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JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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Hasna Safarina Rasyidah (1), Robby Habiba Abror (2),
Munawar Ahmad (3)

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (1) (2) (3)

E-mail: hasna.rasyidah@uin-suka.ac.id (1), robby.abror@uin-suka.ac.id (2),
munawar.ahmad@uin-suka.ac.id (3)

Abstract

This article analyzes the problem of evil in Islamic and Catholic philosophies of divinity using a comparative philosophical approach. The problem of evil poses a major challenge to the concept of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God. In the Catholic tradition, theodicy is developed through the concepts of human freedom and the limitations of the created world, particularly in the thought of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. Meanwhile, in the Islamic tradition, the debate develops through discourses between Mu'tazilite rational theology, Ash'ariyah theology, and the thought of philosophers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina. This article shows that the two traditions offer different frameworks for theodicy: Catholicism emphasizes evil as a privation of good, while Islam views evil as part of divine wisdom and an existential test. This study argues that these differences reflect different metaphysical and epistemological structures in understanding the Triadic relationship: God, humanity, and nature. From this triadic perspective, wrongdoing arises because humans lack systemic awareness; consequently, they perceive their actions as carrying no risk or impact on nature and other people. This research proposes a central thesis—the theory of systemic awareness—positing that an action is moral if it preserves the integrity and continuity of the systems sustaining communal life, the relationship with nature, and the individual's relationship with God, whereas an immoral action undermines the integrity of those systems.

Keywords: *Problem of evil, triadic Structure of Evil Problem, , privation of God, the theory of systemic awareness*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis problem kejahatan dalam filsafat ketuhanan Islam dan Katolik dengan menggunakan pendekatan komparatif filosofis. Problem kejahatan menjadi tantangan utama bagi konsep Tuhan yang maha kuasa, maha tahu, dan maha baik. Dalam tradisi Katolik, teodisi dikembangkan melalui konsep kebebasan manusia dan keterbatasan dunia ciptaan, terutama dalam pemikiran Augustine of Hippo dan Thomas Aquinas. Sementara dalam tradisi Islam, perdebatan berkembang melalui diskursus antara teologi rasional Mu'tazilah, teologi Asy'ariyah, serta pemikiran filosof seperti Al-Ghazali dan Ibn Sina. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua tradisi menawarkan kerangka teodisi yang berbeda: Katolik menekankan kejahatan sebagai *privation of good*, sementara Islam melihat kejahatan sebagai bagian dari hikmah ilahi dan ujian eksistensial. Studi ini berargumen bahwa perbedaan tersebut mencerminkan struktur metafisik dan epistemologis yang berbeda dalam memahami relasi Triadik: Tuhan, manusia, dan alam. kajian dngan menggunakan 3 (tiga) aspek, disebut triadic problem Struktur kejahatan. problem kejahatan bukan sekadar kontradiksi logis antara Tuhan dan penderitaan, tetapi merupakan hasil interaksi tiga dimensi ontologis utama: dimensi teologis, antropologis, dan kosmologis. Dengan demikian, problem kejahatan tidak hanya menyangkut keberadaan Tuhan, tetapi juga menyangkut struktur dunia dan kebebasan manusia. Model ini menyatakan bahwa problem kejahatan muncul dari interaksi tiga komponen utama: (1). Divine Attributes (Atribut Ilahi), (2). Human Freedom (Kebebasan Manusia), (3). Cosmic Structure (Struktur Dunia Ciptaan). Kejahatan dalam perspektif triadic ini terjadi karena manusia tidak memiliki kesadaran bersistem, sehingga ia merasa bahwa tindakannya tidak akan beresiko dan berdampak pada alam dan manusia. Riset ini menemukan tesis utama sebaagai teori kesadaran bersistem, yakni tindakan disebut bermoral apabila menjaga integritas dan keberlangsungan sistem yang menopang kehidupan bersama, kehidupan dengan alam, dan kehidupan pribadi dengan Tuhannya, sedangkan tindakan tidak bermoral merusak integritas sistem tersebut.

Keywords: *Problem of evil, triadic Structure of Evil Problem, privation of God, Teori Kesadaran Bersistem*

INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil is one of the most classic and complex challenges in the philosophy of religion.¹ The fundamental question often raised is: If God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, why do evil and suffering persist in the world? This issue is not only a philosophical debate but also a test of faith for adherents of monotheistic religions such as Christianity (Catholicism) and Islam². In the Catholic philosophical tradition, the problem of evil has been systematically discussed by thinkers such as Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Augustine emphasized that evil is not a substance or independent entity, but rather the absence (*privatio*) of goodness (*Confessions*, Book VII; *The City of God*, Book XII)³. Evil arises from the abuse of free will by created beings. Meanwhile, Aquinas developed the idea that God permits evil in order to achieve a greater good

¹ Zain Ali, "The Problem of Evil, God's Personhood, and the Reflective Muslim," *Religions* 15, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020225>.

