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A Comparative Look at the Problem of Evil in the Specificity of Ibn Arabi and Rumi

İbnü'l Arabi ve Mevlâna Özelinde Kötülük Problemine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Bakış

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Abstract

The question of the origin of good and evil has been a recurring debate throughout the history of thought. In Abrahamic religions, good is always associated with God, while evil is not associated with God. So while good is recognized by consensus, evil becomes a problem. The concepts of good and evil, which are central to the philosophy of religion, have been debated throughout history, regardless of whether one believes in God or not, and they continue to be debated. The aim of our literature review is to examine how evil, which has been debated in various fields and has become a philosophical problem, is viewed from a comparative perspective by two key figures in Sufism: Ibn al-Arabi and Rumi. The study consists of an introduction and three main sections. The introduction gives a general overview of the concepts of good and evil and the problem of evil. The first section presents Ibn al-Arabi's views, while the second section focuses on Rumi's perspectives. The final section concludes the discussion and locates the problem of evil in the realm of Sufism on the basis of these perspectives. This study can be seen as an attempt to evaluate the views of two important figures who have profoundly shaped Sufism on a topic that is highly debated in the field. Indeed, the discourses of these figures concerning their search for truth have reached today's intellectual world, offering solutions and foundations for the problem from their own perspectives.

Keywords: Ibn al-Arabi, Rumi, Sufism, Problem of Evil, Good and Evil.

Öz

Düşünce tarihi boyunca iyi ve kötünün nereden geldiği konusu hep var olagelmiş bir tartışmadır. Semavi dinlerde iyi daima Tanrı ile ilişkilendirilirken; kötü Tanrı'nın alanına dâhil edilmemektedir. Böylece iyi üzerinde mutabık kalınırken, kötü bir probleme dönüşmektedir. Din felsefesine konu olan bu iyi-kötü kavramları, ister bir Tanrı inancı olsun isterse olmasın tarih boyunca tartışılmış ve tartışılmaya da devam etmektedir. Literatür tarama olarak yapılan çalışmamızın amacı, farklı alanlarda tartışmaya konu olan ve bir probleme dönüşen kötülüğü, Tasavvuf'un şahsiyetlerinden İbnü'l Arabi ve Mevlâna özelinde karşılaştırmalı bir bakışla nasıl ele almaktır. Çalışma giriş ve üç başlık içermektedir. Giriş mahiyetinde iyi-kötü kavramlarıyla birlikte kötülük problemine genel bir bakış verilecek olup, ilk başlıkta İbnü'l Arabi'nin, diğer başlıkta Mevlana'nın konuya ilişkin görüşleri aktarılacaktır. Son başlıkta ise konu nihayetlenecek ve bu görüşler özelinde Tasavvuf alanında kötülük probleminin konumlanışı ortaya konulacaktır. Çalışma, Tasavvuf'ta mühim izler bırakan iki şahsiyetin alana dair tartışmalı bir konuda görüşlerini bir arada değerlendirme çabasının bir ürünü olarak görülebilir. Nitekim bu şahsiyetlerin hakikat arayışına ilişkin söylemleri bugünün düşünce dünyasına ulaşmakta ve probleme ilişkin çözümlemelere kendi nazarından çözümler ve dayanaklar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İbn Arabi, Rumi, Tasavvuf, Kötülük Problemi, İyi-Kötü.

Introduction

In his quest for truth, the human being establishes a connection—on the one hand, with the cosmos, and on the other, with the Divine. This dual relationship situates the human being at a central position, placing him at the heart of both existential and metaphysical inquiries. From this central standpoint, man passes certain judgments about the beings and phenomena that surround him: good, evil, beautiful, ugly, useful, etc. The act of making such judgments necessitates an ontological, epistemological, and ethical perspective on that which is being judged. First and foremost, it is necessary for the object of judgment to possess being—for without existence, there would be nothing to speak of. The investigation of being qua being reveals the essence of a thing. The content of "being" itself is disclosed through an inquiry into what it is—that is, through the acquisition of knowledge about it. Together with the ontological and epistemological dimensions of a thing, the ethical dimension forms the complementary part. This unity emerges when an individual's emotional and intellectual engagement with something aligns with a broader, shared human experience—creating, in a sense, a common moral ground. Indeed, the characterization of something as definitively good or evil is the product of such a context.

While the human being passes value judgments—particularly moral judgments of good and evil—concerning existence, the origin or source of these judgments is also of significant importance. The attribution of value, as a phenomenon, is reflected in a person's relationship with both the world and the Divine. This is expressed through a subjective perspective grounded in personal experience, as well as an objective one framed by universal principles. In this regard, the human being, within the bounds of worldly interactions, may either conform to or diverge from universal moral standards. At the same time, he forges connections beyond himself, informed by his faith—or lack thereof. Consequently, a person formulates judgments regarding entities and relationships from various angles: sometimes through mundane, everyday reasoning; at other times by developing metaphysical arguments; and occasionally through the application of religious doctrines. Within this intricate network of relationships, it becomes relevant to explore the origin and the general, philosophical, and mystical meanings of the concepts of "good" and "evil" from a universal perspective. Though perhaps not as problematic as the notion of evil, the concept of good also demands attention—particularly because it involves delineating the boundaries of evil and investigating the essence of what truly constitutes the good.

According to the Turkish Language Association, *iyi* (good) is defined as that which is desired, appreciated, and considered the opposite of evil. Etymo-

logically, the term derives from the Arabic root *khayr*, which is used as the antonym of *sharr* (evil). In *the Philosophical Dictionary*, it is defined as: "That which is desired, the object of value and longing, that which rational will deems worthy and thus wills or desires" (Cevizci, 2005, p.478).

