2025 TheoLogica
An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology
Published Online First: June 25, 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v9i1.84943

Evil, Hiddenness, and Nonbelief in Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Commentary on Ecclesiastes:

A Contemporary Philosophical Reflection

BAKINAZ ABDALLA
Nazarbayev University
bakinaz.khalifa@gmail.com

Abstract: The problem of evil has consistently challenged theistic belief. This challenge appears in both contemporary and medieval philosophical sources, including those written by Jewish and Muslim philosophers and theologians. Treatments of the problem vary across historical contexts. This study examines a significant, yet understudied, engagement with this problem by Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (a 12th-century Jewish philosopher who converted to Islam) in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, proposing to contribute to research on both intellectual history, within the realms of Islamic and Jewish philosophy and theology, and philosophy of religion. First, I reconstruct the problem of evil as presented in Abū al-Barakāt's Judeo-Arabic commentary on Ecclesiastes (extant in manuscript form), highlighting the surrounding philosophical and theological trends that shaped its overall perspective. Second, reflecting a deeper philosophical dimension of the reconstructed problem of evil, I analyze it through the lens of contemporary philosophy of religion, particularly the evidential argument from evil and relevant aspects of the problem of divine hiddenness. I argue that Abū al-Barakāt's formulation, distinct from customary articulations of the problem in his intellectual milieu, anticipates atheistic challenges posed by the evidential argument and divine hiddenness. Finally, I propose that potential complementary responses to these challenges can be developed by analyzing (1) Abū al-Barakāt's conception of *taqlīd* (conformism) in light of Alvin Plantinga's concept of the basicality of belief, and (2) his use of the Islamic doctrine of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* (divine Decree and Predestination), which allows for a skeptical response.

Keywords: Evil, Divine hiddenness, Divine Decree and Predestination, Conformism, Skeptical theism

1. Introduction

Upon the creation of the world, God surveyed His work and deemed it good. In the divine perspective, goodness pervades all of creation (Gen 1:31); indeed, how could it be otherwise, having been conceived by the wisdom of an infinitely good God and brought forth by His omnipotent power (Jeremiah 1:17; 51:15; Psalms 34:8; 107:1)? Nevertheless, the intrinsic goodness of the world, as affirmed by the God of theistic religions in both the Bible and the Quran (e.g., 95:4; 32:7), faces considerable challenges. Although the world exhibits diverse forms of perfection and beauty, it is also replete with terrible evil and suffering. The presence of evil in the world not only calls into question God's assessment of the goodness of creation but, more fundamentally, jeopardizes belief in God's power, justice, and even existence. Numerous anti-theistic arguments originate from the premise that the world is filled with evil and suffering. To a significant extent, evil is regarded as the cornerstone of atheism (Küng 1976, 431)—a viewpoint with origins in Epicurus' philosophy and which has been systematically developed in contemporary discussion (Hume 2007, X:74).

Scriptural affirmation of the goodness of God and His creation does little to conceal the reality of evil and suffering in the world. Indeed, numerous scriptural accounts recognize human suffering on Earth, reflecting upon diverse evil occurrences that raise questions about God's justice and the reasons for His allowance of evil and suffering, particularly in instances of innocence. Moreover, the potential for evil to impede belief in God is highlighted, for example, in the Quran (Abdalla 2024, 3-4). It is important to note that this acknowledgement does not imply the rational validity of atheistic assertions that deny or doubt the existence of God. The Quran affirms that God's existence is undeniable, supported by abundant unfalsifiable evidence. While evil may present itself as a problem or a puzzle, it is unlikely to persuade a discerning individual to abandon his faith. Similar to Job, who in both the Quranic and Biblical narratives remained resolute despite the intensity of his suffering and the enigma of its origins, the wise believer also steadfastly maintains their faith.

Beyond scriptural considerations, the problem of evil and suffering constitutes a recurring theme in the intellectual contributions of monotheistic religions. Concentrating on the Jewish and Islamic traditions, it is significant that their

medieval discussions of this problem were largely separate from atheistic arguments. The atheistic challenges currently linked to the problem of evil were either unfamiliar to medieval thinkers or disregarded—despite the common practice of refuting heretical ideas in other areas[1]—while the implications of evil for God's moral character and aspects of His governance were the primary focus. In essence, the central concern of medieval Jewish and Islamic explorations of evil was "the aporetic problem," which involved reconciling God's goodness, power, justice, and other omni-attributes with the existence of evil and suffering in the world.[2] Although some freethinkers, such as Ibn al-Rawandi, critiqued those who defended divine justice (Stroumsa 1999, 130-135), skepticism regarding God's existence, let alone atheism, was rarely a consequence considered in the articulation of the problem of evil and suffering as a pressing issue.