² Anastasia Foyle, "Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil," *Ars Disputandi* 6, no. 1 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15665399.2006.10819908>.

³ Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. Maria Boulding, vol. XXX, 1895; S T Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972).

(*Summa Theologica*, I, q. 48, a. 1-6). Thus, in the Catholic tradition, evil is understood within the framework of human freedom and divine wisdom ⁴.

Meanwhile, in Islamic philosophy, the problem of evil has also received significant attention. Thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) discussed the concepts of qada and qadar (destiny), free will, and Divine justice (al-'Adl). Ibn Sina argued that everything that exists comes from the All-Good God, and that evil is merely a consequence of the limitations of creation, not God himself (*The Metaphysics of Healing*, Book IX) ⁵. Al-Ghazali highlighted the mystery of God's will, but still emphasized human moral responsibility (*Al-Iqtisad fi al-'Itiqad*) ⁶. In this context, evil is often seen as a test and a means of perfecting the human soul.

A comparative study of these two philosophies reveals similarities, such as an emphasis on free will and God's transcendent goodness, as well as theological differences, such as the Catholic concept of original sin and the Islamic view, which emphasizes the sacred nature of humankind⁷. These differences reflect the historical and cultural dynamics of both traditions in responding to the reality of evil.

Studying the problem of evil from a Catholic and Islamic perspective is not only crucial for deepening theological and philosophical understanding but also relevant for building interfaith dialogue in the modern era. By examining the roots of the concepts of evil and human responsibility according to these two major traditions, it is hoped that common ground can be found in addressing ethical and moral challenges in the contemporary world.⁸

This debate has been central to reflection in both Western and Islamic theological and philosophical traditions. In the Catholic tradition, this problem was discussed in depth by Augustine of Hippo, who stated that evil is not a substance, but rather the absence of goodness (*privatio boni*). This thought was later developed by Thomas Aquinas within the framework of Aristotelian metaphysics⁹. In the Islamic tradition, the discourse on evil emerged in the theological debate between the Mu'tazilites, who emphasized God's justice, and the Ash'arites, who emphasized God's absolute will. Figures such as

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Vols. 1-2), *New Scholasticism*, 1948.

⁵ Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing : A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, Trans. M.E. Marumura, *Islamic Translation Series*, 2005.

⁶ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin*, Jilid 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005).

⁷ Peter Jonkers, "Religion as a Source of Evil," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 4-5 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1322915>.

⁸ A.A. Kovalev, "Understanding the Phenomenon of Evil in Christianity and Islam: An Experience of Historical and Philosophical Comparison of the Concepts of Al-Farabi, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas," *Vestnik Povolzhskogo Instituta Upravleniya* 21, no. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.22394/1682-2358-2021-4-74-85>.

⁹ Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing : A Parallel English-Arabic Text*.

Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina offered different philosophical approaches to understanding the relationship between God, human freedom, and suffering¹⁰.

Although both traditions share the concept of monotheism, their explanations of the problem of evil demonstrate significant epistemological and metaphysical differences. The aims of this article are: (1) To analyze the concept of evil in Catholic divine philosophy. (2) To examine the understanding of evil in Islamic divine philosophy. (3) To compare the theodicy framework in the two traditions.¹¹

Method

This study uses a comparative philosophical analysis approach to understand the conceptual differences and similarities between the Islamic and Catholic traditions¹². This research is a qualitative study based on literature studies (philosophical textual analysis). This method is a philosophical study that emphasizes the reading, interpretation, and critical evaluation of philosophical texts. This method aims to understand the thoughts, arguments, and core concepts contained in the works of philosophers, both classical and contemporary.

In practice, philosophical textual analysis involves several main steps: (1). Critical Reading: Reading is carried out carefully to capture the explicit and implicit meaning of the text. The reader tries to understand the historical, cultural, and intellectual context in which the text was written., (2). Interpretation: Interpretation aims to reveal the deeper meaning of a particular argument or concept. This includes clarifying terms, analyzing the structure of the argument, and exploring the basic assumptions underlying the philosopher's thinking. (3). Argument Evaluation: After understanding and interpreting the text, the next step is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the argument put forward. Is the argument logical? Are there any contradictions or weaknesses? How is it relevant to broader philosophical issues? (4). Comparison and Dialogue: Philosophical texts are often analyzed comparatively, both between works within a single tradition and across traditions. Through this dialogue, understanding of an idea can be deepened and broadened. (5). Contextual Application: The results of the analysis are often applied

¹⁰ Mona Jahangiri, "The Question of Theodicy in Islamic Philosophy—Suggesting a Solution: Badā' ," *Religions* 14, no. 8 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14081047>.

