

Shams C. Inati, *The Problem of Evil: Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications 2000. ix plus 215 pp.

If the often-cited argument that ‘for a through study and understanding of Western Philosophy, we need to learn Islamic Philosophy’ is correct, then Inati’s book is a concrete example of this argument. Inati’s interest in Ibn Sina’s (Avicenna) theory of theodicy developed as a result of her interest in Western Philosophy. In her study of the Aquinan concept of evil, she finds it necessary to go back to Islamic Medieval Philosophy in general and Ibn Sina in particular. Inati attempts to unearth “a wealth of ideas” in Ibn Sina’s philosophy that, to her surprise are unknown among Western and Eastern intellectual circles. As a result, she abandons her original plan of focusing on Aquinas, devote her efforts to a” completely original study of Ibn Sina’s thought” on the problem of theodicy. Ibn Sina is “the first Muslim philosopher to preoccupy himself with the problem of evil”. (p.65) In fact, the presence of evil, pain and suffering in our world is one of the most persistent arguments raised against theism. Therefore, the title alone draws our interest to this timely book

The book comprises five chapters. In the first chapter, the author formulates the problem of evil, one of the most puzzling problems to the human mind, in the historical context. Then, she dwells on Ibn Sina’s treatment of the issue. To Ibn Sina, the major problem is “the reconciliation of God’s absolute attributes with God’s creating or allowing evil in the world” and “God’s justice with God’s rewarding and punishing human beings for actions that God Himself causes”. (p.13) This chapter is a great help for readers new in the field and also for students.

In Chapter Two, Inati analyzes the theories of evil in classical Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. For example, Plato accepts the existence of evil as static and dynamic evil. However, he argues that God is not responsible for the existence of evil. (p.29) Aristotle, whose influence on Ibn Sina greater than Plato or Plotinus, the problem evil does not arise. The Aristotelian notion of God or “Unmoved Mover”, is limited and has nothing to do with universe and anything in it. Yes, there is evil, but that is due either to “the natural constitution of things or to the imperfection of

the universe as a whole”. (p.48) Analyzing Plotinus ideas makes it clear that “God and the rest of divine realm have nothing to do with the existence of evil”. (p.63) This chapter, as it seems, prepares the reader to understand “the most complex and essential element of Ibn Sina’s theodicy.”

Inati devotes chapters three and four to a thorough analysis of Ibn Sina’s two main types of evil, “Essential Evil and Accidental Evil,” which both can be translated as metaphysical evil. She summarizes the former one as (1) a privation I being; (2) not any privation in being, but only that which is of the natural; (3) identical with disorder; (4) evil in all respects; (5) uncaused; and (6) due to matter. (p.84) Accidental evil, on the other hand accidental evil is ‘the non-existent or that which withholds perfection from what deserves it.’ (p. 86)

In chapter four the author deals with moral evil at length, which she defines as “the evil of human soul” and results from ignorance (p.102) Therefore, Inati finds it necessary to analyze Ibn Sina’s theory of human soul in detail. To do so, she discusses Ibn Sina’s epistemology (p.110) and theory of prophecy (p.114) in order to give a satisfactory definition of his morel theory and human soul as the basis of this theory. The importance of Ibn Sina’s epistemology lies in the fact that he, like Plato and Plotinus, regards “ignorance’ as the source of moral evils. But what about the relation of moral and metaphysical evil? It is not difficult for Ibn Sina, according to Inati, to establish this link. As the ignorance results from that attachment of the human soul to the body, so moral evil is grounded: “Detach the human soul from the body, and abolish ignorance, you also abolish moral evil.” (p.124)

Inati, however, turns to a critical examination if Ibn Sina’s theodicy in chapter five by posing the question “How does Ibn Sina reconcile the presence of evil with the absolute goodness of God?” To answer the question, the author presents several theses, provided by to justify God’s causing or allowing the presence of evil in the world and then criticizes them systematically. Inati argues that Ibn Sina’s theodicy grounded in his concept of God, which was influenced by his peripatetic Greek Masters, which led to him

being criticized by al-Ghazali. This is a crucial point. Inati, then, argues that Ibn Sina compromises the concept of God, understood in orthodox Islam as omnipotent, omniscience, all-good, and free, in his attempt to provide an answer to the problem of evil. According to al- Ghazali, Ibn Sina presupposes a God whose goodness, power, knowledge is limited, therefore, the existence of evil was not a challenge for God and most importantly, neither God nor human being is free. They act by necessity. Inati underlines that although Ibn Sina solved the problem of evil, like his Greek successors, by limiting the attributes of God, he was unwilling to declare that in fear of theologians. (p. 173)

The author shows clearly that the problem of evil is linked to our concept of God and universe. Undoubtedly, other philosophers have taken up the challenge. However, to most the problem of theodicy will remain as a “puzzle”. In order to come to grips with this puzzle, Inati’s book and Ibn Sina’s insights are invaluable. The book is not only timely and but also systematic and well written. After Ormsby’s book, (Eric L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, Princeton University Pres, New Jersey, 1984) it is a major contribution to Islamic literature on the problem of theodicy.

Ibrahim Ozdemir

Visiting Luce Professor of Abrahamic Religions. University of Hartford