As for the concept of "evil," the Turkish Language Association defines it as that which is undesirable, disliked, and the opposite of good. Etymologically, it comes from the Arabic root *sharr*, signifying the opposite of *khayr*. The concept of evil, expressed in Arabic as sharr and sū', corresponds in English to terms such as "bad condition, malicious or evil action, wrong, harm, badness, wickedness, evil." (Kiriş, 2008: 83). While it is approached from multiple angles in philosophical literature, for the purposes of this study, the following definition is pertinent: "That which, from a moral standpoint, stands in opposition to the good and is deemed wrong or unacceptable" (Cevizci, 2005, p.524).

In the Sufi lexicon, the concepts of good and evil (*khayr-sharr*), light and darkness (*nūr-ẓulmah*), are treated in an interconnected and holistic manner: "Ḥā', yā', and rā' mean 'to turn toward' and 'to incline.' Later, the word acquired other meanings. Khayr is the opposite of sharr (evil), for each one turns into the other, and both return to their origin or source" (Suad al-Hakim, 2017, p. 210). Accordingly, in religious, philosophical, and mystical (Sufi) contexts, these concepts are best understood in relation to one another. Indeed, within some Sufi perspectives, the notions of good and evil may even be considered relative and, to a certain extent, interchangeable in their manifestations.

In light of this general framework, it becomes pertinent to examine what is known as "the Problem of Evil."[1] As a religious-philosophical issue, it is defined in the *Philosophical Dictionary* as follows: "A problem concerning the existence of evil in a world that is believed to have been created by God, which is thought to contradict or cast a shadow upon the existence of God or at least His essential attributes" (Cevizci, 2005, p. 525). This definition highlights the fundamental challenge, but another critical dimension concerns the various types of evil. Broadly speaking, two primary forms of evil can be distinguished: natural

[1] The Problem of Evil has been a highly debated and extensively written-about topic throughout history. In the philosophy of religion, this problem often serves as a significant point of reference when questioning the existence of God. On the other hand, there are also discussions regarding *theodicy* and the possibility of God's justice. Below are some studies related to the subject: Şahin Efil, *The Problem of Evil and Theodicy in the Philosophy of Sufism According to Ibn Arabi*, *Felsefe Dünyası*, 2011/1, Issue 53. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1975. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, Macmillan, London, 1985. Antony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew & A. Macintyre, SCM Press, London, 1955. J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," trans. Metin Yasa, *Philosophy of Religion with Classical and Contemporary Texts*, ed. C. S. Yaran, Etüt Publications, Samsun, 1997, pp. 135-152.

(or physical) evil and moral evil (Aydın, 2019, p. 163). Occasionally, metaphysical evil is added to this classification (Yaran, 1997, p. 25). Such categorizations allow for a more nuanced inquiry into evil and raise several ancient, yet still unresolved, philosophical questions.

David Hume, in addressing the problem of evil, famously revisits the ancient questions attributed to Epicurus: "Is God 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? Then whence cometh evil?" (Hume, 1979, p. 165). Epicurus poses and formulates the initial questions of the problem of evil. Similar questions arise in the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro: "Do the gods love what is pious because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it?" (Plato, 2016, p. 53). More commonly, this dilemma is reformulated as: "Is something good because God wills it, or does God will it because it is good?" These fundamental inquiries lie at the heart of the problem of evil, representing timeless philosophical dilemmas that await resolution and that continue to fuel theological and metaphysical discourse to this day. Alongside such a dual situation, the perspective of the Christian doctrine regarding the stance of both God and human beings in the face of evil is strikingly reflected in the following words: "If God is as benevolent as Christian theists claim, he must be just as appalled as we are at all this evil." (Plantinga, 2002: p.9) These words can be seen as a response offered by the philosophy of religion to God's position in the face of evil. Perhaps the most significant emphasis on the problem of evil in Christian thought was made by Spinoza (d. 1677). According to him, goodness is everything that is beneficial to people (Spinoza, 2011: 200). Evil, on the other hand, is "every kind of sadness and everything that frustrates one's main expectations" (Spinoza, 2011: 161). In other words, any condition that obstructs goodness is evil (Spinoza, 2011: 200). These statements are the ocentric and, in a manner similar to Sufism, emphasize the necessity of addressing evil independently from God.

From an epistemological standpoint, the concepts of good and evil—when examined in terms of their origin and meaning—are inherent within existence itself. However, the primary domain in which these concepts are meaningfully discussed is ethics. Whether something is deemed good or evil acquires significance through the influence of various factors such as individual perspectives, societal norms, religious beliefs, economic systems, and more. Although value judgments may carry personal implications, they are most commonly institutionalized within three principal domains: law and crime, society and shame, and religion and sin.

In society, laws are established as compulsory norms and clearly define certain actions as crimes, imposing sanctions by labeling them as evil or wrong.

Similarly, societal norms—rooted in tradition, custom, and cultural mores—define what is considered shameful and apply social sanctions such as exclusion or marginalization. Even though the Kantian perspective promotes the idea of a universal moral law and seeks to draw clear boundaries between good and evil through rational legislation, individual subjectivity can challenge these boundaries. That is, a person may open up alternative interpretations of an act that is universally deemed "evil." For this reason, there are often instances in which the same action cannot definitively be labeled as either good or evil. This underscores the importance of perspective in moral evaluation.