¹¹ Telman Emiraliyevich Kafarov, "Is Islam Theodicy Or Anti-Theodicy?," in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Congress «Knowledge, Man and Civilization» (ISCKMC 2022), June 8–10, 2022, Complex Scientific Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Grozny, Russia*, vol. 129, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2022.12.73>.

¹² Jesse Fleming, "Comparative Philosophy: Its Aims and Methods," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30, no. 2 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.00118>.

to contemporary issues or practical problems, thus demonstrating the relevance of philosophical thought to modern life ¹³.

This method is very appropriate for reading the concept of the problem of evil from two different perspectives in the philosophy of divinity, namely the Catholic and Islamic versions. In order to find the basic arguments of each through critical, analytical, and reflective thinking processes, and to build strong arguments in discussions or scientific writing.

Explanation Of Research Object

The Problem of Evil is a central issue in the philosophy of religion that asks how evil and suffering can exist in the world if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent ¹⁴. This problem arises in two main forms: the logical problem and the evidential problem. (1). The logical problem (Logical Problem of Evil) was first clearly formulated by Epicurus and further popularized by J.L. Mackie. Mackie argued that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of God as understood in classical theism. He wrote: "If God were all-good, he would eliminate evil; if he were all-powerful, he could eliminate it; but evil still exists, so such a God cannot exist.." ¹⁵. (2). The evidential problem (Evidential Problem of Evil) was developed by William Rowe. Rowe did not argue that the existence of evil and God is contradictory, but rather that the existence of evil that seems to have no moral purpose (gratuitous evil) makes the existence of God probabilistically impossible ¹⁶.

The philosophy of God or the philosophy of religion addresses fundamental questions about the existence, nature, and role of God in reality. (1). Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, proposed five arguments (*quinque viae*) supporting God's existence, such as the arguments of motion, causality, contingency, degree, and purpose. These arguments emphasize rationality in proving God's existence (Aquinas, 1265-1274). (2). Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, criticized the classical arguments (ontological, cosmological, and teleological) for God's existence. Kant argued that God's existence cannot be rationally proven through metaphysical arguments but is instead a

¹³ Adrian Blau, "Philosophical Analysis," in *Research Handbook on the History of Political Thought*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800373808.00009>.

¹⁴ Safaruk Zaman Chowdhury, "Explaining Evil In The Biosphere: Assessing Some Evolutionary Theodicies For Muslim Theists," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 57, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12775>.

¹⁵ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *Journey into Philosophy: An Introduction with Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7gm2.11>.

¹⁶ William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315234021-5>.

practical postulate for morality¹⁷. The philosophy of God also addresses God's attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and absolute goodness, as well as God's relationship to His creation. Contemporary discussions include the thinking of Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, who defend theism through probabilistic and logical arguments¹⁸.

Theodicy is an attempt to justify or defend God's goodness amidst the existence of evil and suffering in the world. G.W. Leibniz was the first philosopher to systematically develop the concept of theodicy in his *Essais de Théodicée* (1710)¹⁹. He argued that this world—despite its evil—is the best possible world God could have created, because its presence contributes to overall beauty and harmony. John Hick developed the “soul-making” theodicy, which holds that suffering and evil are necessary for the formation of human moral character. The world is seen as a “soul-forming ground” where humans are tested and given the opportunity for spiritual growth²⁰. Furthermore, Alvin Plantinga, in his “Free Will Defense,” argues that moral evil is a consequence of God's granted human freedom. This freedom is so valuable that God allows the possibility of evil for the sake of realizing true freedom.²¹.

freedom is a fundamental aspect in discussions of the problem of evil and theodicy. Freedom is seen as a condition for moral responsibility and a prerequisite for free-will-based theodicy. Augustine argued that evil is not a creation of God but rather the result of the abuse of free will by rational beings. He wrote: “Evil is the absence of the good that should be in the will of creatures.” (Augustine, *The City of God*). Jean-Paul Sartre in his philosophy of existentialism emphasized the radical freedom of humans. For Sartre, humans are completely responsible for their actions without divine basis, and evil or suffering is a consequence of that freedom itself²². In the context of theism, human freedom is used to explain why God allows evil—because the creation of free beings is of higher value than creating beings who automatically act well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature analysis shows that both the Islamic and Catholic traditions distinguish evil into several philosophical categories. This division is important because each type of evil requires a different theodicy: (1) moral evil, (2) natural evil, and (3) existential evil. Moral evil stems from human actions that violate ethical norms. Examples include

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant and J M D Meiklejohn, “Critique of Pure Reason,” 1781, 1–7.

¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil, Essays in Philosophy*, 1974.

¹⁹ G W Leibniz, “Essais de Théodicée,” 1710, <http://www.pgdp.net>.

²⁰ Ronald E. Santoni and John Hick, “Evil and the God of Love,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 28, no. 1 (1967), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2105344>.

²¹ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

²² Jean Paul Sartre, “L'Existentialisme et Jean Paul Sartre,” *Philosophical Library*, 1946.

violence, oppression, and social injustice. In both traditions, this type of evil is usually explained through the concept of human freedom. Augustine of Hippo's thought asserts that moral evil arises when humans misuse their free will. This view shares similarities with rational theology in Islam, which emphasizes human moral responsibility.²³

Natural evil includes natural disasters, disease, and suffering not directly caused by human actions. In philosophical discourse on divinity, this type of evil presents the greatest challenge because it appears unrelated to human freedom. In the Catholic tradition, this phenomenon is explained through the limitations of the created world. In the Islamic tradition, this phenomenon is often understood as part of a cosmic order endowed with divine wisdom.

Existential evil relates to psychological or spiritual human suffering, such as the loss of meaning in life, grief, and existential anxiety. This type of evil is often discussed in modern religious philosophy and is associated with human spiritual experience. In Catholic philosophy, evil is not understood as an independent ontological reality. Augustine of Hippo stated that evil is the absence of good (privation of good). This concept has several implications: (1) God did not create evil. (2) Evil arises from the abuse of human freedom, and (3) the created world remains fundamentally good. This idea was later developed by Thomas Aquinas who emphasized that evil can arise as a consequence of the limitations of created beings²⁴

In Islamic philosophy, evil is often understood within the framework of divine wisdom and life's trials. Some of the main approaches include: (1) the Mu'tazilite approach, emphasizing God's justice and human freedom. Evil stems from human actions, not from God. (2) the Ash'arite approach, emphasizing God's absolute power. Everything happens because of God's will, but humans still have moral responsibility. (Chowdhury, S. (2021)). Figures such as Al-Ghazali argue that the limitations of human reason prevent humans from always being able to understand the wisdom behind suffering. Meanwhile, Ibn Sina sees evil as a consequence of the limitations of matter within the structure of the cosmos. A comparison reveals several fundamental differences

²³ Reda Abdelgalil, "Rethinking the Causes of Moral Decline from the Perspectives of the Bible and the Qur'ān," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol24.iss2.art3>.

²⁴ Muhsin Akbas, "The Problem of Evil and the Theodicies in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Thought" (Doctoral thesis, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.82227/repository.uwtsd.ac.uk.00001032>.

Table 1: Comparison of Fundamental Difference

Aspects	Catholic	Islam
The Nature of Evil	Privacy of Good	Part of God’s Wisdom
Causes	Abuse of Freedom	God’s Will and Trials
Metaphysical Approach	Ontology of Good	Divine will
Focus on Theodicy	Human freedom	Wisdom and Destiny

Sources: data from various sources

In the Catholic tradition, discourse on the problem of evil develops through a theodicy framework that emphasizes the relationship between human freedom and divine goodness. According to Augustine of Hippo (1895), evil does not have an independent ontological status. He defined evil as the privation of good (*privatio boni*), that is, the absence or lack of goodness in reality. This concept has several important implications: (1) God does not create evil. (2) Evil arises when free creatures depart from goodness. (3) The world retains an ontological structure that is fundamentally good.

This thinking was later developed more systematically by Thomas Aquinas. In Aquinas’s metaphysics, evil arises as a consequence of the limitations of created beings. Because creatures lack absolute perfection, the possibility of flaws or damage becomes part of the ontological structure of the world. Thus, in Catholic philosophy, there are two main mechanisms that explain evil: first, human freedom as the source of moral evil. Second, the imperfection of the created world as an explanation of natural evil.

This approach seeks to maintain consistency between the existence of an all-good God and the reality of human suffering. The discourse on evil in Islamic divine philosophy developed through complex theological debates between various schools of thought. (1). *Mu’tazilah* perspective, The *Mu’tazilah* school emphasizes the concept of divine justice. According to this view, God cannot possibly create evil because it contradicts His just nature. Therefore, evil is understood as a consequence of human actions that have moral freedom. This approach places humans as the main agents in the emergence of moral evil. (2). *Ash’ariyah* perspective, In contrast to the *Mu’tazilah*, *Ash’ariyah* theology emphasizes God’s absolute power. Everything that happens in the universe is in God’s will. However, humans still have moral responsibility for their actions. This concept is often explained through the theory of *kasb* (acquisition of action²⁵).

