The Philosophical Problem of Evil In The Intellectual System of Suhrawardī And John Hick

Mukhammad Zamzami[1], Abdullah Hosseini Eskandian[2], Muktafi[3], Zumrotul Mukaffa[4]

[1,3,4]Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, Indonesia; [2]University of Tabriz, East Azerbaijan, Iran

Email: [1]m.zamzami@uinsby.ac.id; [2]hosseinieskandianabdullah@gmail.com; [3]muktafi.sahal@uinsby.ac.id; [4]zumrotul.mukaffa@uinsby.ac.id

Abstract: The issue of evil is one of the most important cases in philosophy, which is very important in philosophy because it contradicts the existence of God with improper evidence. Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl believes that evil is non-existent and what is considered evil or not evil is a means of achieving good, and since it is a means of obtaining good, it is also good; as a result, there is no evil. But John Hick, according to the "Theodicy of the Cultivation of the Soul," believes that evil exists and that the existence of evil is minimal and merely for the cultivation and evolution of the human soul and spirituality. Having examined and compared the thoughts of Suhrawardī and John Hick about evil as philosophers with two different religions and schools of thought, their partisan defense of the existence of God and His attributes about evil is something that can lead us to their thoughts regarding their familiarization with the problem of evil and their solutions to solve it. In this research, the nature and interpretations of evil by Suhrawardī and Hick, as well as the types, solutions, and answers given by these two philosophers on the problem of evil, have been examined using a descriptive-analytical method and finally, their thoughts have been compared. Suhrawardī and Hick believed that the existence of evil has no contradiction with the existence of God because God is absolute Good and evil is not issued from him and what is considered evil is either an estimate of a person's misunderstanding or a necessity for acquiring charity.

Keywords: Evil, Suhrawardī, John Hick, Good System, Philosophy, God.

A. Introduction

The existence of hardships, difficulties, and sufferings in life has always involved the human mind with the problem of evil; on the other hand, in appearance, it contradicts with the belief propositions such as knowing the almighty, the absolute Good and the absolute benefactor. The existence of these types of cases has always attracted the

attention of different thinkers in philosophy and theology to the issue of evil and discussions in this regard.[1]

The problem of evil has a long history in the life of man from the beginning until now; every time he has been afflicted with various kinds of sufferings, he has been faced with the question of why there is evil? What is the purpose of their existence? Or could the world not exist without evil? In the revelatory religions, where the attributes of God are stated, the issue of evil can be in contradiction with their accepted religious principles in different interpretations, and there is a question that in case of evil is issued from God, who is absolute good? Such questions and doubts have always led to discussions and research about evil and its nature. In ancient Greek philosophy, philosophers such as Plato[2] and Aristotle[3] have discussed evil and offered solutions to its problems. Also, in Islamic philosophy, many philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārābī,[4] Mulla Sadra,[5] and others have discussed and researched about evil. In the meantime, the study and comparison of Suhrawardī's thoughts as a Muslim philosopher and mystic with the thoughts of John Hick, a Christian, regarding evil was the main focus of this research.

Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā bin Habash al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (1154-1191)—or popularly called Suhrawardī—is was a Persian philosopher and founder of the Iranian school of Illuminationalism (*ishrāqiyyah*), an important school of Islamic philosophy. He believes that evil is non-existent and has no realization in the universe. He considers evil as the lack of perfection in the essence of the object because it is useless. He believes God to be the absolute good that only good is issued from him and evil cannot be attributed to him, and this is the person who causes sin and aggression with ill will and will, and in a sense "evil".[6] Unlike Suhrawardī, John Hick (1922-2012)—a philosopher of religion and theologian born in England—has accepted the existence of evil and believes that God has given good deeds and values to man that cannot be achieved unless man suffers pain and tolerates difficulties. He considers that the world has a good system in which all its

---

[1] Abdullah Hosseini Eskandian and Masoumeh Rajab Nejhadian, "Evil Thought and Its Approaches with an Emphasis on Swinburne Theodicy of Divine Justice", *Metafizika*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2020), 108.

[2] Reginald Hackforth, "Moral Evil and Ignorance in Plato's Ethics", *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3-4, (1946), 118-120. DOI: 10.1017/S0009838800023442.

[3] Jozef Müller, "Aristotle and the Origins of Evil", *Phronesis*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2019), 179-223. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685284-12342099.

[4] Hümeyra Özturan, "The Practical Philosophy of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna: A Comparison", *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2019), 1-35. DOI: dx.doi.org/10.12658/Nazariyat.5.1.M0071en.

