, to play and to be cherished. I know how hard it is to accomplish things and I also know how joyous it is to accomplish things. I have felt the excruciating pain of illness and I have also felt the exhilarating joy of health. I have worked and I have played, won and lost and I have seen and felt many countless and wonderful things. There is no place like the earth. My experience here has given me a perspective about reality that I could not otherwise have gained if I had been born say, in paradise. All God's intelligent creatures are students on a course entitled "God's Many Signs and Worlds". God wants us to learn about Him and to come to appreciate and to

love His Greatness and Glory, through His creation. The earth is one of the signs of God and a required reading. It is a required reading because of all the unique qualities described earlier. There are more pleasant readings as part of the course. Now because of the law of opportunity costs, none of us could have been born into two different worlds at the same time. God therefore, had to determine which one of His worlds to place us in first. The decision was entirely up to God. For us human beings, He chose this world as our starting point.

As I have already explained, if God wills the human being could live forever. As compared to forever, the time spent on the planet is like one trillionth of a millisecond; it is almost nothing. I also mentioned earlier that for those who love God at least, the hereafter is more pleasurable than this world. So, given that the earth is a required reading and the time spent here insignificant, it makes sense that God allows us to begin on the earth in the less pleasant world and then upgrades us to the more pleasant, later. By giving us the earth first and for only a short period, God has ensured, at least for those who love Him, that the hereafter would be more pleasant. We come to live for the first time in this world, without much to compare our experience with. It is thus easier on us to handle this type of “evil”: we have not known anything better. It is easier to be poor and then rich than to be rich and then poor; it is better to be sick and then healthy than to be healthy and then sick. It is better to be deprived and then rewarded with abundance later than to be rewarded with abundance first and then deprived of it later. Placing human beings in this world as the starting point of their very long journey is, therefore, kind. It is a wise decision on the part of God. This is a clear sign of God's Compassion for us.

To be placed on the earth, therefore, is to be given an opportunity to experience a very unique perspective of God's reality. Those who have been (created) into different worlds, have not lived like we have lived; they have not known what we have gone through and we do not know what they have gone through. If we human beings had been born directly into a world of more pleasures instead of this world, we would have been forever denied and prevented from ever experiencing one of the dramatic, deep and memorable creations of God, that is, the earth. Now if you go to heaven from the earth, you can have something to talk about and to compare things with. Your company and conversations

will be more interesting and you yourself would be more pleased, more grateful to God and happier.

But It Is Not All Pain, Pain, Pain

Although evil is a necessity, we do not live in such constant pain as to be incapable of even temporary joys. The bad comes with the good. The very fact that we are able to discuss this matter is proof that we have some room for good. The very fact that we decry evil proves that we have some good. After all, if this world were all evil, how come billions of people have families and continue to have children? What about the joys that we partake in as so-called ordinary living? As Christians and Muslims we must admit that evil is a reality without positing two “Gods” or that it is an illusion to be overcome. The degree of suffering in the world has been tampered and limited by two things: by the short span of our lives, and by our desire and ability to reduce suffering. Humanity is, in fact in the process of discovering the means to curing much of the physical and mental hurts that afflict us. How much progress can be achieved is completely dependent upon time and human effort. If there are any limitations to progress, it would appear to lie mostly in human laziness, greed and stupidity. Right now, there some types of suffering that we could eliminate or reduce if we choose to do so. We can reduce hunger, homelessness, tyranny, ignorance and so on. The strong need not abuse the weak; the learned need not deceive the ignorant; the rich need not rob the poor nor be greedy. We need not hate and hurt one another. We need not destroy ourselves and our environment. Yet every day, these are the things we do and these are some of the things that rob us of some of the joys of life.

