

A Muslim Response to Evil: A Technical and Philosophical Analysis of Said Nursi's Theodicy

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The problem of evil remains one of the most persistent challenges in the philosophy of religion and systematic theology. Traditionally, the debate has been dominated by Western Christian perspectives, focusing on the logical trilemma of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence in the face of suffering. However, the work of **Dr. Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan**, specifically in her seminal study *A Muslim Response to Evil: Said Nursi on the Theodicy*, provides a rigorous technical framework for understanding how Islamic thought—and specifically the **Risale-i Nur** of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi—addresses these existential questions.

The Philosophical Landscape of Islamic Theodicy

In Islamic theology, theodicy (the justification of God's justice and goodness) is often framed through the lens of **Adalah** (Divine Justice) and **Hikmah** (Divine Wisdom). Unlike the Augustinian theodicy which often focuses on the 'privation of good' or the Irenaean 'soul-making' theodicy, Said Nursi's approach utilizes a multi-dimensional semantic and ontological analysis of existence. The core of this response lies in the distinction between the **Mulk** (the realm of appearances/physicality) and the **Malakut** (the realm of inner reality/spirituality).

The Semantic Analysis of Sharr (Evil)

According to Dr. Ozkan's analysis, the term **sharr** in the Qur'an does not denote an independent ontological reality that stands in opposition to **khayr** (good). Instead, Nursi argues that evil is often a relative concept. From a technical linguistic perspective, 'evil' is frequently the result of a human's limited viewpoint failing to grasp the totality of a Divine Decree. This leads to a fundamental principle in Nursi's thought: **The existence of minor evil is necessary for the existence of major good.**

Theoretical Framework: The Manifestation of Divine Names

To understand Nursi's theodicy, one must understand the **Asma al-Husna** (The Most Beautiful Names of God). Nursi posits that the universe is a mirror reflecting these names. This reflection requires contrast. Just as light is only truly understood and perceived through the presence of darkness, Divine attributes like **Ar-Razzaq** (The Provider) or **Ash-Shafi** (The Healer) require the 'absence' of their effects (hunger or illness) to be manifested and appreciated.

The Role of Contrast in Perception

Technically, this can be viewed through the lens of information theory. Information is generated through differentiation. If every point in a system were identical, no information could be transmitted. Similarly, in Nursi's ontological model, if every moment was 'perfectly good' in a static sense, the dynamic unfolding of Divine Perfections would be impossible. Suffering, therefore, serves as the 'darkness' that allows the 'light' of Divine Compassion to be visible to conscious beings.

Technical Analysis: The 'Two Faces' of Existence

Nursi provides a procedural methodology for evaluating events that appear 'evil.' He suggests looking at the 'Two

Faces' (Iki Yuz) of every occurrence:

- The Face of Mulk: This is the outer, material face where causes and effects reside. To the observer, a natural disaster like an earthquake is 'sharr' because it causes destruction and death.
- The Face of Malakut: This is the inner face, which is always transparent and directly connected to Divine Wisdom. In this realm, the earthquake might be seen as a mechanism for ecological renewal, a reminder of human finitude, or a catalyst for communal compassion and spiritual growth.

Comparative Theodicy Frameworks

The following table illustrates the technical differences between classical Western theodicy and the Nursian model as presented by Dr. Ozkan:

Feature	Augustinian Theodicy	Irenaean Theodicy	Nursian (Risale-i Nur) Theodicy
Origin of Evil	Fall of Man / Misuse of Will	Necessary for Human Maturity	Manifestation of Divine Names / Contrast
Nature of Evil	Privatio Boni (Lack of Good)	Soul-Making Tool	Relative 'Sharr' vs. Absolute 'Khayr'
Role of God	Permits evil for greater good	Facilitates growth through trial	Directly creates all for Wisdom (Hikmah)
Perspective	Moralistic/Historical	Developmental/Evolutionary	Ontological/Semantic

Procedural Execution: How to Analyze Evil via the Risale-i Nur

For a practitioner or scholar following the methodology of Said Nursi and Dr. Ozkan, the process of 'resolving' the problem of evil in a specific context follows a structured logical sequence:

Step 1: Identify the Category of Evil

First, determine if the evil is **Moral Evil** (stemming from human agency) or **Natural Evil** (stemming from cosmic processes). Nursi treats these differently but unites them under the umbrella of Divine Sovereignty.

Step 2: Apply the Principle of Non-Existent Sharr

Mathematically, evil is often viewed as a zero-value or a negative vector. Nursi argues that things are 'good' in their existence and 'evil' in their non-existence or destruction. Therefore, God creates the 'existence' of the act, but the 'evil' is the human's failure to direct that act toward its proper purpose.

Step 3: Evaluate via the 'Names of God' Model

Identify which Divine Name is being manifested. If one is experiencing illness, the focus shifts to the Name **Ash-Shafi**. If one is experiencing poverty, the focus is on **Al-Ghani** (The Rich One). The suffering is not the end goal; the recognition of the Divine Attribute is the objective.

