UNIT 4   PROBLEM OF EVIL

Contents

4.0   OBJECTIVES

The problem of evil challenged the existence of God. As Stumf observed, the problem of evil traditionally has been understood as an apparent inconsistency in theistic beliefs. The gruesome facts of suffering provide unmistakable, objective evidence that an all- powerful and perfectly loving god does not exist. For more than two millennia, dramatists, theologians, philosophers and their modern counterparts have pondered the problem of evil. The unit attempts to capture the problem of evil as dealt in philosophy in both Western and Indian traditions.

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Philosopher's task is to see whether the facts of suffering, which induce a range of powerful religious reactions involving belief, emotion, and motivation, also provide the basis for a cogent argument from evil to the non existence of God- an argument that should persuade the reasonable person who considers it carefully. Philosophy, like literature preoccupied with the problem of evil: its origin, nature, and effects. Philosophers have tried to define evil, to assess the utility of the moralistic language of evil, and to ask what the existence of evil says about human nature. Religious thinkers have asked how an all powerful and benevolent God can tolerate evil and undeserved suffering; whether evil is intelligible and serves some rational purpose or is utterly inexplicable; and whether evil is intractable or can be eradicated or overcome. In the twentieth century secular explanations of evil, attributing evil to environmental or psychological defects, tended to replace religious and philosophic ones, at least among intellectuals. Psychologists and sociologists blamed evil on such factors as mental disease, past abuse, psychological desensitization, and dysfunctional patterns of development; social demographic, economic, and political stresses frustrations, inequalities, dislocations, flawed ideologies and misplaced idealism. Contingency is a hallmark of many historical accounts of evil. A key goal of moral history of evil must be to understand the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions and ideologies that misshape societies and allow collective evil to develop, take root and flourish. Historical evils are resulted from forces

as diverse as racial and religious intolerance, difficult economic circumstances, the untrammeled workings of the free market, and utopian and messianic ideas.

4.2   TYPES OF EVILS

Philosophers and theologians are discussed the problem of evil for centuries. They tried to classify evil into two broad categories, namely, moral and natural.

Moral evil - This covers the willful acts of human beings (such wars, crimes, self destructive vices and damages they cause in human life as murder, rape, etc.)

Natural evil - This refers to natural disasters (such as famines, floods, and destructive effects of earth quakes and so on.)

There are two classes of evil:

1.   Physical evil - This means bodily pain or mental anguish (fear, illness, grief, war, etc.)

2.   Metaphysical evil - This refers to such things as imperfection and chance (criminals going unpunished, deformities, etc.)

There is another way to distinguish evil as moral and non-moral. Evil s what harms human beings. The moral evil is harm done by human beings to other human beings. The non-moral evil is viewed as a harm done to human beings by non human agents and events.

4.3   LOGICAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

The classical form of argument from evil demonstrates the impossibility of God's creating a world containing any evil whatsoever. This basic idea was put forwarded by Epicurus , Greek philosopher was forcefully restated by David Hume, eighteenth century Scottish philosopher and fierce critic of Christianity in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* : 'Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?'

This may put it in this logical sequence:

1.   If God exists and is perfectly good, then He will prevent as much evil as He can.

2.   If God exists and is omnipotent (and omniscient), then He can prevent any evil from occurring.

3.   There is evil

Conclusion: God does not exist, or He is not omnipotent and omniscient, or He is not perfectly good.

4.4   TYPOLOGY OF EVIL

In her book, *The Many Faces of Evil*, Amelie Oksenberg Rorty provides a complex and six fold typology of metaphysical –theological treatment of evil. First, there is only divine goodness while evil as an illusion. (what is often called theodicy), secondly that there is some evil, but the latter is only a lesser degree or a 'privation' of goodness (a view prominently associated with St. Augustine);