Much of human suffering is attributable to the actions and inaction of our fellow human beings rather than to the cycles and processes of nature. If people were inclined to reduce suffering for all, many people would suffer significantly less than they do right now. At the individual level, much suffering could be eliminated by a fundamental change in desires. There is much that we can do to acquire the power to overcome our many ills. Our relative powerlessness in the presence of evil is elastic. With knowledge and the will, there is much joy to be had and much pleasure to be gained. Love of the harmful may

result in harm to oneself, no doubt. Love of the good results in goodness and therefore, peace. For example, because of scarcity of some things, the desire for gold, a high status and the one hundred and one charms of the material world one can easily be frustrated. Frustration leads to hurt. A change in the quality and quantity of things you desire would lessen your desires, the less would be your frustrations and therefore, the less your pain.

In the final analysis, however, because many hurts will occur as a result of events or things beyond the person's control, subjective exercise alone would not be enough. Not only must the individual strive to change his or her priorities, but each is called to purposefully help change the collective priorities of the society as a whole towards improving the lot of everyone. You, as an individual, have a responsibility to reduce the harm that you may cause or allow to be caused to yourself and to others. However, the society as a whole, has an even greater responsibility to reduce as much suffering as possible for each fellow being. This is a call for compassion for the weak and the hurt, and justice for all. This is a calling within human capacity and if responded to positively, will make this world a better place.

In addition, God has, out of His compassion, made our lives relatively short so that we do not endure evil for long. Each one of us has a limit on how much we can tolerate. There is only so much we can take. The more intense or unbearable the evil we experience, the shorter our lives. The unbearable soon kills us. Furthermore, our ability to endure, resist and to overcome evil is strengthened by the comforting thought that our time is short and that God is with us and that there is with Him, a hereafter more enduring and forever blissful.

The Differences In Human Experience and God's justice

If God is Good, you may ask, and we are supposed to be learning, why does not everybody enjoy or suffer equally? Why do some people appear to live in affluence whereas other people live miserable lives? The answer lies in the uniqueness of this world and of the uniqueness of the person. After all, when we describe this world, it must specifically include our inequalities. This inequality is part of the map structure of this

world. It is a part of the eternal possibilities that I mentioned earlier. If you take away inequalities completely, you get a different world. I am not saying that we should accept inequalities. But you only have to turn around to see the differences between species and the differences within species; between seasons, between ages, between sexes and so on to see that these things make up the unique world of the earth and will always be around as long as the earth ensures.

Having said that, there is nothing in nature that says that the strong must exploit the weak or that injustice must prevail over justice. In the human realm at least our virtues are topes of kindness, justice. These are ideals that must govern our lives. Every one of us has a stake in ensuring that our communities are ruled by these virtues. We have to strive individually and collectively to make these ideals, our realities in our institutions and communities. For these virtues are the only cures to our relative weaknesses. Life can be better for all only when every man has a duty to be kind and just to another. This is what the Quran preaches; and this is what the Bible offers.

Now on the issue of our differences. We have to remember that we could not all have been born at the same time to the same parents and subject to the same weather, upbringing, weaknesses and opportunities. As we are born at different times, and raised at different places under different conditions, our experiences must differ. You are unique in time and space. So when you suffer or enjoy things, you do so uniquely. The question cannot therefore, be “why can't I enjoy myself like so and so over there”, for you are not so and so and you are unlike anybody else. As I have already explained, your limitations make you the unique person that you are. When you wish for another's fortunes, you in effect wish that you were that other person or that you were non-existent. This is a wish for death; and an insult to your individual personhood and also to the collective purpose for our being on earth. We are born into this world to learn about the many possibilities of reality. Learning is possible only because there are unique events and experiences. Your experiences offer unique educational perspectives to yourself and to those who know you. In turn, your neighbour's unique experiences offer you more educational possibilities. It would defeat the educational purpose and the advantages of unique individuality to have everybody subject to the same experiences.

It is true that some people appear to suffer more than others, but the fact is that everyone suffers in their own way and none of us is wronged in the least. As Christians and Muslims, we believe that the ultimate measure of success is pleasing God. God does not burden any person, nor does He make any demands upon any person beyond his or her control. Each person is judged uniquely according to his or her unique circumstances. God treats the similarly situated, similarly and the differently situated, differently. Every difficulty that a person faces is known to God and He takes this into account every time in judging the person. Those who have more are expected to do more and are judged accordingly. The more you are able to act, the more you are judged by your actions.