Laws evolve over time, and traditions are not merely preserved but adapt and transform according to the spirit of the age. These processes themselves are reflections of changing perspectives. In the domain of religion, the issue becomes even more complex due to its dual nature: subjective when approached from the human standpoint, and objective when approached from the Divine. Sacred texts delineate the fundamental tenets of religion, and they also contain certain dynamic elements that influence their application in different contexts. When a religious judgment is passed on an issue, or when an interpretation extends beyond the explicit rules of religion, the matter often becomes subject to debate.

In the context of Islam, for example, some religious matters are conveyed not explicitly but through implication or symbolic references. This mode of transmission actively engages the believers' emotional and intellectual faculties, encouraging a shift from passive acceptance toward reflective engagement.

While laws and social norms address human beings directly and situate them at the center of judgment, religion places the human in relation to a being higher than himself—namely, God. Therefore, making a moral judgment in religious terms also entails a direct engagement with the Divine, whether it involves acceptance or rejection. Even atheism, which asserts a creation without God, frequently invokes the concept of God in its arguments. Thus, while it may be relatively easy to evaluate individuals, institutions, or social groups in terms of good or evil, such judgments become far more delicate and contentious when applied to God.

This complexity has given rise to a diversity of views within religion in general and Islam in particular. To summarize this discussion within the broader context of various belief systems:

> ...There may be no need to treat theodicies—developed in response to a theologically rooted philosophical problem—as separate categories within Western and Islamic thought. For the real tension lies not so much between these two religious traditions, but far more profoundly between theism and atheism (Yaran, 1997, p. 22).

This observation highlights the enduring relevance of the debate, both in theistic religions where the problem is framed within divine justice, and in atheistic philosophies where it is often used as a central argument against the existence of God. In addressing the problem of evil within the context of this study, it is appropriate to examine the issue from the perspectives of religion, Islamic philosophy, and Sufism. From the religious standpoint, particularly in theistic traditions, the response to the problem of evil often takes the form of a theodicy—a defense of God's justice in the face of worldly suffering and moral evil.

Within the framework of Islamic thought, two major thinkers—Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037) and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111)—are especially noteworthy, not only for their philosophical contributions but also due to their affinities with mystical traditions, particularly the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Rūmī (Mevlānā). In his treatise *On the Explanation of Providence and the Inclusion of Evil in Divine Decree* (*Risālafībayān al-ʿināyawa-idkhāl al-sharrfī al-qaḍāʾ al-ilāhī*), Ibn Sīnā emphasizes that the order and harmony present in the cosmos cannot be the product of mere chance. Rather, such order necessitates a deliberate and purposeful plan. According to him, God emanates in such a way that manifests the best possible order.

Evil, in his view, exists in two forms: (1) as something directly done with the intent of causing harm, and (2) as the prevention or absence of a potential good. Hence, evil is essentially non-being (privation), and absolute evil does not exist in the universe. Instead, evil exists potentially within things, particularly as an inherent possibility within matter. (Ibn Sīnā, 2014, pp. 299–300). Moreover, Ibn Sīnā argues that good and evil coexist necessarily in the universe. This duality is, in his view, essential because the cosmos is created to hold together all these interrelated elements. The harmony of creation requires this coexistence.

Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, is well known for his classical argument "laysafī al-imkān abdaʿmim mākān" —that is, "There is nothing more excellent among the possible than what already exists." According to this view, God has created the world in the best possible form, at the most appropriate time and place. This conception allows for the simultaneous creation of good and evil as interdependent realities: "Perfection cannot be known unless imperfection exists. If animals had not been created, the honor of humanity would not be revealed. Perfection and imperfection are relative. Divine generosity and wisdom necessitate the coexistence of both"[2] (Ghazālī, 2014, p. 752).

[2] Also see: Al-Ghazali, *Ihya'Ulum al-Din*, Volume 4 / pp. 252-253. M. Cüneyt Kaya, *Could a More Perfect World Exist? Notes on the Sources of the "Leysefi'l İmkan" Debate*, *Divan Ilmi Araştırmalar*, Issue: 16, 2004/1, pp. 239-249. *The Most Perfect Possible Worlds and Semhudi's Defense of Ghazali*, Azer Abdurrahman, (Bülent Ecevit University Faculty of

This perspective implies that evil, to a certain extent, is necessary—for without it, the good could not be understood or appreciated. Taking a well-known example from Islamic thought, we can consider the element of fire. The harmful or beneficial nature of fire depends on the manner in which human beings interact with it. Fire, on the one hand, marked a pivotal moment in human progress; on the other, it possesses a destructive potential. Thus, the labeling of something as "evil" pertains more to the field of action and consequence, rather than to its intrinsic nature. Within this understanding, human beings can conceive of evil only in relation to the material world and their engagement with it.

While this line of reasoning characterizes much of Islamic philosophical discourse, we can now shift our attention more specifically to the Sufi tradition, particularly to the insights of Ibn Arabī and Rūmī, who offer unique metaphysical and existential approaches to the problem of evil.

1. Ibn Arabī and the Problem of Evil

Ibn Arabī—whose full name is Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī—was born in 1165 in Murcia, Spain. It is well known that from an early age, he displayed remarkable intellectual abilities. His initial education began under the guidance of his father, and he later received instruction in Qur'anic sciences from his uncle. He continued his studies in Córdoba, which was a major intellectual center of the time. At just 17 years old, he is said to have met with major scholars of the age, including Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Throughout his life, Ibn Arabī traveled extensively, simultaneously receiving and transmitting knowledge wherever he went. His prolific output[3], comprising numerous works across various disciplines, attests to his intellectual vigor and productivity.