Step 4: The Transcendental Shift

Shift the perspective from the **Self (Ana)** to the **Divine (Huwa)**. Nursi explains that the human ego often perceives things as 'evil' because it views itself as the owner of its life and comfort. Once the ego recognizes its role as a 'measure' or 'pointer' to Divine Truth, the 'evil' of its circumstances is re-contextualized as a spiritual exercise.

The Problem of Suffering: Case Studies and Troubleshooting

Case Study 1: The 'Sickness of the Innocent'

A common critique of theodicy is the suffering of children or animals. Nursi addresses this by arguing that for the innocent, suffering is a form of 'spiritual training' or a 'divine favor' in disguise that leads to higher stations in the afterlife. Technically, this is an **extrapolated utility model** where the temporal 'loss' is far outweighed by the eternal 'gain.'

Case Study 2: Natural Catastrophes

In the *Risale-i Nur*, natural disasters are not 'punishments' in a crude sense. Instead, they are the 'shaking' of the

universe to prevent stagnation. Life requires movement, and movement requires friction. Without the 'friction' of natural forces, the 'machine' of the universe would cease to function and evolve.

Technical Troubleshooting: Common Philosophical Errors

1. Error: Viewing evil as an absolute creation of God independent of good. Solution: Recognize that sharr is relative and often a byproduct of the 'Universal Good.' (e.g., Fire is good for its utility; the fact that it burns a hand is a minor misuse/relative evil).
2. Error: Assuming human logic can fully encompass Divine Wisdom. Solution: Implement the Epistemological Humility protocol. Recognize that our 'sample size' of the universe is insufficient to judge the 'Total System.'

Human Free Will and the 'Ana' (The Self)

A significant portion of Dr. Ozkan's work deals with Nursi's treatment of **Juz'i Iradah**(Partial Will). The technical challenge is: if God creates all acts, how is man responsible for evil? Nursi uses the analogy of a building. God provides the materials and the power to build (the existence), but the human architect provides the 'direction' or the 'plan.' If the house collapses due to poor design, the fault lies with the architect's 'non-doing' or 'wrong-doing,' even though the actual physical forces that caused the collapse are laws created by God.

The 'Ana' as a Measuring Tool

Nursi's technical innovation is the concept of the **Ana** (Ego/Self) as a unit of measurement. The self is given a small amount of power, knowledge, and ownership so that it can understand the infinite Power, Knowledge, and Ownership of God. Evil arises when the *Ana* forgets its role as a 'measuring tape' and starts believing it is the 'source' of these attributes. This **Ontological Misalignment** is the root of moral evil.

Comparative Matrix: Islamic Theological Schools on Evil

To provide a broader context, it is helpful to see how Nursi's response (as analyzed by Ozkan) fits within the wider Islamic tradition:

Theological School	View on 'Good and Evil'	Human Agency	Theodicy Strategy
Mu'tazila	Rationalistic; Good/Evil are objective and discoverable by reason.	Absolute Free Will.	God *must* do what is best (Al-Aslah).
Ash'arite	Voluntaristic; Good/Evil are whatever God decrees.	Acquisition (Kasb).	God's will is absolute; no 'why' allowed.
Maturidi	Synthesis; Reason can perceive good/evil, but Law confirms it.	Inclination (Ikhtiyar).	Wisdom (Hikmah) is inherent in all Divine acts.
Said Nursi	Ontological/Manifestational; Evil is relative and a tool for Divine recognition.	Partial Will (Juz'i Iradah) as a 'direction'.	Names of God / Contrast / Two Faces.

Implications for Modern Comparative Religion

The work of Dr. Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan is crucial for modern scholarship because it moves beyond the 'defense' of God and into a 'discovery' of meaning. By using semantic analysis and ontological inquiry, Nursi's theodicy provides a way for modern individuals to process trauma and global suffering without abandoning intellectual rigor or spiritual devotion.

Furthermore, this approach offers a bridge between the **Physical Sciences** and **Spirituality**. By viewing the universe as a dynamic system of 'Names' and 'Manifestations,' Nursi creates a framework where the 'laws of nature' (which include entropy and decay, often seen as natural evil) are recognized as the very 'ink' with which the Divine Wisdom writes the story of existence.

Ultimately, a 'Muslim Response to Evil' as articulated through Said Nursi suggests that the problem of evil is not a 'bug' in the system of creation, but a fundamental 'feature' that enables conscious beings to transition from a state of simple existence to a state of profound, experiential knowledge of the Divine. The transition from the Mulk to the Malakut, from the appearance of 'sharr' to the reality of 'hikmah,' constitutes the primary journey of the human soul. This technical and philosophical synthesis ensures that Islamic thought remains a vital and sophisticated voice in one of humanity's oldest and most difficult conversations.

Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

- [Al-Farabi and the Genesis of Islamic Neoplatonism: A Technical Analysis of Logic, Politics, and Metaphysics](http://alaskawriters.com/al-farabi-islamic-neoplatonism-technical-analysis.pdf)

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Tags: #Said Nursi #Theodicy #Problem of Evil #Islamic Theology #Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan #Risale i Nur