In classical Islamic philosophy, the explanation of evil is also influenced by the metaphysics of emanation. According to Ibn Sina, evil has no positive reality but arises as a consequence of the limitations of matter within the structure of the cosmos. In his cosmology, the material world has a lower level of perfection than intellectual reality.

²⁵ Bakinaz Abdalla, “Evil and Responsibility in the Quran,” *Religious Studies* 61, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412523001026>.

Meanwhile, Al-Ghazali emphasized the limitations of human reason in understanding God's wisdom. He argued that suffering often has a spiritual purpose that humans cannot fully comprehend.

Comparative analysis reveals two main theodicy models in the Islamic and Catholic traditions: the moral theodicy model, which explains evil as a consequence of human freedom. This model is dominant in the thought of Augustine of Hippo and Mu'tazilite theology. The metaphysical theodicy model, which views evil as a consequence of the imperfect ontological structure of the world, is found in the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas and the cosmological philosophy of Ibn Sina. Finally, the divine wisdom theodicy model emphasizes that suffering has a spiritual meaning or wisdom that humans cannot always comprehend. This approach is strongly rooted in Al-Ghazali's thought.²⁶

Based on a literary analysis, the problem of evil in both traditions can be understood through the relationship between three main elements: the attributes of God (omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent), human freedom, and the structure of the created world. These three elements form a conceptual framework that explains how evil can arise without negating God's existence.²⁷

A comparative analysis of the literature on Islamic and Catholic philosophy of divinity shows that the problem of evil cannot be understood solely as a moral or theological issue. This problem arises from the conceptual relationship between three main elements: the attributes of God, human freedom, and the ontological structure of the created world. These three elements form a conceptual framework that determines how a religious tradition explains the existence of suffering and evil without negating God's perfection.

The first element in the conceptual structure of the problem of evil is the fundamental attributes of God, which form the basis of the philosophy of divinity. In monotheistic theology, God is typically understood to possess three primary attributes: (1) omnipotence, (2) omniscience, and (3) omnibenevolence. These three attributes form what is often referred to in the philosophy of religion as the "classical theological triad." The problem of evil arises when these three attributes are confronted with the reality of suffering in the world. The premises are as follows: "If God is all-powerful, then He can prevent evil." "If God is all-knowing, then He knows the existence of evil." "If God is all-good, then He should not will evil." Yet, in reality, suffering persists in the world. This logical tension lies at the heart of the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion²⁸.

²⁶ Safaruk Chowdhury, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil*, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2ks6z03>.

²⁷ Abdalla, "Evil and Responsibility in the Quran."

²⁸ Kafarov, "Is Islam Theodicy Or Anti-Theodicy?"

In the Catholic tradition, the thought of Augustine of Hippo attempts to resolve this tension by arguing that evil has no independent ontological existence. It is simply the lack of goodness in reality. This approach aims to uphold God's perfection while explaining the existence of suffering. In Islamic philosophy, a different approach emerges through the concept of absolute divine will. Figures like Al-Ghazali emphasized that humans have epistemological limitations in understanding God's wisdom. Therefore, not all suffering can be fully explained rationally. Thus, both the Catholic and Islamic traditions uphold God's perfection, but employ different metaphysical approaches.

The second element in the structure of the problem of evil is the concept of human freedom (free will). In many theodicy theories, human freedom is considered the primary factor enabling the emergence of moral evil. According to Augustine of Hippo, God created humans with free will so that they can consciously choose good. However, this freedom also opens up the possibility for humans to choose evil. Thus, moral evil is not a result of God's will, but rather a consequence of human freedom ²⁹.

A similar concept also appears in Islamic rational theology, particularly in Mu'tazilite thought, which emphasizes human moral responsibility. In this view, humans have the ability to determine their own actions, so evil cannot be directly attributed to God's will. However, a different approach emerged in Ash'arite theology. Within this framework, everything happens because of God's will, but humans still acquire moral responsibility through the concept of *kasb* (acquisition of action). This approach attempts to balance God's power and human responsibility. Thus, human freedom becomes a crucial element in explaining moral evil without negating God's perfection.