[5] Ibrahim Kalin, "Mullā Ṣadrā on Theodicy and The Best of All Possible Worlds", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2007), 183-201. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26199806.

[6] Maryam Solgi, Ghasem Pourhassan Darzi, Amir Abolfazl Hekmat Arjmand, "Merciful God and the Problem of Evil in the Philosophy of Suhrawardī", *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 11 (2015), 286.

components are in the right place, and evil cannot disrupt this ultimate order of the world of creation.[7]

This article sought to answer these questions using credible sources and analytical capacities: What was the definition of evil by Suhrawardī and John Hick? Is evil non-existent or does it exist? Can the existence of evil deny the existence of God or restrict His attributes? Can evil violate the good system of the universe? In what ways do Suhrawardī and Hick know evil? What strategies did Suhrawardī and Hick express to solve the problem of evil? What are the similarities and differences between the ideas of Suhrawardī and John Hick on the issue of evil?

B. The Nature and Problem with Evil

In Suhrawardī's works, instead of the words good and evil, light and darkness are sometimes used, the reason behind this is that Suhrawardī's philosophy is based on absolute light and the importance of the subject of light in his philosophy is for this reason that he attributes goodness to light, which is the same as light and guidance and attributes evil to darkness. Suhrawardī's explanation expresses the luminosity of goodness and the darkness of evil. According to him, evil is a non-existent thing that has no essence; he has defined evil as having no essence.[8] He says: "Evil is not a thing, but it is either nothingness or imperfection of something, and since the obligatory existence is purely good and its essence is the most perfect and rational being, then pure goodness exists from God".[9]

And if there is something having evil within, his goodness is then more than evil, which is due to the highest kind, and good is pure *Ashraf*; and that is the world of reason, so like it, although it appears like water and fire. That is, their benefit is greater than their harm, and the benefit of fire is necessary to burn the dervish's clothes every time and to leave a lot of good out of every small evil; although there is a lot of evil, there is no dominant evil. If someone says why they did not create this species so that there is no evil in him, then this question is wrong since it is still the case that someone says they did not make water non-water and fire non-fire. And if all were pure good, you would have been

---

[7] C. Robert Mesle, "The Problem of Genuine Evil: A Critique of John Hick's Theodicy", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (1986), 412-430. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1202728.

[8] Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, in Suhrawardi's Collected Works, introduction and edition Henry Corbin, Vol. 3 (Tehran: Institute of Cultural Studies and Research, 1996), 55.

[9] Faris Hajamaideen, "'Ilm and the Human Body: al-Suhrawardī's Concept of the Illuminated Temple", in Akkach Samer (ed.), *Ilm: Science, Religion, and Art in Islam* (South Australia: University of Adelaide Press, 2019), 125-138. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb4bt41.16.

the first kind, and you would not have been the second kind, and the existence of the universe would not have been possible, more complete than what has been achieved.[10]

Suhrawardī divides beings into five categories: absolute good, abundant good and little evil, equal good and evil, absolute evil, and abundant evil and little good, and it is believed that in the meantime, only the first two propositions are realized, and equally good and evil or absolute evil or multiple evil and little good have no place in realization and manifestation.

Suhrawardī considers evil as a necessity of the nature of the world due to the poverty of the *Ghahereh* and *Modabareh* lights in the world of darkness and believes that the occurrence of evil is due to a defect that is not worthy of attribution to the light of the lights and should be sought for another reason. It could be because of a divine test or punishment. According to Suhrawardī, although a person can consider a series of things and phenomena as an evil that causes him to lose his composure or harm him, the same things and phenomena are nothing but good in comparison with the whole world system. Also, evil is a partial estimate of the superficial view of man, and if it is explained in comparison with the whole system of the universe, it will be all good.[11]

According to Suhrawardī, evil is realized when it can be considered as an existence for which the whole universe has possible beings, but since the existence of the obligatory existence is obvious and clear and human intellect and soul confirm it. Therefore, it cannot be considered evil.

As for John Hick, instead of trying to define evil based on the type of theological theory, for example, as something that is against the will of God, it is better to define it without veiling, that is, by showing what these words mean; evil means suffering, this suffering refers to physical pain, mental pain and moral evil.[12] He also states: "The word evil, if used in a comprehensive sense, can be distinguished in two ways: *first*, moral evil caused by human evil; and *second*, immoral or natural evil such as disease and natural disaster. Human beings create moral evil; it is cruel, unjust, vicious, and misguided thoughts and actions, or in other words, moral evil refers to those evils in which the human factor has a direct role in its emergence. But natural evil arises independently of human actions such as disease, flood, earthquake, storm, drought, tornado, etc.[13]

---

[10] Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 60-61.