thirdly, that good and evil are both real and permanently conflicting forces (what is called Manichaeism); fourthly, that human reason postulates a perfectly rational universe but acknowledges evil as a dilemma (a view ascribed to Kant); fifthly that evil is real and the world is a mess (Schopenhauer); and sixthly, that good and evil are nothing in themselves but only social constructs (Hobbes and possibly Nietzsche). By contrast Susan Neiman in her book *Evil in Modern Thought* makes to do only two major types, namely arguments relying on free from heaven' and arguments bent on 'condemning the architect'. Whereas the former advanced by philosophers celebrating divine or rational 'order' despite real-life experience to the contrary, the second are favored by an assortment of realists, pessimists and cynics. Fred Dallmayr approached the problem in different way. He finds three categories that are traditionally dominated discussion of evil. They are: radical monism, radical dualism and third category involving a spectrum ranging from modified monism to modified dualism. Radical monism holds that ultimate reality-being a reflection of divine or a benevolent creator- is wholly good and perfect where as perceived imperfections are illusions or the result of ignorance .this theory s mostly associated with Leibniz , but it can also found in versions of Christian and neo –platonic 'gnosis'. The proto type of radical dualism is Manichaeism , but it can also found in 'gnosticism' and extreme puritan theories of pre-destination. The middle ground between monism and dualism is occupied by neo –platonic and Christian thinkers ready to acknowledge evil but giving primacy to divine goodness. Thus in treating evil as mere 'privation' of goodness , Augustine approximates the monist view ; however by insisting on 'fallenness' of human nature and the distinction between the heavenly and earthly cities , his theory slides towards Manichaean dualism.

4.5 THEORIES OF EVIL:WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

McCloskey had an attempt to map the prominent theories and explanation of problem of evil. The theists offered different explanations for the problem of evil. Some of the people consider evil as real and some viewed as an unreal or as privation. Some consider it from moral view point and some discussed it as a matter of faith. These are some of the prominent explanation to problem of evil:

1. *Evil as Unreal*. This view is usually explained by reference to an analogy with the arts. Discord in one part of a symphony produces greater harmony and beauty in the whole. Few theists would seriously wish to contend that moral evil is unreal-that it is illusion rather than reality. However, some theists have argued that pain is not really evil. Our thinking that it is evil is said to result from viewing it out of its context. If we had "a God's eye view" we should see that such alleged evil is a valuable part of the whole which heightens the beauty of the majestic, divine melody. In brief, the attempt to solve the problem of evil by asserting that evil is unreal rests on an argument which, if valid, would simply suggest that evil might be justified. It is an argument that most theists will feel impelled to reject because of its shocking moral implications. And it is invalid because it rests on a false analogy between aesthetic appraisal and moral judgment.

2. *Evil as Privation*. The view that evil is a privation of proper good, or of right order. It is an attempt to steer a middle course between saying that it is merely illusion and saying that it is fully real. It is hoped thereby to

circumvent the difficulty of having to attribute to God the creation of evil as a positive nature. Evil, it is claimed, is such that its nature lies in the absence or privation of good rather than in the presence of something positive or intrinsic.

Evil is real. It has a real nature of its own. It is not simply privation of being or of right order. And even if it were, the problem of explaining it would remain, for sin and pain do not become justified and do not cease to be a problem merely by being described as a privation rather than as an intrinsic nature.

3. *Evil as Real but Justified*. With moral evil, the free will explanation dominates the field. Moral evil is explained as a consequence of God's gift to man of free will. Where the physical evil involved, there are explanations of evil as real but justified. Evil as means to good. Evil as unavoidable, or as undeserved and unavoidable but compensated for in an after life. C.A. Campbell suggests that while some do suffer undeservedly in this life, God could not avoid such suffering. But God makes amends for such suffering by granting compensate joy in the next life.

It is pointed out that physical evil is not to be explained as deserved punishment; nor as unaviodable suffering, which is or is not compensated for in an after life; nor it is justified asa meansto greater goods.

4. *Moral Evil*. Moral evil is usually accepted as something real and then explained in terms of free will. The theist argues that God created man with the gift of freedom but man chose to sin. God could not prevent the latter possibility without denying free will. Hence, God is not the author of sin. The value of free will (and/or the goodness of the moral goods it makes possible) justifies the evils that come into being as a result of the misuse by man of his free will.

5. *Faith and Evil*

Does faith provides way out of the problems of moral evil and suffering? It is often argued that it is presumptuous and arrogant for us to try to judge God on the basis of our limited human reason. If faith is understood as something some thing that improves our moral life, it simply makes the problem of moral evil more acute. It is argued that faith can no more used to explain or justify the moral evil, than it can be used as a basis for overcoming the problem of suffering. Faith is not an aid to the theist in his attempt to solve the problem of evil. The problem of evil is in fact aggravated by the claim that faith improves moral performance.