The third element in the structure of the problem of evil concerns the nature of the material world. Many philosophers argue that evil arises as a consequence of the ontological limitations of the created world. In Catholic metaphysics, the thought of Thomas Aquinas states that the created world has varying degrees of perfection. Because creatures lack absolute perfection like God, the possibility of decay, suffering, and death is inherent in the structure of the world. A similar approach is also found in classical Islamic philosophy. In the emanation cosmology developed by Ibn Sina³⁰, cosmic reality has different levels of existence. The material world is at a lower level of existence than the intellectual world, so limitations and imperfections are inherent in the physical world. From this perspective, evil is not understood as a direct creation by God, but rather as a consequence of the imperfect ontological structure of the world. Based on a comparative analysis, the problem of evil can be understood as the result of the interaction between three main dimensions:

²⁹ John Culp, "Introduction for the Topical Issue 'Issues and Approaches in Contemporary Theological Thinking about Evil,'" *Open Theology*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0139>.

³⁰ Jahangiri, "The Question of Theodicy in Islamic Philosophy—Suggesting a Solution: *Badā'*."

Table 2: Interaction Between Three Main Dimensions

Dimension	Elements	Role in the problem of evil
Theology	Nature of God	Determining the metaphysical limits of the possibility of evil
Anthropology	Human freedom	Explaining the origins of moral evil
Cosmology	Structure of The World	Explaining natural evil and suffering

Sources: data from various sources

The interaction of these three dimensions creates a conceptual framework that explains how suffering can arise in a world created by a perfect God. The results of this study indicate that the problem of evil in both traditions is not only related to theology but also to the metaphysical structure of each tradition. In Catholic philosophy, Aristotelian metaphysics influences the understanding of goodness as an ontological reality. Therefore, evil is understood as a deficiency in the order of goodness. Conversely, in the Islamic tradition, the concept of God’s absolute power is the primary basis for explaining the reality of evil.

In this context, the difference between Islamic and Catholic philosophies of God lies not in the recognition of God’s existence, but in how they explain the relationship between God, humanity, and the world. The Catholic tradition tends to emphasize the metaphysical dimensions of goodness and human freedom, while Islamic philosophies of God emphasize the dimension of divine wisdom and the limitations of human knowledge regarding God’s plan. This difference demonstrates that the problem of evil is not merely a matter of theological logic but also a reflection of the broader philosophical structure within each religious tradition.

An analytical framework using the Triadic Structure of Evil Problem model was developed as an analytical framework to understand how the problem of evil arises within monotheistic theological systems. This model starts from the assumption that the problem of evil is not simply a logical contradiction between God and suffering, but rather the result of the interaction of three primary ontological dimensions: theological, anthropological, and cosmological. Thus, the problem of evil concerns not only the existence of God but also the structure of the world and human freedom. This model states that the problem of evil arises from the interaction of three main components: Divine Attributes, Human Freedom, and Cosmic Structure³¹. These three components form an ontological triangle that determines how a religious tradition explains suffering.

³¹ Kovalev, “Understanding the Phenomenon of Evil in Christianity and Islam: An Experience of Historical and Philosophical Comparison of the Concepts of Al-Farabi, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas.”

Table 3: Suffering Explanation in Religious Traditions

Dimension	Main Variable	Function
Theological	God’s attributes	determine the metaphysical possibility of evil
Anthropological	Human freedom	explains the origins of moral evil
Cosmological	The structure of the world	explains natural evil

Sources: data from various sources

This model allows for a more systematic analysis of various theories of theodicy. This triadic model allows for the classification of theodicy theories based on their most dominant dimension.

Table 4: Type of Theodicy

Type of Theodicy	Dominant Dimension	Example Thinker
Moral theodicy	human freedom	Augustine of Hippo
Metaphysical theodicy	the structure of the cosmos	Thomas Aquinas
Wisdom theodicy	divine will	Al-Ghazali
Cosmological theodicy	the structure of emanation	Ibn Sina

Sources: data from various sources

Epicurus himself did not leave behind any explicit writings containing a formulation of the problem of evil in the triadic form as it is known today. However, his ideas on the problem of evil were conveyed and preserved by later authors, particularly by Lactantius in his work *De Ira Dei* (On the Anger of God). In this work, Lactantius quotes and summarizes Epicurus’s position on God and evil in the form of a series of rhetorical questions: “Does God want to prevent evil, but is unable? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able, but is unwilling? Then He is not omnibenevolent. > Is He both able and willing? Then where does evil come from? Is He both unable and unwilling? Then why call Him God?”³².

This structure forms the basis of the logical problem of evil, namely, that the existence of evil is considered inconsistent with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. This formulation persists in the Western philosophical tradition and forms the foundation of discussions of the problem of evil, which were later developed further by philosophers such as David Hume and J.L. Mackie³³.