[11] Ibid.

[12] John Hick, *Face to Unface*, trans. by Jalal Tavaklian, *School Magazine*, No. 2 (1993), 89.

[13] John Hick, "D. Z. Phillips on God and Evil", *Religious Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (2007), 435. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20006391.

Hick defines an example of evil and says: "Instead of trying to define evil based on some kind of theological theory, it is better to define it without arguing, by showing what the word means. Evil refers to physical and mental suffering as well as moral evil.[14]

Unlike Saint Augustine,[15] Hick believes that although evils are non-existent, their existence in the world of creation cannot be denied. He considers the non-existence of evil and on the other hand offers solutions to solve the problem to be contradictory and believes that providing solutions to solve the problem is contradictory; he believes that providing a solution to solve the problem of evil is one of the reasons for proving the existence of evil in the universe because no rational human being for a non-existent assumption states a solution to solve the problem, and if the solution is expressed, it means that the problem already existed that the solution to the problem is now stated.[16]

From Hick's point of view, the existence of evil in the universe has no contradiction with the attributes of God's benevolence, wisdom, and absolute justice; because God is absolute good and no good is issued except good, and evil cannot be attributed to God because it is contrary to the divine attributes and God cannot be considered as the creator of evil. On the other hand, he believes that the existence of evil is necessary to achieve charity, and their minimal existence in the world can be identified, and obtaining knowledge about charity is obvious.[17]

From Hick's point of view, the existence of evil in the world has no contradiction with the goodness of this world because the existence of evil in this world is an integral part of it, and without them, this good system of the world cannot be imagined; despite this evil, the world is called as the creation of the best system.

C. Evil Types in the View of Suhrawardī and John Hick

Suhrawardī has not given a detailed and comprehensive division about evil in his works, but from his discussions about evil, it can be acknowledged that he believed in the existence of three types of evil, which include metaphysical, natural, and moral evil.

---

[14] John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th edition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 39.

[15] Augustine knew that evil was real. Independent evidence (natural theology) was enough to convince him that God existed and that everything He created would be good. Evil, then, must be something real, but not a "thing" in the conventional sense. Evil is not a created thing, but a corrupted good made possible by the free moral agents of rational beings. Evil is not something that is present, but something that is missing, a privacy. There is a good reason why God permits evil. It is not against His goodness. God is not the creator of evil, or its helpless victim. On the contrary, it was precisely because of His goodness that He chose to coexist with evil for a time. See Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Chap. 6 & 9 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009).

[16] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 67-69.

[17] Arifa Farid, "John Hick on God: A Review Article", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1999), 275-287. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837041.

Metaphysical evil refers to those evils that lie at the root of things and people and potentially exist in them. Metaphysical evil is the absence of absolute perfection from which it is inherently useless. Broad says: "It is metaphysically necessary that every creature of the world should contain some kinds of metaphysical evil because in every world a creature is made up of monads and each monad has a degree of ambiguity and a degree of metaphysical evil.[18]

Metaphysical evil is the absence and absolute perfection that is woven into the core of the whole possible world. Metaphysical evil is a prerequisite for the creation of the universe of possibility. Evil pervades the universe, and that is the limitation and imperfection of the universe relative to the infinity of God. In other words, metaphysical evil is the evil that all possible beings and creatures of God are affected by and cannot be separated from them, and means the limitation; in Mulla Sadra's words, it is the "existential poverty" of all possible beings in the face of God's infinite perfection. Because every limitation is considered a defect and weakness, and every defect is considered as a kind of evil; therefore, limitations are poverty and the possibility of the existence of evil.[19]

Suhrawardī has used metaphysical evil to explain the possible existence of this world and its creation; on the other hand, to describe the perfection of the goodness of God's existence, from which nothing but good is issued.

Natural evil includes the same events of the natural world as floods, earthquakes, storms, tsunamis, etc., which may always occur in different parts of the world and their existential roots go back to nature; although human manipulation in their creation should not be ignored. Natural evil is one of the characteristics of the natural world that is always happening and frequently happens in different regions. It seems that there is a kind of inseparable existence between this group of evil and the ruling system of nature. Some believe that natural evil is the manifestation of metaphysical evil in the natural world.

Suhrawardī believes that the existence of floods and earthquakes is an inseparable part of this world. These things cannot be considered evil because it is a matter of nature and because it is related to nature, it is therefore not evil and it is good. It can lead to the attainment of many good deeds for man, which may be hindered by the limited thought of the man in understanding all aspects of it.