St. Augustine's Theodicy

Defenses of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of this problem - called *Theodicies* - also stretch back to the beginnings of Christianity. The thing to note about theodicy is that none of the main aspects of the problem change: God is still all-good, omniscient and omnipotent; evil still seems to exist. The difference is, however, that some reason is given to explain how all of these things can be true at the same time. St Augustine (354-430) put the problem most concisely: " Either God cannot abolish evil, or he will not; if he cannot then he is not all-powerful; if he will not then he is not all good." St. Augustine theodicy is a prominent theory of evil considered by many theologians and philosophers. St. Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr   stressed evil's inward

character, its roots in human pride, arrogance, sensuality, selfishness, and alienation form the divine. Drawing upon the notion of original sin, this perspective sees the capacity for sinfulness as omnipresent, lying ultimately in the human capacity for self-deception and the tendency to confuse self-interest with righteousness. Other theologians have adopted a Manichean perspective, regarding evil as an entity outside the self.

The Free-Will Argument

A modern advocate of Augustine's view can be found in Alvin Plantinga (*God, Freedom and Evil*, 1974) who claimed that for God to have created a being who could only have performed good actions would have been logically impossible. Plantinga's view of the free will defense is a landmark in contemporary discussions of the problem of evil. As he expounds it, the free will defense rests on the two philosophical claims, which it adds to the theological assumptions that God is omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good. And Human beings have free will, and possession of free will and use of it to do more good than evil is a. Perhaps the most common theodicy is the so-called free-will argument - very similar to Augustine's argument - which goes something like this:

1. Evil is the result of human error

2. Human error results from free-will (the ability to do wrong)

3. If we didn't have free-will we would be robots

4. God prefers a world of free agents to a world of robots

5. Evil is therefore an unfortunate - although not unavoidable outcome - of free-will

6. For God to intervene would be to go take away our free-will

7. Therefore, God is neither responsible for evil nor guilty of neglect for not intervening

This view was later criticised by Anthony Flew and J.L. Mackie, who both argue that God *could* have chosen to create "good robots" who still possessed free-will.

John Hick's Theodicy

 The philosopher John Hick (b.1922) has developed the view 'Irenaean theodicy' further. St Irenaeus (130-202 AD), a Father of the early Christian Church, who thought that humanity was not created perfect, but that they required growth in order to approach spiritual perfection. However, God does not necessarily intend evil to provide a means for this growth. According this, for a person could grow to spiritual perfection simply by obeying God's laws. Also, from Irenaeus's point of view, God does not intervene in human affairs to prevent evil because that would be to interfere with free will. Hick agrees with Irenaeus that God created us with the potential for spiritual growth. However, Hick then sees the process of 'soul making' (as he calls it) to be a response to the evil in the world. So, if cancer did not exist, or the evil actions of others, then we would not have the means whereby we could develop spiritually. Also, Hick argues, there exists what he terms an 'epistemic distance' between human beings and God, so that we are not born knowing of his existence, and it is not something which it is easy to gain certain knowledge of. Therefore, the process of soul making also involves a battle to attain religious faith.

Two further consequences of Hick's theodicy should be borne in mind here: firstly, because some individuals do not seem to have opportunity to develop spiritually (e.g. in the case of infant death), Hick argues that we must bring the possibility of an afterlife into the equation (so that such soul's receive a heavenly reward); secondly, because there is such a great amount of evil in the world, and not all suffering seems fair or understandable, we must finally admit that we cannot fully understand God's reasons or His plan.

The Process Theodicy

Process philosophy is the idea that reality is in a state of change and development. From this point of view, no opinion of how the world is can always be true. Process theology argues that the reality of God is not fixed and that God himself is still developing. From this point of view, God is "dipolar" - that is, has two "poles", one mental and one physical. The physical pole is the material world itself, which acts almost as God's "body".

Because of this relationship, God is partly distinct and partly immersed in the world - just as we are in our bodies. As a result, any suffering in creation is also undergone by God, and creation itself is seen as a cooperation between God and all other beings. Whether this cooperation actually takes place is thus up to humanity - in other words, God cannot force humans to do His will, but can only influence them.