Ibn Arabī was an original thinker who frequently moved beyond classical interpretations, offering unique insights into controversial issues. He remains, undoubtedly, one of the most widely written-about figures in Islamic intellectual history—both praised and criticized. His magnum opus, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom), has inspired countless commentaries and remains a central text in Sufi metaphysics. Given the influence of his thought, it is only natural that he engaged deeply with one of philosophy's most enduring issues: the problem of evil.

Theology Journal, 2019, 6 (2)), pp. 307-332.

[3] It is estimated that he has approximately two hundred and forty-five works, though the numbers may vary. See: Mahmud Erol Kılıç, *Şeyh-ı Ekber* (Istanbul, Sufi Book, 2018), pp. 51-70.

A particularly striking feature of Ibn Arabī's method is his tendency to reinterpret Qur'anic verses and ḥadīths outside of their conventional contexts, yet without disregarding them. As such, his approach blends a deeply metaphysical vision with the experiential mysticism of the Malāmatiyyah tradition[4]. Therefore, any analysis of good and evil in his thought must be situated within this metaphysical framework. The essential questions for Ibn Arabī include: What renders a thing good or evil? And what are the conditions under which such labels are applied?

For Ibn Arabī, good and evil are not fixed qualities but contextual judgments, and the meaning of these judgments is clarified within the system of waḥdat al-wujūd (Unity of Being). These evaluations, according to him, are redefined moment by moment, relative to the circumstances of existence and the observer's state. Thus, concepts such as good and evil are fundamentally relative, not absolute.

An illustrative passage appears in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, where he references Ibn Sīnā: "One who says that non-being is evil does not understand the truth. What is referred to as evil in terms of non-being is the absence of an essence or reality, rendering that which is predicated upon it impossible to exist externally. This kind of evil is, in fact, impossibility" (Ibn Arabī, XVII, 2012, p.353). This passage—quoted via Ibn Sīnā—demonstrates that non-being, in and of itself, is not evil for Ibn Arabī.

However, he does acknowledge the existence of good and evil in the world. In *Shajarat al-Kawn*, Ibn Arabī explains the dual emergence of creation through the divine command "Kun" ("Be"): "From the command 'Be' came forth two things—one is darkness, and the other is light. All goodness originates from light, and all evil arises from darkness" (Ibn Arabī, 2018, p. 69).

In another passage, he writes:

> Every deed with which God praises you is, in itself, a good praise. Thus, though you may be humbled, impoverished, and deprived from one perspective, you are at the same time exalted, enriched, and praised from another. Therefore, there is neither rebuke nor divine hardship upon you (Ibn Arabī, XVII, 2012, p. 336).

These statements illustrate his view that good and evil are relative and context-dependent, and that a thing perceived as "evil" from one vantage may be "good" from another. At the ontological level, Truth is one, and all differentiation stems from the observer's limited perception.

The issue is addressed more fully in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, where he develops what is perhaps his most controversial stance: that hell does not truly exist,

[4] It is a Sufi order that includes Ibn Arabi, to some extent. See: Abdulbaki Gölpınarlı, *Melamilik and the Melamiyah*, (Istanbul, Kapı Publications, 2017).

and that since everything originates from the Divine, true evil cannot exist either. This is not so much a refutation of the problem of evil as it is a denial of its ontological validity. Such a stance follows naturally from the metaphysical system of waḥdat al-wujūd, which envisions all being as part of a circular process of continual creation, wherein the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning.

In this circular cosmology, each being has its place within a harmonious whole, though differences and distinctions inevitably arise in the realm of manifestation. What is ontologically one becomes phenomeno logically multiple. For contingent beings (*mumkin al-wujūd*) to exist, they must receive a share of existence from the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*).

For Ibn Arabī, this plurality of perspectives is expressed through the concept of the "Particular Lord" (*al-rabb al-khāṣ*). Each individual, he argues, has a particular Lord, and the truths of one's Lord may contradict those of another. However, this does not constitute a contradiction, because every being is already beloved and affirmed by its own Lord: "…for every Name receives its lordship not from the One alone, but from the Whole" (Ibn Arabī, 2013, p. 93).

Thus, in his view, each divine name assumes a unique lordship, and while differentiation emerges in appearance, at the level of Reality (*ḥaqīqah*), everything remains One—a manifestation of the same Divine Essence immanent within all existence.

Existence is manifested in the world between unity and multiplicity**.** However, according to Ibn Arabī, it is not sufficient to explain existence only through this world. At the very least, a person who believes in God also holds a belief in the afterlife, where paradise is desired as the reward for good deeds and hell as the punishment for evil. In this context, the belief that justice, which cannot be achieved in this world, will be fulfilled in the hereafter plays a determining role in the principles of worldly conduct. Accordingly, paradise is accepted as the place where good is rewarded, and hell where evil is punished.

However, Ibn Arabī also interprets paradise and hell within the system of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. According to him, paradise is a form of veiling the Truth. He takes only a part of the verse *"Enter My Paradise" [Q 89:29]* and interprets it as: "This paradise is that with which I have veiled Myself. My paradise is nothing other than you, for you veil Me with yourself" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 93) He clarifies the subject by emphasizing the meaning of the word "paradise" as covering or veiling, derived from the verse. Accordingly, distancing from the veiling of the Truth would be hell[5]. Hell is nothing other than being distant from God: "Hell

[5] He also addresses the issue with a similar example in the context of Moses. See: Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, translated by Ekrem Demirli, pp. 218-233.

means distance, which they used to assume would occur. However, when God directs them to that place, they find themselves in the very closeness. In this case, distance disappears and what was called hell is removed concerning them. Thus, they gain the blessing of proximity because they were sinners" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 113) "As for the people of hell, the place they reach is also a blessing" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 184) Eventually, from Ibn Arabī's point of view, paradise and hell will exist in unity within the same truth.