According to Suhrawardī, the last type of evil is a moral evil, which is the source of the creation of a person who sins by following his whims and avoiding the divine commands. Moral evil is the obedience of man from the devil inside and outside, which

---

[18] C.D. Broad, *Leibniz: An Introduction*, ed. C. Lewy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 160.
[19] Alizamani Amir Abbas and Hashemi Fatemeh Sadat, "Augustine's Theory of Evil and its Critique from Ibn Sina's Point of View", *Sadraie Hekmat*, Vol. 5, No. 12 (2015), 98.

causes the sovereignty of evil between human beings and the world. Moral evil is all the evil; that is the intentional product of those people who do evil deeds or the evil that is made by human beings who fail to do good deeds due to negligence.[20]

Furthermore, Suhrawardī argued that the performance of moral evil by man is one of the means of authority because one of the proofs of the existence of authority in man is the power to choose between good and evil. He attributes the existence of evil to man and considers God as pure good. Nothing good is issued from him, and he is not the cause of evil, and what is considered evil is the product of man's will and authority in an inappropriate position.

Meanwhile, according to John Hick, he considers evil to be unique in both moral and natural forms. Moral evil is the result of man's evil and his evil will create evil, and natural evil includes natural things in the universe, such as floods and earthquakes. About this category, he says: "Moral evil is created by human beings. Oppressive, unjust, and misguided thoughts and actions, or in other words, moral evil is the kind of evil that the human factor has a direct role in its emergence. But natural evil is independent of human will and human will does not play a role in its creation".[21]

Hick considers moral evil to be the result of human will and will be caused by the human factor. Hick considers human selfishness as one of the factors that cause moral evil. In other words, it has been the selfishness and superiority of human beings throughout history that has led to wars and killings, because as long as there is no greed for the land and capitalism of another land, no war would have taken place, and blood has not been shed for no reason. Hick considers that another factor causing moral evil is the ignorance of a person who suffers from evil in knowing good and evil, which leads him to choose evil since he is unable to distinguish between good and evil. Accepting and surrendering to fleeting desires and committing moral vices stem from human ignorance in committing and creating evil.

Hick says: "There is a deep connection between moral evil and human free will, and human free will plays a major role in creating moral evil".[22] When Hick confronted with the question of why God, the absolute benefactor, does not prevent the creation of moral evil, he pointed to man's free will and stated that if God prevented man from creating moral evil, then man's free will would not be valid, then, man would become like

---

[20] Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* trans. by Mohammad Javadan (Qom: Mofid Publishing Institute, 2002), 154.

[21] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 265.

[22] *Ibid.*, 263.

the creatures that God had already created; one of the differences between man and the angels is man's freedom to do good deeds and sins.

Hick believes that if a person realizes that God, the Holy Father, is always watching him and wants him to give up evil and walks towards him, he will then never commit moral evil. But since man's tint is occupied with passion and lust, and he does not consider God as he deserves, he suffers from evil and evil creation.

In the case of natural evil, Hick also considers suffering as one of its symbols. John Hick mentioned natural evil to be one of the tools of human progress in science and technology and believes that if it were not for natural evil, many of today's inventions, tools, and instruments that play an important role in human life would not have been created. Hick, however, believes that natural evil can sometimes cause great harm to humans and animals. But he considers the charity resulting from this evil to be much greater than its losses, and he considers the losses resulting from natural evil to be insignificant in comparison to its charity.

D. Solutions to Solve the Evil Problem

Suhrawardī has stated these solutions to solve the evil problem: *First, evil is necessary for a good system*. Suhrawardī considers the world of creation at its best and considers it a good system in which despite the mustard, there is no disorder and distortion because creation is the creator of the almighty and pure good, and there can be no evil or wrong in it. As this world and all its creatures are absolute goodness, from which, no evil is ever issued, and the evils that man think, are either not evil or are necessary for this good system.

In a comprehensive look at Suhrawardī's views, it can be seen that in all his works that raise the issue of evil, he emphasizes the two important philosophical foundations of "good system" and "abundance of good". Suhrawardī states that evil occurs only in darkness and dark affairs and is an inherent requirement of material nature, trying to portray the existence of evil in the universe as a partial existence in the face of abundant goodness and shows that leaving much good due to evil is contrary to the expediency, divine wisdom and mercy.[23]

Suhrawardī believes that evils are necessary for the world of nature, and the world cannot be considered without them; otherwise, we would face another world that God has already created. He states: "Evils cannot be separated from the natural world,

---

[23] Maryam Solgi, "A Comparative Study of the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of Suhrawardī and Swinburne", *Andishe-e-Novin-e-Dini*, Vol. 14, No. 55 (2018), 155.

and just as moisture is inseparable from water or burning from fire, evils are also inseparable from the universe.[24]

Second, evil is few and good is great. Suhrawardī believes in the minimum of evil or the second type of Aristotle's division, that is, the existence of abundant good and little evil, and considers the existence of little evil in the world as a necessity for obtaining charity.