The Triadic Structure in the Problem of Evil is a philosophical analytical framework that maps the problem of evil into three central propositions that are considered logically incapable of being simultaneously maintained without creating contradictions³⁴. The

³² Lactantius, *De Opificio Dei and De Ira Dei* (Italy (Ferrara or Rome?, 1444).

³³ Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” 2016.

³⁴ J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” *Mind* 64: 200-212. 64, no. 254. (1955): 200-212.

Triadic Structure in the Problem of Evil is a philosophical analytical framework that maps the problem of evil into three central propositions that are considered logically incapable of being simultaneously maintained without creating contradictions. This structure has become the main foundation in discussions of the problem of evil, especially in Western philosophy of religion. The triadic structure is classically formulated as follows: (1) God is omnipotent, (2) God is omniscient, (3) God is Omnibenevolent, (3) Evil Exists. The problem of evil arises when these three elements are in a tense relationship with three concepts, namely (1) God is considered omnibenevolent, (2) humans have freedom, and (3) the world has limitations.

This tension has given rise to various theories of theodicy in the history of philosophy. The first relationship arises between God's omnipotence and human freedom. If God is truly omnipotent and all-knowing, then the question arises as to whether humans truly possess authentic freedom. In Catholic divine philosophy, the thought of Augustine of Hippo attempts to explain that God created humans with free will so that they can consciously choose good. This freedom is a prerequisite for morality. However, this same freedom also allows humans to commit evil. The tension arises from two possibilities: (1) If God controls all human actions, then humans are not truly free. (2) If humans are completely free, then it seems that God does not fully control the world.

In Islamic theology, this tension is evident in the debate between two major schools of thought. Mu'tazilite theology emphasizes human freedom as the basis of God's justice, while Ash'arite theology emphasizes God's absolute power. In the Ash'arite approach, the concept of *kasb* is used to explain how humans retain moral responsibility even though their actions are within God's will. This tension suggests that the problem of evil is not only related to suffering, but also to the ontological status of human freedom.

The second relationship arises between God's perfection and the imperfection of the created world. If God is all-good and all-powerful, why was the world created with a structure that allows for suffering? In Catholic metaphysics, Thomas Aquinas explains that the created world has varying degrees of perfection. Because creatures lack absolute perfection like God, the possibility of decay, suffering, and death is part of the ontological structure of the world. This explanation is known as metaphysical theodicy. The diverse and imperfect world actually allows for a more complex cosmic order.

In Islamic philosophy, a cosmological approach can be found in the system of emanation developed by Ibn Sina. Within this framework, cosmic reality has different levels of existence. The material world is at a lower level of existence than the intellectual world, so limitations and imperfections are consequences of the structure of the cosmos.

The tension in this relationship arises from the philosophical question: why did a perfect God create an imperfect world? ³⁵.

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The third relationship exists between human freedom and the conditions of the material world. Even if moral evil can be explained through human freedom, there are still forms of suffering that do not originate from human actions. Examples of this type of evil include natural disasters, disease, death, and biological suffering. This type of evil is often referred to as natural evil. In many theodicy theories, this type of suffering is explained as part of the structure of the world that makes human life and freedom possible. A world with stable natural laws also allows for natural disasters.

In the Islamic tradition, figures such as Al-Ghazali emphasized that suffering often has a spiritual dimension and is a test for humans. From this perspective, suffering does not always have a rational explanation that humans can fully understand. This tension suggests that human freedom cannot fully explain all forms of suffering. ³⁶. If these three propositions are held simultaneously, a logical problem arises because the presence of evil seems incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent and all-good God. Philosophers and theologians have attempted to resolve this problem using several approaches: first, by weakening one of the propositions, namely (1) reducing the concept of omnipotence (God is not absolutely omnipotent), (2) reducing the concept of God's absolute goodness, (3) Denying the existence of evil (e.g., evil is only an illusion, as in some Gnostic thought). As for the theodicy approach, which explains why evil persists even though God is omnipotent and all-good, for example with the argument

³⁵ Chowdhury, *Islam. Theol. Probl. Evil*.

³⁶ Neny Muthiatul Awwaliyah and Tabrani Tajuddin, "Fazlur Rahman's Tafsir Thoughts About Satan And Evil," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 6, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v6i2.340>.

of free will (free will defense,) or the theodicy of soul-making³⁷. In its development, many philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga distinguish between logical problems and evidential problems. Plantinga argued that there is no irresolvable logical contradiction in this triadic structure if the possibility of sufficient moral reasons for God to allow evil remains open. William Rowe then shifted the discussion to the evidential problem: not a question of logical contradiction, but whether the existence of evil really makes the existence of God very unlikely probabilistically³⁸. Nevertheless, both traditions have an important point of agreement, namely that Evil does not eliminate the existence of God. Then, human freedom plays an important role in the emergence of moral evil. And, suffering has a moral and spiritual dimension.