In the Ṣāliḥ chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ibn Arabī addresses the issue from another angle with the introductory wisdom. As known from the Qur'an [7:73, 27:45], the Prophet Ṣāliḥ was sent to the people of Thamūd. This people is considered a continuation of the ʿĀd tribe. The Prophet Ṣāliḥ invites his people to the path of truth, but they deny him and reject his call. What is critical in our context is that the Prophet Ṣāliḥ asks God for a three-day respite for his people. However, the people still do not respond to the call. "On the first day, the faces of the people turned yellow, on the second day red, and on the third day black" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 125)

Eventually, destruction occurs. However, Ibn Arabī analyzes this event differently using his own methodology. After all, once one becomes united with the Truth, true union with the Truth is only fully possible through death. Therefore, this situation should be understood not as the annihilation of the people, but rather as their meeting with God. Accordingly, the yellowing on the first day is the brightening of the faces out of joy, which he associates with the word *sufūr* (disclosure); the reddening on the second day is a blushing from laughter and happiness, linked to the word *yadhakūn* (they laugh); the darkening on the third day results from the intensity of joy affecting the skin, which he relates to *mubashshirīn* (those given glad tidings). "Whoever understands this wisdom and confirms it within himself ceases to attach to others. He knows that it is he himself who grants both good and evil. By good, I mean what aligns with the individual's aim, nature, and temperament; and by evil, I mean what does not align with his aim, nature, and temperament" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 126).

In the Dāwūd chapter, he addresses the issue from another perspective: divine will (mashīʾah) and divine desire (irādah). Regarding the command of will, he states: "The command of will is directed toward the existence of the act itself, not toward the one through whom it is carried out. Such an act cannot fail to exist. However, in this specific case, it may sometimes be called opposition to the divine command, and sometimes alignment with the divine command. For this reason, the judgment of good or evil is not made from the perspective of will but based on the reality of the thing as it occurs" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 179).

In the Muḥammad chapter, one of the topics addressed is fragrance. According to Ibn Arabī, fragrance is breath that has become word. "Breath, in its

essence, is divine and therefore entirely pure. In this regard, everything is pure. A thing may be regarded as praiseworthy or blameworthy based on how it is treated" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 241). He brings an example from the Prophet regarding garlic, stating that the Prophet said, "It is a plant whose smell I dislike," not "I dislike it", "therefore, the essence of something is not ugly; only what appears from it may be seen as ugly or unpleasant" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 241). From this, Ibn Arabī concludes that our knowledge of good and evil stems from our habits. "Hence, only the beautiful was made beloved to the Prophet, for nothing exists in the world but beauty" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 241)

Ibn Arabī believes that it is impossible to have a temperament that knows only good and not evil. He says that God is aware of both pleasant and unpleasant situations in the world. However, unpleasantness is not in the cosmos itself, for the cosmos was created in the image of the Truth. Man, however, was created in two forms (the concept of being created with two hands). Man must be the one who sees the good within the bad. It is not possible to eliminate evil from the cosmos. "God's mercy is in everything, both good and evil. Evil, in itself, is good; good is evil in relation to evil. Therefore, every good thing is bad in one temperament, just as every bad thing is good in another" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 242).

In the Yūnus chapter, Ibn Arabī presents an explanation based on the human being, through the wisdom of breath. The evaluation of an action is presented as follows: "The human being cannot be inherently condemned; only what appears from him can be condemned, and the act is not his essence. We are speaking of the person himself. The act is God's. Still, the part of the act that is condemned is condemned, and the part that is praised is praised. To condemn something because it does not conform to the person's goal is to condemn it in the sight of God. Therefore, only what the Shariah has condemned is to be condemned. If the Shariah has deemed something evil, it is because of a wisdom known or revealed by God" (Ibn Arabī, 2013: p. 183). While this explanation is acceptable for a believer, it may also appear contradictory when considered alongside Ibn Arabī's other views.

According to Ibn Arabī, there is no such thing as evil. Our judgment that something is evil relates to the limits of our knowledge, and therefore, it is relative: "Nothing is evil: everything that exists is good. In other words, what we call evil is not an objective but a subjective reality. However, its opposite—good—is also subjective and relative. The only absolute good is Pure Being (God, Goodness), (Ebul Ala Afifi, 1974: p. 140). This does not mean that God did not create what we call evil. Indeed, actions deemed sinful must exist, otherwise the cosmos would not be complete. In this way, Ibn Arabī affirms the Shariah and also upholds moral responsibility (Ebul Ala Afifi, 1974: p. 143).

Ibn Arabī offers similar examples in *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, where he speaks of man and considers him the measure of all things. God's desire to be known is realized through the human being, who, as vicegerent, is the most honorable of all creation. However, an important point arises here: "Even though the human being is the most honorable of creation, as a volitional being, he is also the cause of much evil and injustice in the world. From this aspect, man is, according to Ibn Arabī, simultaneously the field of conflict between.

2. Rumi and the Problem of Evil

Rumi, born in 1207 in the city of Belh, is fully named Mevlâna Celaleddin Rumi. It is known that his father was a great scholar and Rumi's first teacher. From an early age, Rumi attracted attention as a wise figure, and he grew up in an intellectual environment.

As a young man, he was forced to migrate due to some political events in his homeland. This seemingly obligatory journey would undoubtedly create special memories in his emotional and intellectual world and eventually lead him to settle in the city of Konya, where he would produce his works. The Seljuk ruler's tolerance for knowledge allowed Rumi and his family to stay there for many years, and Rumi was later buried in Konya. The intellectual environment of the period, which coincided with the golden age of Islamic philosophy, greatly influenced his work. The Mawlawi Order, which has survived to this day, with his works translated into many languages and widely read, reflects his place in the tradition of thought.