Suhrawardī states: "If someone says that as stated, good is more than evil, why is it that obedience to lusts, anger, ignorance, and renunciation of the hereafter prevails over people, and most of them are misguided? Know that the people of this world are ranked in three categories; the upper side in worldly and moderate happiness is far and low, which is the supply of attaching and physical suffering, and the sum of both parts is more than this. Now it is the same and happiness and goodness are more than cruelty and evil".[25] He also states: "Consider a human being whose clothes have been burnt by fire. First, if we compare the harm caused by the burning of clothes with the amount of benefit he has gained from the fire during his lifetime, we will see that they are not comparable in any way; a human being is beneficial and his goodness is greater than his evil".[26]

According to Suhrawardī, the existence of evil and what is considered evil is itself necessary for obtaining good. Therefore, it should also be called good.

Third, evil is non-existent. Existence is absolutely good and selective, and every good has two descriptions and properties; if it exists, it is beloved, and if it is missing, it is desirable and the origin of evil, which is non-existent in the realm of the natural world, includes two things; the weakness and deficiency of talent, which prevents the acceptance of the superior perfection of existence, and the antagonism that exists between these two modes of existence in natural objects. The limitations, collisions, conflicts, and contradictions that exist in the natural world cause some beings to dominate others, preventing them from reaching their proper perfection; this collision and contradiction is not due to the existence of material beings but is due to the allocation, the existence of which is natural and intoxicating; this determination limits and restricts each of them and prevents each of them from surrounding the other and is included in the other, united with them or carried on it.[27]

---

[24] Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 2001), 461.

[25] Suhrawardī, *Collection of Works by Sheikh Ishraq*, Vol. 3, 56.

[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 272.

[27] Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, *Rahiq-e-Makhtum*, Vol. 2 (Tehran: Esra Publishing Center, 1997), 156-157.

Suhrawardī believes that whatever God has created in the world of creation is good, and whatever is considered "existence" is nothing but good. So, evil does not exist at all, and if there is something, it is good and it cannot be called evil.

Meanwhile, according to John Hick, He believes that although in appearance it is possible that the existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of almighty God and His attributes, or that it challenges the goodness of the system of existence; when we realize the truth of evil, not only it does not contradict with the existence of God and the good system, but we realize the existence of God and understand the goodness of this world in the best way. He has stated these solutions to solve the evil problem:

First, evil is necessary for achieving charity. One of the solutions to the problem of evil, which many religious thinkers have expressed, is that it is necessary to understand charity. Based on this solution, we sometimes realize the goodness of some phenomena through evil, and by realizing them, we try to protect and fortify them as much as possible. For example, illness is a kind of evil by which we realize the importance and value of health or hunger that makes us realize the blessings of satiety. Thus, although evils may seem harmful in appearance, they will either direct us to charity to try to pay more attention to their preservation or may lead us to newer charities.

Charles Taliaferro says: "By experiencing evil, we come to understand the nature of good and appreciate it fully. Good without evil is neither known nor its value will be known. This approach can also be called the "theory of divine justice "of the great good. By believing this theory, theists believe in the all-encompassing dimensions of the universe as truly good, so they cling to it in addition to arguing that these good deeds are either a condition for the existence of some evil people or the realization of these good deeds requires some evil people".[28]

Hick believes that we should not consider every seemingly evil thing to be harmful and bad to us with a superficial view because in its essence, it may be all good and beneficial for us, and we may be unaware of its nature. The same trend continues in the universe, and natural phenomena, although seemingly harmful to nature and ourselves, the benefits of that natural evil far outweigh the harms to humans and nature itself.[29] He also believes that the existence of evil is necessary for the acquisition of charity, and one of the areas in which evil causes the acquisition of good is that evil cultivates the spirit and

---

[28] Charles Taliaferro, "Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction", in Graham Oppy Chapter (ed.), *In the History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 5, Acumen Publishing (2009), 1-12. DOI: 10.1017/UPO9781844654673.002.