The less you are able to act, the less you are judged by your actions. Those who cannot run are judged by how far they walk. Those who cannot walk are judged by how far they crawl and those who cannot even crawl are judged by how much they wish to run or to walk or even crawl. When a person is completely incapacitated as result of circumstances beyond his or her control, that person is excused from any human or moral responsibility and becomes completely blameless. The blameless please God. The consequence of that is that every involuntary handicap or difficulty opens heaven's doors to the person.

Despite the value of suffering as an educational possibility, to the extent that we can minimize or remove handicaps to moral choices, or to the extent that we can minimize or remove suffering, we are obliged to remove them. Everybody's life is unique and incomparable and therefore, equal to everyone else's. As such, no one human being has the right to increase another's misery, or to restrict their moral choices without just cause.

Those who hurt others must be prevented from so doing at all times. It is needless to say that from our perspective much suffering is undesirable. Therefore, even though these are educational possibilities, we are not asked to blindly seek after things that make us suffer. Rather, while the world has been set-up in such a manner as to make exposure to the stupidity and evil of others inevitable, we often have a choice as to the type of educational possibilities that we wish to have. And whenever we have a choice, the reasonable thing to do is maximize our exposure to less hurtful educational possibilities and to minimize destructive educational possibilities. The incentive for so doing or

refraining from the other is often the practical consequence that follows from choosing one way or the other. There are many things to learn and there is not enough time to learn them all. Some things bring hurt and lead to destruction while other things bring goodness and health. Only the unthinking and the foolish will indiscriminately expose themselves to whatever possibilities on the basis that they are learning. The wise person is required to choose what type of thing to learn whenever possible to do so and to minimize their hurts.

It is true that there is not much joy in sickness, broken dreams, deprivations, abuses, betrayals and wars. True, much living is filled with sorrow. But look at the other side too. Not long ago, I walked past a little park with many colourful trees, and scattered about on its ground were uncountable leaves, some dead and many freshly fallen. Close to where I walked, many pigeons flew here and there in their little familial groups, seemingly undisturbed by the little children playing nearby. Up in the heavens the blue sky seemed like a glorious tapestry, with its gentle clouds gradually dispersing. As I looked on, cool winds from nowhere blew past and round me, softly blending the pigeons, the leaves, the children and my view into one complex and vibrant earthly family. The ordinary was, at once, extraordinary and very impressive. I walked on but I could not help but noticing how nice it is to be alive, to be able to see, to know and to experience! The point is that much living is filled with joy. There certainly is joy in being alive and being a conscious witness to it. There is joy in being with loved ones; there is joy in accomplishments; there is joy in satisfying needs, and, for the most part, what people need in order to make their lives enjoyable are food, shelter, basic health, caring companions and the pursuit of meaningful goals. Thankfully, all these are within human ability .

What we must do is try our best to know how things work so as to have the means to minimize our hurts and injuries. The best way that we know how to reduce our suffering is to be learned; work and apply the principles of kindness and of justice that we have learned from the Bible and from the Quran. To sum up then, God has given us lives and placed us in a world that allows us to experience pain and joy and the opportunity to learn and to accomplish things. God has also given us the capacity to increase our joy and decrease our pain. The best human qualities that we have and cherish, such as

compassion, love, courage and creativity arise in us only because we are born in a world with suffering. To be born unto the earth is to be given a very remarkable educational opportunity unparalleled in its intensity and qualities and unobtainable anywhere else. The One who has given such an opportunity and the ability to live, free of charge, with even a promise of greater and better worlds to come, cannot justifiably be called bad. Certainly, God is not only Good, He is also Most Kind. O my Lord, Your servant! Thank You. Thank You forever!

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