As a scholar raised in such an environment, Rumi also dealt with the scholarly issues of his time. One of the issues he tackled, as part of our topic, is the problem of evil. Rumi addresses this issue from a mystic perspective and grounds it in the relationship between God's destiny (fate) and human free will. According to him, the power of will enables one to rule over things. Therefore, attributing something as good or bad is a meaning that humans assign to it. For Rumi, the state of something being good or bad can be understood as a matter of relativity. This connection between the state of good or bad and the relativity of the individual explains the lack of relation between evil and God.

In his fundamental work *Masnawi*, Rumi provides important arguments regarding this issue. His general view on the subject is as follows: "This sweet water and salty water, it runs through the veins. Until the Day of Judgment, they flow without mixing" (Rumi, I, 2007: b. 746). And "In this body, two persons are at war: let's see whose fate will prevail, who will be chosen?" (Rumi, 2014: p.48). With these words, Rumi acknowledges that good and evil exist in the world. However, he draws an important distinction by recognizing the different domains of good and evil. According to him, good is attributed to God, while evil

arises from human choices. “Those who do good act of their own will, they protect themselves with their conscious actions and thus they are praised and honored. All these praises and appreciations in the world occur due to free will” (Rumi, V, 2007: b. 3296). This willpower is also the factor that establishes the relationship between God and humans.

According to Rumi, there is an unbreakable relationship between God and humans. This relationship takes shape between God creating what is good, and the existence of what is bad, in a relative sense. “You see, in this world, there is no absolute evil. Evil is evil only in relation to something else. Then know this: there is no poison or sugar in the world that does not have an opposite! Yes... One can be a foot, the other can be a fetter. One can be poison, the other can be sweet! The poison of the snake is life to the snake, but death to humans!” (Rumi, IV, 2007: b.65-69).

Elsewhere, he states: “The prophets said: ‘To attribute ugliness and evil to something is something that arises from your soul. This fault is not with us, it is with you.’” (Rumi, III, 2007: b. 2955). According to Rumi, God’s desires are good, and humans should respond to this good will through their choices.

In *Masnavi*, Rumi addresses the problem of evil through allegory and stories, as he does with other topics. One such story about the problem of evil is titled: “Does God cause us to sin or is it the responsibility of the person themselves?” Rumi asks, “Is disbelief and hypocrisy also part of God’s decree and fate? But if we accept it, do we not commit evil? If we do not accept it, that too is a sin... So, what should we do in between?” (Rumi, III, 2007: b. 1365-67). From this dilemma, Rumi offers a middle path: “Disbelief arises from ignorance, but the decree of disbelief is God’s knowledge” (Rumi, III, 2007: b. 1371). The conclusion is that disbelief and fate can reach a solution along the same line. This emphasizes that the divine decree and human will cannot be discussed in the same context. Konuk, in his commentary on *Masnavi*, clarifies this topic through the metaphor of the painter and the painting: “The ugliness of the writing or the painting does not necessarily mean that the writer or the painter is ugly; rather, it shows that the calligrapher or the painter has the capacity and power to make both beautiful and ugly designs” (Konuk, V, 2005: p. 367). In other words, the presence of good or evil figures in the painting does not mean that the painter is bad, but rather it shows that the painter is highly skilled. “The more a painter can beautifully and masterfully depict both beauty and ugliness, the more power and strength they possess in their art” (Konuk, V, 2005: p. 367).

According to Rumi, God is not the cause of the evil actions of humans, but the Creator of good. For him, the existence of good and evil in the world is

merely an indication of God's transcendence. "The ugly painting does not imply the ugliness of the painter. It only proves that the painter has the power to create both the ugly and the beautiful. In fact, being able to create both ugly and beautiful paintings shows that the painter is a powerful painter" (Rumi, III, 2007: b. 1372). In our opinion, Rumi, summarizes the issue with this example. Although he speaks in a way that seems to be in simple language and is often evaluated in this context, it can also be seen that the problem, from Rumi's perspective, has an epistemological and ontological background, in addition to an ethical one.

In Rumi's thought, there is the acceptance that God is inherently good. This acceptance also defines the limits of both God and humans. *Masnavi* holds a special place in this regard. As in the case of Ibn Arabi, Rumi's evaluations of good and evil occur in a relative manner beyond the limits of God. Ultimately, God is the direct interlocutor of existence itself. At this point, a comparison between Ibn Arabi and Rumi can be made.

3. Sufism Philosophy and the Problem of Evil

Sufism is one of the important cornerstones of Islamic Thought, alongside Kalam, Fiqh, and Philosophy. The figures who speak in this field generally follow the classical Sufi view, which is based on an ethical doctrine. However, with Ibn Arabi and later with Sadreddin Konevi, as the topics began to be discussed in the metaphysical realm, philosophy entered the field. The definition of Sufi philosophy also takes shape with this tendency. Thus, the discussions about God, man, and the universe began to transcend merely ethical teachings and the state of being a person of experience, entering into ontological and epistemological realms. The issue of the problem of evil, which we briefly mentioned in the introduction and addressed in later sections through the perspectives of Ibn Arabi and Rumi, can also be examined with such a perspective.