[29] Mesle, "The Problem of Genuine Evil", 413-414. Frances Gray, "John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection", *Ars Disputandi*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2004), 186-187, DOI: 10.1080/15665399.2004.10819840.

spirituality in people and as a result elevates them to a much higher human level and it is difficult to find the ground for the excellence of anything.[30]

From John Hick's point of view, evil does not exist without reason because all evil people pursue a goal. He believes that God allows evil to create the greater good.[31]Hick also states regarding the charity from natural evil: "If we remove suffering from the world, human activities and efforts would alleviate suffering and natural disasters, and on the other hand, learning techniques and skills, and the creation and expansion of civilization and culture, will break the rules and lose their cooperation and mutual support. In this case, the human race will have innocent but ineffective and unmotivated people. Human beings would be without identity and personality and devoid dignity and greatness and would have responsibility and policy in a dreamy, pleasant, unchallenged, quiet and peaceful world.[32] Therefore, from Hick's point of view, the existence of evil is a necessary thing to know and acquire charity.

Second, epistemological distance. To explain and solve the problem of moral evil, Hick uses a solution called epistemological distance, which links the creation of moral evil by man to his distance from God; he will no longer be able to earn good and will inevitably suffer evil. In defining the epistemological distance, Hick says that "the epistemic distance refers to the distance that exists between God and provides man with the possibility of freedom and independence from God".[33]

Hick believes that the starting point of man's epistemological distance from God is when God blew his spirit into man and he turned away from God, widening the gap by immersing himself in the concerns of material and worldly life. This epistemological distance causes man to sin because man is far from God; that is, it is far from good and all that is good, and as a result, it suffers from evil.

Hick puts man at an epistemological distance from God. The result of this effective tool in maintaining man's epistemological distance from God is the emergence of the intelligent man as the axis of creation. For this reason, man's spiritual position in the epistemological distance from God forces him to organize his life apart from God and to place himself at the center of competition with his peers. This central self naturally

---

[30] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 292.
[31] Michael Peterson, *God and Evil*, trans. by Rostam Shah Mohammadi (Semnan: Semnan University Press, 2014), 98.
[32] Hick, "D. Z. Phillips on God and Evil", 436.
[33] *Ibid.*, 438.

appears in the developmental nature of individuals and is considered a moral evil that one finds in oneself.[34]

Hick believes that this world has less color and smell from God than the world of the hereafter, and that is why God has given man will and authority and because man does not follow the divine commands as much as he should and his will is used for inappropriate matters. It causes him to turn away from God and as a result, create evil. Hick has used this strategy to justify moral evil.

Third, evil is relative. Another solution for evil is to consider it as relative. According to this theory, evil is a relative thing and maybe a phenomenon for some people; this phenomenon may seem good to others, and we should note that relativity is opposite to the truth. Also, the conditions and situation of time indicate that the evil is relative because in a certain period, a phenomenon may be evil for a person, and in another period and time, the same phenomenon may appear as good.[35]

Evils are of two kinds: evils that are non-existent affairs and evils that are existential and are bad because they are the source of a series of non-existent affairs. Evils that are non-existent, such as ignorance, helplessness, poverty, etc., are real but non-existent traits. However, the evils that exist are bad because they are the source of non-existent matters such as floods, earthquakes, stings, and germs, which are undoubtedly the relative evil of these matters.[36]

John Hick emphasizes that evils are relative, and in contrast to each other, accepting a description of being worse. He explains that even if God eliminates all the evils that we think are the worst because of the relative nature of the evils, remaining evils will have the same prominent title.[37]

Fourth, evil is compensated in the other world. This world, with its limitations, cannot be fully accountable for the creation of justice among human beings, and on the other hand, it cannot please the pious and punish the transgressors. Some human beings, from the beginning of life to the end, are always in sufferings and hardships that are

---

[34] Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). See also Stephen J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 16 (1984), 73-93.

[35] Peter H. Here and Edward H. Madden, "A Theodicy for Today: A Review of John Hick's Evil and the God of Love", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (1966), 287-292. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1966.tb01884.x

[36] Khalil Sultan al-Qaraei, et al. "A Study and Comparison of Evil from the Perspective of Augustine and Ibn Sina", *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (2010), 97.

