



Research Paper

A comparison of opinions by Morteza Motahari and John Hick on evil and the educational implications

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Abstract

Aim: The present study aims to compare the opinions of Morteza Motahari and John Hick on evil for its educational implications using George Bereday's four-step comparison model of description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. Initially, the opinions of Motahari and Hick on evil were described based on the philosophical components before being interpreted and criticized. In the juxtaposition stage, the information obtained in the description, interpretation, and criticism stages was categorized to set up a framework for the next stage of comparing similarities and differences of opinion between the two thinkers on evil. Finally, the resulting educational implications of their opinions were presented. Research findings show that the opinions of Motahari and Hick on evil as two religious thinkers prompt people to face evil in a constructive manner and exploit its emergence for educational purposes instead of fleeing, attacking, or remaining passive towards it. In this approach, the threats of evil are transformed into moral education, cultivating the human spirit and moral virtues.

Keywords: *Evil, John Hick, Morteza Motahari, Educational implications*

Introduction

Evil as the absence of good (Haas, et al, 2022: 83) has been introduced with a dual function. One aspect states that evil is not extremely bad but that good cannot exist and be perceived without bad. For instance, in an article titled “The Counterpart and Appreciation Theodicies”, McBrayer(2013) states that good cannot exist without evil and that we are unable to know, recognize, and appreciate good and other issues without evil. The other aspect states that evil is inherently bad and unnecessary in the world (Pinak, 2003: 132), and so must be confronted. The first generation of the Frankfurt School theorists, i.e. Gramsci, Freire, and Giraud, believe that the way to confront deprivation, domination, and educational discrimination as examples of moral evil is the creation of change by community elites (Kardan, 2009: 271-272), liberating education for reform, raising awareness, empowering the oppressed and deprived, and critical literacy, respectively (Kardan, 2009: 272). By accepting the dual function of evil, the main question that arises is that in most education systems, the issue of evil is generally frowned upon as inherently undesirable, to be avoided. Although much recommendation exists on confronting evil, this has not yet been considered as an opportunity to educate (turning threat into opportunity). To achieve this, and to attain its educational implications, the present study uses a descriptive analytical method to explain the approaches of Morteza Motahari and John Hick as two religious thinkers in facing evil and the educational implications of each approach.

Methodology

We used a qualitative approach and George Z. F. Bereday’s four-step comparison model of description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison for this basic research (Aghazadeh, 2012: 126). In the description stage, the phenomena and examples under research, i.e. the opinions of Motahari and Hick, were described based on the philosophical components. The information described by the researcher in the first stage was interpreted next. At this stage, the data collected in the first stage was criticized based on its weak and strong points. In the juxtaposition stage, the information obtained in the description, interpretation, and criticism stages were categorized to set up a framework for the next stage of comparing similarities and differences of opinions between the two thinkers on evil. Finally, the resulting educational implications of their opinions were presented.

Results

In general, the opinions of Motahari and Hick are rooted in a religious approach in ontological terms with a central belief in God, Judgment Day, and life after death. This, in turn, is rooted in another ontological belief in which evil is considered necessary for existence and inevitable for the growth and evolution of humankind. Ontologically, in addition to the aforementioned similarities, both thinkers have considered the existence of evil as an opportunity for self-improvement and spiritual cultivation, at the same time as recommending the fight against it in an integrated manner. Anthropologically, both thinkers believe that humans have free will and see evil as a necessity for evolution and growth. They consider that humans have the free will and choice to counter evil as a natural right and see evil as an environment for the emergence of human skills. Epistemologically, Motahari and Hick see evil as a factor for thought, reflection, educator of wisdom, and the bedrock of human scientific genius. Hence, in a shared opinion with Motahari, Hick believes that the advancement of experimental sciences such as physics, chemistry, medicine, science and technology, and culture and civilization is owed to the existence of evil. By considering evil as a factor of growth and evolution, an important aspect of which includes cognitive growth and development of human insight, Motahari and Hick join voices to recommend the two approaches of fighting evil and at the same time exploiting it for its cognitive opportunities. Therefore, they are of the same opinion in focusing on the cognitive opportunities produced by evil. For instance, in the first type of evil such as ignorance, incompetence, intellectual poverty, and lowly character traits, leading to the creation of type two evils such as microbes, floods, and earthquakes, Motahari adopts the approach of countering evil as a cognitive struggle in the former to block the path of the latter. Namely, by using cognitive thinking skills and reasoning, it is possible to block the occurrence of type two evils such as floods and earthquakes. Axiologically, Motahari and Hick believe that evil must exist to reveal spiritual and apparent beauty, and moral virtues and goodness. Thus, based on axiology, they share similar opinions. On the other hand, their approach to type two evils such as disasters and hardships is an evolutionary one because both believe that human bliss flourishes at times of loss and deprivation; that in the absence of disasters and hardships, bliss finds no meaning. Ontological differences go back to the existence and nonexistence of evil. Motahari is of the opinion that evil is inherently nonexistent (Motahari, 1997: 156), while Hick is of the opinion that evil is a natural part of the universe which is intertwined with it (Hick, 2010: 39). Another difference between Motahari and Hick on the subject of evil is related to their definition of ontology. Motahari sees evil as a necessity of Divine wisdom and justice (Motahari, 2009: 90), while Hick sees the joys of heaven

as a reward and compensation for the harm (Hick, 2007: 338). Therefore, in Hick's thought, only Divine justice for evil is explained.

Table 1: Comparison of approaches by Motahari and Hick in countering evil

| Philosophical foundations | Approaches | | Similarities and differences | |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| | Motahari's approach | Hick's approach | Differences | Similarities |
| Ontology | Evil is necessary for Divine wisdom and justice Evil is necessary for the growth and evolution of existence Evil is nonexistent | Evil exists Evil will be compensated in the hereafter | Motahari believes evil is nonexistent but Hick believes that evil exists | Both hold a religious opinion of evil |
| Anthropology | Evil is necessary for human growth and evolution Evil is necessary for human free will | Natural moral evil is an essential element of the universe for the cultivation of human spirit and moral virtues Natural moral evil is a stage of gradual human development | | Evil is a requirement of human will Natural moral evil is necessary for the cultivation of human spirit and human moral and spiritual evolution |
| Axiology | Evil is relative Evil is not separated from good but it is overcome by good Evil is necessary for | Evil is necessary for superior good and the growth of moral and spiritual virtues Evil is relative Evil is | Motahari emphasizes the inseparability of evil over good and the superiority of good over evil but Hick believes in the existence of | Evil is relative Evil is necessary for an orderly universal system and the revelation of beauty Evil is |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| good and moral virtues | necessary for an orderly system of universal existence | evil in the world and separates it from evil-doers | necessary for good and moral values |
| Evil is necessary to reveal beauty | | | Evil is relative |
| Evil is necessary for a good universal system | | | |

Discussion and conclusion

Overall, both thinkers hold an active stance on the subject of evil and a constructive approach to exploiting various evil situations. This approach can be used instead of or in conjunction with the approach to avoiding evil or surrendering to it and believes that evil holds educational opportunities for spiritual cultivation and moral virtues on the path of human perfection. The approaches of both thinkers hold educational importance. Both encourage people to counter evil actively and constructively instead of passively and consider evil as a factors for the stimulation of thought, production of knowledge, enrichment of science and bedrock of spiritual cultivation and moral virtues in humans. Both thinkers believe that actively encountering evil transforms threat into opportunity in educational terms and cultivates the human spirit and moral virtues. Thus, Hick and Motahari believe that the important educational implications of evil lie in exploiting it as a platform to educate the individual and the community.

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