In the history of thought, some figures create a distinction between what came before and after them through the ideas they present, becoming the critical threshold of new knowledge environments. In this study, where we examine Ibn Arabi and Rumi together, we claim such an argument. Moreover, the reason for examining these two figures together is the thought that they share common concepts and views: "The *Masnavi* is a poetic version of the *Futuhatal-Makkiyya* or *Fusus al-Hikam*, while the *Futuhat al-Makkiyya* is a prose version of the *Masnavi*" (Demirli, 2007: p. 232). This view appears consistent with the information we provided in the relevant sections. They seem to express similar thoughts in different styles. At this point, we can look at the concepts of good-evil and the problem of evil.

From a general perspective on the problem of evil, the concepts of good-evil, benefit-harm, light-darkness correspond to desired and undesired situations in the universe. In a broader sense, the question of whether evil is a part of God, and whether it exists in the relationship between man and God, persists whether one is religious or not. The relationship of God with good does not pose a problem but evil becomes a subject of discussion and turns into a problem. Some ancient questions are as follows: Did God create evil? If He did, is He evil too? If He did not, is there another creator? These questions, which continue to unfold, seem to pull this problem into an abyss. However, there is still much to be said on the subject.

The fundamental premise of Sufi teachings is the claim that everything is a reflection of God and that it can be understood through the inherent state of being in existence. From this perspective, issuing a judgment of good or evil about something is not very meaningful. This is because everything that is attributed to be evil carries a relative view. Therefore, the inherently good God cannot have a relationship with evil. However, the philosophy that discusses matters in the metaphysical realm brings the issue into a discussion environment based on being and knowledge, aiming for reconciliation with Sufi teachings. In this sense, the claims of Ibn Arabi and Rumi regarding the problem of evil in their works, within the axis of being, knowledge, and ethics, are significant.

It would be appropriate to start from the very beginning, from the story of the creation of Adam. Indeed, in Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*, the story begins with the section on Adam, and in Rumi's works, a conception of God-Man-Universe is also presented based on this same topic. The act of God creating the universe and humanity represents both the moment and space where the first word regarding being comes into existence. However, this story is not only the beginning but also portrays a continuity of existence with a depiction of life and death, where the foundations of good and evil will be laid. This subject is significant because the Qur'an serves as the primary source for the figures we have discussed. Indeed, the relevant verses establish the foundation of the issue. According to the Qur'an, the creation of the first human, Adam, is explained with the verse: "When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to place a vicegerent on earth,' they said, 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we glorify You with praise and thanksgiving and sanctify You?' He said, 'I know what you do not know.'" [2:30]. This verse, from an Islamic perspective, conveys both the creation of humanity as vicegerent and, on the other hand, serves as an example of the first objection. This objection is, from a more important perspective, the angels' concern about the potential evil humans might bring.

The story of the creation of man in Surah Al-Baqarah holds great importance in Ibn Arabi's thinking. The Adam section in the *Fusus al-Hikam* is structured around the objection of the angels, as mentioned in verse 30 of Surah Al-Baqarah, concerning the superiority of humanity in becoming a vicegerent. (Ibn Arabi, 2013: pp. 26-27). According to Ibn Arabi, although the angels' objection seems to be about Adam's existence, it is essentially an objection to the divine command. In his view, this objection stems from the angels' ignorance. Ibn Arabi interprets the angels' objection as follows: "This statement was nothing but a dispute, and it originated from them. What they said about Adam was the same as their condition in relation to the Truth." Adam, on the other hand, was created with the wisdom of vicegerency, and thus, he was to exist as the reflection of God in the universe. In the subsequent sections, it is stated that Adam knew the divine names that the angels did not know, and because the angels did not know these names, they could not praise and sanctify their Lord as Adam did. Looking at Ibn Arabi's general system, this situation is placed in the narrative as a story that is detached from good-evil definitions and God's knowledge. The emphasis here can be understood in proportion to the importance given to the notion of humanity's vicegerency.

When we look at the system of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being), Adam's place is understood as being the vicegerent and the manifestation of divine names, which serves as the Logos to make the unknown of God known. This perspective is important in terms of a perfect conception of God. However, although the objection seems to be directed at another creation, it is essentially against the command. Objecting to the command logically involves the one who issued it. The questioning or objection to the command results in judgments of good-evil, right-wrong in the mind of the one who objects. Thus, the beginning of creation, considered as the foundation of the story, when evaluated from a different perspective, brings the issue of questioning absolute being through judgments like good and evil. On the other hand, Adam's disobedience by eating the forbidden apple also brings forth Adam's disobedience to God's command. In this section, Ibn Arabi essentially leaves the discussion to Rumi.

Rumi examines the story of Adam's creation through the lens of Adam eating the apple. In the first volume of the *Masnavi*, the 'Adam-Shaitan dialogue and the creation of the world' is addressed. Shaitan says, "My Lord, because You have led me astray, I will surely make disobedience attractive to them on earth, and I will mislead all of them, except for Your sincere servants" (Qur'an, 15:39). In this way, Satan denies the will of God. However, Adam responds by saying, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Qur'an, 7:23). Mevlana analyzes this dialogue as follows: "O heart! Bring an example to distinguish between coercion and free will, so that you may understand both: the hand trembling be-

cause of an illness and the hand you move on your own... Know that both movements are created by God; but there is no comparison between them" (Rumi, I, 2007: pp. 1496-1499).

The trembling hand metaphor is a well-known example. This example makes a good-evil distinction while emphasizing human free will. In this example, Satan rebels against the will of God, while Adam acknowledges his fault, accepting responsibility. Konuk explains this point: "Do not be frightened by the mystery of destiny that God has left unknown to you; know it through His grace, for this fear leads you to obedience, supplication, and humility, and even through this act, it places you on a domain of security" (Konuk, I, 2006: p. 389). In our opinion, Rumi emphasizes that the secret of destiny must be in balance with human free will. This also marks the concept of the first sin. Another interpretation of this situation is as follows: "The fact that Adam and Eve approached the forbidden tree and committed the first wrong (wrongdoing) is a significant point, and this wrong can only be understood when they are expelled from paradise. The question arises: is evil inherent in human nature or something learned?" (Tatar, 2017: p. 294).