[37] Mesle, "The Problem of Genuine Evil", 412-430. See also Zahra Hosseini, Karim Atashgar, and Navid Nazarnejad, "The Problem of Evil from the Perspective of John Hick", *Islamic Studies of Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 48, No. 96 (2017), 57.

incomprehensible to many others, and their hardships and difficulties are not answered with a proper reward in this world; this does not mean that they will be deprived of the administration of true justice, but that the limitations of the present world prevent the full administration of justice and God will bring true justice in the hereafter although some aspects of it will take place in the same world. According to religious propositions, a person in this world always struggles with problems and hardships such as poverty, slavery, suffering, and similar bitterness and has not yet achieved his right. In that case, God will answer and reward in the hereafter. He will give her hardships because many evils are the punishment of deeds and on the other hand, God will punish other people who oppress others.[38]

In response to the question of endless suffering, Hick points to their mysterious nature and states that behind this evil, there is a great charity that this world cannot bestow it on man and that there must be a world separate from material features. This is the world so that it can be accountable to man for receiving great good and charity and this great good is in exchange for the sufferings and hardships of man in this worldly life, which are not possible for a man to receive this goodness in this world, and God will benefit man in this world in the hereafter.

Hick believes that every hardship that man has endured in this worldly life will be answered in the hereafter with a great reward, and no hardship befalls man in this world unless he shares in the final plan of God, and all this will happen if we believe in the pure and absolute goodness of God and His mighty will.[39]

E. Differences in Thoughts on Evil between Suhrawardī and John Hick

The issue of evil is one of the topics that has always caused human thought and thinking over the centuries and has confronted him with fundamental questions about the world of creation and its creator. It is more difficult to face the challenge of evil, especially for believers in monotheism, because in the revelatory religions, God is described as wise, just, and benevolent; at first glance, the existence of human suffering and hardship in the world contradicts these divine attributes. This has led to the most difficult doubts in denying the existence of God or restricting His attributes by the issue of evil, and the issue of evil is considered a refuge for atheism.

---

[38] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 294.
[39] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 388; Martin Prozesky, "John Hick's Interpretation of Religion: A Perspective from South Africa", *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2012), 5-14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24798117.

Suhrawardī and John Hick are Islamic and Christian thinkers of revelatory religions who have tried to explain and present a narrative on the issue of evil in their religious and philosophical parameters and make it compatible with God. Methodologically, Suhrawardī has tried to explain the base of light and darkness, which is the basis of his philosophy and considers good as good and evil as darkness. In comparison, John Hick has also tried to explain evil based on his theory of what is called "Soul Cultivation" which is derived from the theodicy of St. Irenaeus.

According to Suhrawardī, evil is a non-existent thing that has no existence and essence and means the absence of good in everything. He believes that evil either does not exist or if something is considered evil, such as illness and suffering, it is the cause of achieving good, and because it causes the attainment of good, it is also good; the cause of achieving good is itself also good. He considers the benefits of suffering and illness for a person to be thankful and submissive to the divine will, as well as the acquisition of moral virtues in its guidance, such as generosity, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and help, and he believes that such things that cause good deeds will be good and there will be no evil. But Hick believes that evil is not non-existent, rather evil has been realized in the world of creation, and the existence of evil cannot be denied in the world of creation, and the minimal existence of evil is necessary for the existence of such a world.

Suhrawardī believes that the creation of the world is a good system that combines good and evil to mean goodness. John Hick also believes in this rational paradigm and states that the existence of a minimum of evil makes this world the best one among the possible worlds. Hick, in his theodicy, on the one hand, attributes the moral evils created by man to God to provide the ground for the attainment of charity by creating evil; and on the other hand, in the light of this evil existence, he proves the authority in man, and attributes this duality and all things to God, even the moral evil of man, and proves that the authority of man is one of the contradictory points in the theory of soul cultivation. But Suhrawardī believes that God did not create evil and did not create it, and man has free will, and if evil is realized, it is the inheritance of man's will and free will, and from the absolute good that is God, nothing but good is issued.

In his theory, Hick has tried to explain evil as a necessity for human mental and physical development, and at this time, he faces the problem of excessive evil like infants who initially have a disease and disability in life without committing a sin and reincarnation to solve the problem; he is subjected to reincarnation to attribute the sufferings of infants and other such issues to their sins in the previous life. As a Muslim sage, Suhrawardī hates reincarnation and whatever smells of duality and polytheism, and he does not believe in such a thing. He believes that the sufferings and hardships of

such people as infants are ultimately compensated for by great goodness that is not comparable with that aspect of evil.

Suhrawardī considers evil to be limited to three types: natural, moral, and metaphysical, and attributes natural evil to the natural world, such as floods and earthquakes, and moral evil to the will, such as sin and aggression. Metaphysical evil is also called evil that is potentially like objects and people; it is the absence of absolute perfection. But John Hick considers evil to be limited to moral and natural evil and does not discuss metaphysical evil. Both philosophers believe that evil is more than the estimation of human will and that moral evil is much greater than natural evil.