4.6 PROBLEM OF EVIL: INDIAN UNDERSTANDING

The western theories of evil are mostly explained from Christianity. Indian perspectives on problem of evil are different from the west. The dominant conception of India is derived from Hinduism. The scholars try to explain it differently from the Semitic religious traditions. Does evil belong to the divine or is it purely human or psychological phenomenon? It is argued that evil is a major theological problem in the Semitic religious traditions as the existence of God and evil are not compatible and reconcilable. It is also argued that understanding of the problem of evil is depends upon ones world view. The theistic world view of evil would be significantly different from that of that world view is non-theistic. As Ramamurty argues in his book *Indian Philosophy of Religion: In Hinduism the explanation of evil is more metaphysical than theological as there is no doctrine of creation in Hinduism. Since God is not the creator of the world He is in no way connected with the explanation of evil. The problem of evil is delinked with the existence of God. Evil is viewed and explained basically in terms of man and his spiritual growth.* It is more or less a value or a meaning which man attaches to certain things and experiences. The objective world or the world of facts in itself is neither good nor bad. It acquires the value of good or bad from the point of view of man who judges things in terms of their value and significance to himself. What is good or what is evil depends ultimately upon the culture and religion to which man belongs. Further it is viewed that Indian philosophers of religion are basically pragmatic in their attitude and approach to religion, and its problems. Their analysis and understanding of the problem of evil is also basically pragmatic as their object in understanding the problem of evil is to help man in overcoming it. A purely theoretical understanding of the problem of evil may not be possible as it is not amenable to rational understanding of man. And at a same time the problem is highly significant to man and his religious life of attaining perfection.

A major explanation of evil which characterizes Indian understanding of the problem of evil, and is common to several thinkers and schools of thought is that though man is supreme or best form of manifestation of the divine, he is somehow unaware of his divine origin and nature. Instead, he thinks of himself as having an independent existence, and therefore lives for himself, and conducts himself as if he is his own master and explanation.

It is often claimed that the doctrine of karma and rebirth provides Indian religion with a satisfying account of evil and suffering than do typical Western solutions to the problem of evil. Arthur Herman, in his work *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, similarly asserts the superiority of karma to all Western theodicies : "Unlike the Western theories, ... the doctrine of rebirth is capable of meeting the major objections against which those Western attempts all failed" (Herman 1976, p. 287). The doctrine of karma and rebirth represents perhaps the most striking difference between Western (Judeo-Christian) religious thought and the Indian religious traditions (especially Hindu). To be sure, Western theology also makes use of a retributive explanation of evil in which an individual's suffering is accounted for by his previous wrongdoing. But given the obviously imperfect correlation between sin and suffering in an individual's lifetime, Western religions have resorted to other explanations of suffering (including, notoriously, that of Original Sin). However, Indian thought boldly combines this retributionism with the idea of multiple human incarnations, so that all suffering in this life can be explained by each individual's prior wrongdoing, whether in this or in a prior life, and all wrong- doing in the present life will be punished in either this or a future life. In this way, Indian thought is able to endorse a complete and consistent retributive explanation of evil: all suffering can be explained by the wrongdoing of the sufferer himself. However, the theory of karma and rebirth is seriously attacked by many scholars that it justifies the inequalities in a society and keeps the system status quo by not allowing the questioning the dominant hegemony. Critics argue that theory of karma and rebirth has its own limitations in providing satisfactory explanation for the problem of evil. What kind of explanation is offered for the unfairness, injustice, and innocent suffering in the world? It is argued that the doctrine, in whatever form it is proposed, suffers from serious limitations that render it unlikely to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Evil as understood as antithesis of good. It becomes a moral question. Kant conceives of evil in human nature as the will or disposition or propensity to act on maxims contrary to the moral law. If good is value realization, and evil is value destruction. Evil is serious unjustified harm inflicted on sentient beings. Theologians confuse the fact with origin of the evil; theodicies tend to confuse the fact with the locus of the evil. The one reduces evil to the status of a sin or a derivative from it; the other reduces evil to the status of imperfection according to one, there would be no evils were there no wickedness; according to the other, there would be no evils were there nothing finite. The first is right in maintaining that evil can be the outcome of the good activity of good beings, just as the second is right in remarking that the occurrence of evil is not depend on spiritual failures.

Many theologians and philosophers over the centuries have asked this question and look at some answers. The question often asked how a good God could create a world with evil in it, why such a deity does not do something to help

combat such evil. We have various explanations from religious people and philosophers. The problem itself arises because of certain qualities which religious believers grant to God, and the consequences of these given certain observations about the world. Understanding evil is crucial to our conception of morality. The philosophical approach to the problem of evil is different from the theological approaches. It has potential to understand the problem in fair and objective manner. It will broaden our understanding.

4.8   KEY WORDS

theistic, moral evil, theodicy, sin, morality, karma, theologians, free will, God

4.9   FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Student Satisfaction Survey of IGNOU Students

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7.	Examination procedures were clearly given to you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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14.	Results and grade card of the examination were provided on time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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