

# *The Problem of Evil*

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Great sages and brilliant minds have marveled at the inscrutable ways of Providence, but they all feel perplexed at the existence of evil and suffering in the midst of the bounty of Nature. On

one side, man is provided with immense wealth of good, while on the other side he is harassed by the forces of malign power. It seems strange that the faithful and godly people suffer, and the ungodly prosper; saints fail in their philanthropic undertakings, while tyrants flourish by their nefarious activities.

If God is all Power, all Love, and all-pervading Spirit, and Lord of Eternity, then how can the forces of evil maintain themselves in the Universe? Is God responsible for their existence? Are they a necessary evil? These are the questions that have been baffling great minds throughout the Ages.

All great religions recognise the existence of evil. Its denial is no solution to the problem. The existing state of affairs, as well as the history of the world, shows that there is conflict, trouble, pain, suffering, disease, and death in the Universe. According to the Hindu savants, the logic of the fish prevails; the larger fish devours the smaller species; the strong take advantage of the weak.

Races of people with superior fighting skill and organisation subjugate other races for selfish exploitation. Principles of justice and fair play are thrown to the winds, and feelings of love are spurned with contumely. Human life is made miserable by the constant attacks of the malignant bacteria floating in the ether, and there is an unending struggle for existence. Undoubtedly, there is good to counterbal-

ance this evil, but the forces of evil are too strong and alive to be denied. It is a mark of advanced intelligence that man recognises the problem of evil. For the primitive man there was no such problem. He lived in constant terror of the Universe and found good and evil from the Spirit World. Beneficent Spirits brought him good and malignant Spirits were responsible for his ills. The same conception prevailed in the polytheistic religions, which maintained that Nature was ruled over by various gods. The real difficulties in explaining the problem of evil come in the monotheistic religion, which traces the order of the Universe to the will of one Supreme Being, who is all Love.

Various thinkers in history have marshalled arguments to give a reason for the discordant elements in the order of the Universe. In the Bible there appears the story of the "Fall of Man," which states that Adam and Eve were induced by a serpent to eat the forbidden fruit. Plato said that the material factor in life, conflicting with the idea [sic], gives rise to wrong passions and evil desires. Plotinus, exponent of "New Platonism," finds the root of evil in the body, or Matter, with which the lower appetites are connected. He is said to have been ashamed that he had any body. The Gnostics attributed evil to the imperfect agents whom God employed in the work of Creation. According to

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St. Augustine, sin is due to the weakness of human will issuing in the wickedness of human nature. But the Scholastics maintained that human nature was originally good; later it became admittedly bad. But what made it bad is not adequately explained.

Modern, exponents of religious philosophy deal with the problem of evil in three ways. In the first place, it is said to be due to the free will of personal beings without any responsibility on the part of God. Originally the Universe was good, and there was no disturbing element to upset its harmony, until one of the powerful angels, Satan, led his fellow angels in rebellion against God. Satan was ambitious and jealous. Although he could not prevail against God, he had great powers to tempt man. Man listened to him and fell. His fall brought him, sorrow, suffering, and disease. Once established, this kingdom of evil can be uprooted only by atonement for sin through suffering. Since man is finite and unable to atone for his sin, God sent His Son to make atonement and to redeem men from sin and suffering.

In the second place, the older theories of the inertness of matter are brought out to explain the problem of evil. Matter is said to precipitate a conflict with Spirit, and thus obstruct the power of love, justice, and the ethical and higher values of the human spirit. Even the finer forces in human existence, in the form of nervous organization, are not perfect instruments for Spiritual realization. Matter is a tool of Spirit, but its brutal and insensate character becomes a hindrance rather than an aid to the development of Spiritual life. It is, therefore, the source of evil in the living world.

Finally, evil is said to be a necessary factor to bring into prominence the real value of the beauty, goodness, and grandeur of the Universe. The way to Spiritual realization is through hardships and suffering, and the richest and most harmonious Selfhood is attained only by those who bear with patience

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and self-abnegation the burden of evil in the service of mankind.

According to Leibniz, human beings derive their perfections from the influence of God, but their imperfections come from their own nature, which is incapable of being without limit. Imperfection is the source of evil, not the will of God. However, he avers, this is a desirable world; its good far outweighs the evil. For Hegel, sin holds a justifiable place, as it forms a necessary stage to virtuous Self Realization. Bradley admits that, although sin is a discord, "yet discord disappears if the harmony is made wide enough."

After all, divested from philosophic interpretations, evil is positive evil, rather than an instrument of good, and none of the theories advanced in its explanation can stand a rational test. If God is said to be Omniscience, Omnipotence, and All Love, how did He create Satan, who had the power to rebel? If this is true, then God is not free from responsibility, for He created beings endowed with evil powers, and He permits them to continue their mischief.

From a biological point of view, our rise, fall, and death are incidents in the evolution of animal life. Beings devoid of the sensation of pain and pleasure, and who are immune from death, are inconceivable in the scheme of the Universe. The theory of Satan, therefore, is an offense to human reason.

Is there any conflict between Matter and Spirit? Does this conflict cause suffering and sin in the world? So far as human knowledge goes, there is no scientific ground to suppose that Matter conflicts with the finer forces of Nature or obstructs the operation of intelligence. Matter is a necessary factor in the Universe, but it is in discovering the nature of material energies that some of the greatest Spiritual values are achieved. Moreover, disease and suffering are caused by the struggle of invisible microscopic organisms floating in the air. Even for these phenomena God is responsible, for He is all Power, and all-pervading Spirit.

Finally, the question arises: "What is the explanation of the problem of evil?" To deny the existence of evil

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is either to allay its harshness or to live in a fool's paradise. Nor is the doctrine of Reincarnation any solution to this riddle, for this also is caused by the forces of evil. Man recognizes this problem at this stage of his development, and being finite, he attempts to delve into the secrets of the Infinite. He recognizes, however, that all these diseases and sufferings are for the material body, not for the Soul. The Soul is immortal, deathless, and scatheless. [sic]

When the physical body is fully under the control of the mind, and the mind is governed by the Soul, then there is no evil; an individual sees macrocosm in the microcosm, and his own Self in all existences. Finally he reaches a stage where he identifies himself with the all-pervading Spirit. Instead of a bubble that is subject to the dangers of winds and storms, he becomes the ocean. His problem of evil vanishes in thin air.

This realization is the result of a slow process of self-purification. The finite mind should have faith in the inscrutable ways of the Infinite Power, because human reason has not yet advanced to that stage where it may explain the operation of the Divine scheme. Faith in super-mundane affairs brings self confidence and power. By right living, and by ennobling and elevating worldly desires, one may follow the path of true Self Realization. When the mind and Soul are vibrating in harmony with the Cosmic scheme, there is no evil. Strong faith yields love, and man becomes convinced that "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." —Romans: [8]:38, 39.