CONCLUSION

This article shows that the problem of evil in Islamic and Catholic philosophies of divinity develops through different theodicy frameworks to answer three problems, namely (1) moral evil, (2) natural evil, and (3) existential evil. The answers to these three problems originate from two different traditions. The Catholic tradition emphasizes evil as the absence of goodness and the result of human freedom, while the Islamic tradition sees evil as part of divine wisdom in the structure of the cosmos. This difference reflects ontological and epistemological differences in understanding the relationship between God, humans, and the world. However, both traditions maintain the belief that the existence of evil does not negate the reality of God. In the Triadic Structure of Evil Problem model, the problem of evil does not arise from a single element, but from the structural tension between three ontological dimensions: the attributes of God, human freedom, and the structure of the created world. This tension is philosophical because each dimension carries different metaphysical principles and sometimes collides with each other. In other words, the problem of evil is a structural paradox in the metaphysics of monotheism: the world created by a perfect God still contains suffering. The above analysis shows that the tension in the triadic model stems from the complex interaction of four main factors: (1) God's perfection, (2) human freedom, (3) the finite structure of the world, and (4) the limitations of human knowledge. These four factors create conditions in which the problem of evil cannot be blamed solely on moral immorality, but rather constitutes a structural tension within the metaphysics of monotheism, namely the existence of nature and human existence. God is present as the creator who grants free will to humans, and nature as the limiter of free will.

³⁷ John H. Hick, "The Problem of Evil," in *Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed., 1983, CHAPTER FOUR.

³⁸ William Row, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Adams and R. M. Adams (edd), 1990.

In this context, the difference between Islamic and Catholic philosophies of divinity lies not in the recognition of God's existence, but in how each tradition manages this tension. The Catholic tradition tends to emphasize metaphysical and moral approaches, while Islamic philosophies of divinity emphasize the dimensions of divine wisdom and human epistemological limitations. However, both carry the same implication of action, namely not blaming God but also does not mean that nature is not evil, because there is human freedom that works to always be able to adapt creatively, if a natural disaster occurs causing damage and death, humans should not curse nature and God, but come back to care for nature, care for the damaged, care for the dead, build civilization, by being friendly with nature and God. This is where human morality grows as a result of triadic formation, without having to blame but balancing and developing towards the creativity of human-nature-God harmony civilization. All will ultimately form a positive awareness of the evil products of human and natural behavior. Through human freedom, humans can choose to conquer nature adaptively and friendly, as a manifestation of typical closeness to nature, even if a disaster occurs, humans will return to occupy nature with increasingly adaptive skills equipped with resilience to survive in a friendly manner with nature and God. Thinking In this context, crime is not a triadic result, but due to the dominant factor of human freedom that has lost its morals, so that in this condition, human law will stop the crime. If it is discovered that criminal behavior is based on a conscious intention to commit repeated evil and there is no element of remorse, then humanitarian law has the potential to revoke the right to life of those who consciously commit evil.

From this triadic perspective, wrongdoing arises because humans lack a systemic awareness; consequently, they fail to perceive the risks and impacts their actions have on nature and other people. The study posits that an action is moral if it preserves the integrity and sustainability of the systems sustaining communal life, the relationship with nature, and the individual's relationship with God, whereas an immoral action undermines the integrity of these systems. Ontologically, this reflects the fact that humans always exist within interconnected systems—social, political, economic, digital, and ecological—linking them to one another, to nature, and to God. Epistemologically, morality is shaped by the capacity to comprehend the structures, relationships, and consequences inherent in these systems. Axiologically, therefore, a moral action is one that preserves, restores, or enhances the sustainability of the system, rather than merely adhering to rules. I term this thesis the theory of systemic consciousness; this framework differs from classical moral theories because the focal point of morality is no longer “rules” (Kant), “virtue” (Aristotle), or “utility” (Mill), but rather the capacity to comprehend systems and the systemic consequences of every action. This approach is also relevant for addressing contemporary issues such as digital media, artificial intelligence, climate

change, and global governance, where individual actions almost invariably produce impacts that extend far beyond the individual..

This research opens up space for interfaith philosophical dialogue in understanding human suffering within a broader metaphysical framework, particularly the intersection of the triadic structure. This triadic structure serves as the basic framework for almost all modern discussions on the problem of evil. It forces theologians and philosophers to re-examine the understanding of the attributes of God, the nature of evil, the relationship between God and the world, and God's relationship with humanity.

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JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

Prodi Studi Agama-Agama
Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Pemikiran Islam
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