F. Conclusion

Both philosophers, Suhrawardī and John Hick, believe that evil is necessary for the acquisition of goodness and the good nature of this world. But the solution to the non-existence of evil, which Suhrawardī stated to solve the problem of duality, is not accepted by John Hick because he accepts the existence of evil. Also, the existence of maximum charity is one of the solutions that is accepted by both philosophers. Finally, it should be noted that despite the ideological and methodological differences that exist in explaining the evil issue between Suhrawardī and John Hick, which is also natural given the scholastic and religious differences, both philosophers have tried to make a rational defense of the existence of God and the good system against evil suspicions and both have expressed a defensive view against evil suspicions to deny the non-existence of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbas, Alizamani Amir and Sadat, Hashemi Fatemeh. "Augustine's Theory of Evil and its Critique from Ibn Sina's Point of View", *Sadraie Hekmat*, Vol. 5, No. 12, 2015.

al-Qaraei, Khalil Sultan et al. "A Study and Comparison of Evil from the Perspective of Augustine and Ibn Sina", *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 5, No. 9, 2010.

Augustine, Saint. *The City of God*, Chap. 6 & 9. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009.

Broad, C.D. *Leibniz: An Introduction*, ed. C. Lewy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Farid, Arifa. "John Hick on God: A Review Article", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1999. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837041.

Gray, Frances. "John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection", *Ars Disputandi*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2004. DOI: 10.1080/15665399.2004.10819840.

Hackforth, Reginald. "Moral Evil and Ignorance in Plato's Ethics", *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3-4, 1946. DOI: 10.1017/S0009838800023442.

Here, Peter H. and Madden, Edward H. "A Theodicy for Today: A Review of John Hick's Evil and the God of Love", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, 1966. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1966.tb01884.x

Hick, John. "D. Z. Phillips on God and Evil", *Religious Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2007. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20006391.

Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Hick, John. *Face to Unface*, trans. by Jalal Tavaklian, *School Magazine*, No. 2, 1993.

Hick, John. *Philosophy of Religion*, *4th edition*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990.

Hosseini, Zahra., Atashgar, Karim., Nazarnejad, Navid. "The Problem of Evil from the Perspective of John Hick", *Islamic Studies of Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 48, No. 96, 2017.

HosseiniEskandian, Abdullah and RajabNejhadian, Masoumeh. "Evil Thought and Its Approaches with an Emphasis on Swinburne Theodicy of Divine Justice", *Metafizika*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2020.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel (ed.). *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Javadi-Amoli, Abdollah. *Rahiq-e-Makhtum*, Vol. 2. Tehran: Esra Publishing Center, 1997.

Kalin, Ibrahim. "Mullā Ṣadrā on Theodicy and The Best of All Possible Worlds", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2007. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26199806.

Mesle, C. Robert. "The Problem of Genuine Evil: A Critique of John Hick's Theodicy", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 1986. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1202728.

Müller, Jozef. "Aristotle and the Origins of Evil", *Phronesis*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 2019. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685284-12342099.

Özturan, Hümeyra. "The Practical Philosophy of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna: A Comparison", *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2019. DOI: dx.doi.org/10.12658/Nazariyat.5.1.M0071en.

Peterson, Michael. *God and Evil*, trans. by Rostam Shah Mohammadi. Semnan: Semnan University Press, 2014.

Prozesky, Martin. "John Hick's Interpretation of Religion: A Perspective from South Africa", *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24798117.

Solgi, Maryam. "A Comparative Study of the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of Suhrawardī and Swinburne", *Andishe-e-Novin-e-Dini*, Vol. 14, No. 55, 2018

Solgi, Maryam., Darzi, Ghasem Pourhassan., Arjmand, Amir Abolfazl Hekmat. "Merciful God and the Problem of Evil in the Philosophy of Suhrawardī", *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 11, 2015.

Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, in Suhrawardi's Collected Works, introduction and edition Henry Corbin, Vol. 3. Tehran: Institute of Cultural Studies and Research, 1996.

Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq.* Tehran: Tehran University Press, 2001.

Swinburne, Richard. *Is There a God?* trans. by Mohammad Javadan. Qom: Mofid Publishing Institute, 2002.

Taliaferro, Charles. "Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction", in Graham Oppy Chapter (ed.), *In the History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 5, Acumen Publishing, 2009. DOI: 10.1017/UPO9781844654673.002.

Wykstra, Stephen J. "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 16, 1984.