The story of Abel and Cain represents the first concrete example of the conflict between good and evil, which is associated with killing and murder. "The story of Cain and Abel marks the historical embodiment of the production of goodness (light) and evil (darkness) by man, symbolizing the moment of the emergence of a tradition in the world based on human existence" (Tatar, 2017: p. 294). In a historical context, the story of Adam's arrival on Earth, his sin, and how the concepts of good and evil become symbolically embedded in his descendants have caused centuries of debates on this issue. Mevlana's engagement with such a critical issue is evident.

Another perspective: "The fact that Adam and Eve approached the forbidden tree and committed the first wrong can be seen in relation to whether evil comes from human nature or is something learned" (Tatar, 2017: p. 295). The story of Abel and Cain is also significant for the way it represents the first example of the conflict between good and evil. "The story of Cain and Abel marks the historical embodiment of the production of goodness and evil by man, symbolizing the birth of a tradition in the world, referring to human existence" (Tatar, 2017: p. 295). These examples show how the concepts of good and evil, in relation to human existence, are seen as the beginning of judgments about things in Islam.

Another analysis of the problem of evil in the context of *Fusus al-Hikam* is the understanding of the "Special Lord" and the metaphor of the Elephant in

the *Masnavi*, which carry similar claims. Although expressed in different languages and styles, they can be seen as employing similar approaches and methods in matters related to knowledge acquisition and judgments about being. The well-known story is of the blind men who encounter the elephant in a dark room and describe it. Each man touches a different part of the elephant, such as its trunk, foot, or ear. Each of them knows only the part they touched, but the elephant is more than any of these individual parts. Thus, each person understands the elephant only according to the part they touch. (Rumi, I, 2007: pp. 1260-1265). A similar interpretation can be found in Ibn Arabi's response to the question, "How can we know God?" just as a person knows the elephant only by the part they touch, in the relationship between God and man, humans only know God to the extent that God's attributes are reflected in them. However, in reality, God is more than the sum of all these individual reflections. (Ibn Arabi, 2013: p. 92). This leads us to a more specific area, which is the basis of the discussions about evil. This requires talking about God's attributes rather than His essence, because His essence is absolute.

In light of the examples given from the perspectives of Ibn Arabī and Rumi, a final evaluation of Sufism's relationship with the problem of evil reveals the following: firstly, within the Sufi literature, these two figures offer critical insights into the problem and, by internalizing the generally accepted views within their own systems, they shaped them into a formal structure that served as a foundation for later perspectives. Referring back to the conceptual analysis mentioned in the introduction, the concepts of good and evil should here be addressed in relation to God. Indeed, the problem gains meaning through its interlocutor. In this context, while philosophers in the traditional setting considered existence as pure goodness and non-existence as pure evil, Islamic thinkers, by associating the concept of good with attributes ascribed to God—such as "akmal" (most perfect), "mukammal" (complete), and "beautiful"—introduce a meaningful distinction. (Özdemir, 2001, p. 17-18).Therefore, from this viewpoint, the concept of "good" discussed within the world cannot be attributed to God and only makes sense within a framework of transcendence (tenzih).

More specifically, the attitude of the Sufis also takes shape in a similar manner to the philosophers, with the understanding that existence is "pure good." So much so that associating the metaphysical notion of good debated in the world with God does not, through a mere conceptual shift, offer a solution to the problem. According to Ibn Arabī and Rumi, in summary, existence—as existence—is good as a manifestation (tajallī) of God. From this angle, it is logically impossible for existence, which manifests from a perfect God, not to bear traces of that perfection. Evil, on the other hand, in being pure sharr (evil), is by its very nature disconnected from God. If the issue is to be concluded in the language of philosophers: the attribution of evil to something is purely a matter

of absence, and to discuss something that is pure absence is, within the realm of existence, tantamount to a conversation about what does not exist.

Conclusion

The act of making judgments about existence leads to the attribution of relative qualities such as good and evil to that thing. This situation, in one sense, is an individual approach, while in another, it provides a foundation for universal moral laws. Religion, society, and law elements bring life to such situations with rewards and punishments. In a more specific field, philosophy allows a deeper analysis of the topic by examining it from epistemological, ontological, and ethical perspectives. From the standpoint of philosophy of religion, an understanding of God as perfect becomes a problem when it is associated with the concept of evil. The essence of our study revolves around the point where such an attribution of evil becomes a problem, and this is approached through two significant figures in history who have left their mark with ideas that surpass classical discourses. Ibn Arabi and Rumi, both children of their time, seem to have offered some solutions to the problem of evil that is still debated today. Indeed, although each thinker follows a different path or method, it is observed that they express ideas on a particular subject with a shared concern. The sources they are nourished by and the environments in which they exist make such a unity possible. It is particularly significant that Ibn Arabī, who is regarded as the starting point of Sufi philosophy, responds to such a discussion in a language close to that of Rumi—that is, in the language of Sufism. For a Sufi, after all, experience is the most fundamental means of acquiring knowledge. Accordingly, the perspective on evil is, in this context, essentially understood as relative—stemming from deficiencies in the experiential dimension of the human being. On the other hand, bringing the way this contemporary and metaphysical issue is addressed within the Sufi discipline of tradition into today's discussions is important, as it can serve as a foundation for future analyses.

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