The present study introduces an intriguing exception from a philosophical commentary on Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), written in Judeo-Arabic by the 12th century Jewish convert to Islam Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. Abū al-Barakāt's commentary offers a vast ground for examining theological and philosophical issues within the contexts of medieval Jewish and Islamic thought, and, as I would like to propose, for making a link to important dilemmas and solutions in contemporary philosophy of religion. Despite its historical and philosophical significance, the commentary has been understudied and still exists in manuscript form. This study proposes to be the first in-depth engagement with the commentary's content, and an attempt to set classical sources into dialogue with contemporary discourse.

I argue that two distinct skeptical perspectives permeate the commentary, ultimately leading, however, to contrasting conclusions. The first, foreshadowing atheistic arguments from evil, connects doubts about God's existence and nonbelief (1) primarily to the presence of evil and suffering in the world, and (2) to God's apparent non-intervention in human affairs to dispel nonbelief. This latter point aligns with another basis for atheistic arguments in contemporary discourse known as the problem of divine hiddenness. The resolution for this skeptical viewpoint, I argue, lies not in rational argumentation but in a form of conformism, which I suggest corresponds to Alvin Plantinga's concept of "basic belief." The second skeptical perspective emerges throughout Abū al-Barakāt's engagement with the Islamic doctrine of *Al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*. This outlook provides a supplementary resolution for the theological challenges raised by the presence of evil and suffering in the world.

[1] Indeed, atheism in the sense of denying or doubting the existence of God was not embraced in the medieval context. See Lindstedt (2021, 161).

[2] For this definition of the aporetic problem of evil, see Woudenberg (2013, 177).

2. An Overview of Kohelet and the Commentary

The book of Kohelet stands out as one of the most disputed books of the Hebrew Bible. Taken in the literal meaning, a collector of sayings or a teacher, Kohelet is a pseudonymous nickname for the author of the book: Son of David (Solomon). Although Kohelet is part of the Biblical canon, several historical, linguistic, and content-based considerations have given rise to disputes about its authorship across history (Whitley 1979, 1-4). Kohelet's content is particularly significant in this regard. Displaying fluctuating attitudes towards the purpose of human life that range from skepticism and cynicism[3] to a hedonist attitude endorsing as valuable enjoyment and pleasure,[4] Kohelet defies a conclusive definition of its author's orientation. Nor is Kohelet's theological significance within the Bible yielding to a monolithic viewpoint. While some scholars see in Kohelet a religious inclination to grapple "with reality," without trying to ascend "beyond the limits of the unknowable," others discern signs of its deviation from conventional "Biblical theology" (Gordis 1955, 122). Kohelet's introduction of a cluster of personal reflections on the world, the divinity, and human life, instead of aligning with the overarching custom of the Bible of narrating God's mighty deeds and interactions with people, marks its deviation from conventional biblical theology (Walsh 2012, 12). Most eccentric of all features is Kohelet's oft-repeated phrase "the vanity of vanities" throughout its reflections on the world, human experiences, and states of affairs, a phrase that clearly flies in the face of Scripture's description of God's creation as being good.

The unconventional content of Kohelet has consistently elicited critical analysis from modern Biblical scholarship and related disciplines, much like it did from classical and ancient sources. Concerns about the text's theological implications date back to early Jewish sources, where some Rabbis reportedly sought to suppress it, fearing that its "words might cause inclination to heresy" (Fox 1989, 149). Despite these concerns, Kohelet was included in the Biblical canon. One possible reason, as suggested by the 17th century philosopher Spinoza, is that Kohelet concludes with an exhortation to fear God and keep His commandments (Spinoza 2002, Chapter 5). Whether this concluding exhortation, which might be an editorial appendix,

[3] See, for example, Kohelet 10:1: "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's oil; a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." Cf. 4:1-3; 7:2-3; 8:14.

[4] See, for example, 2:24: "Is it not good for man that he eats and drinks and shows his soul satisfaction in his labor? And even that, I perceived, is from the hand of God?" Cf. 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 9:7-9.

effectively counterbalances the challenges overtly posed by Kohelet to conventional theological ideals remains moot.

Literature on the problem of evil and suffering has devoted little focus on Kohelet, especially compared to the Book of Job, which represents the *locus classicus* for explorations of that problem in the Jewish and Christian traditions. However, Kohelet is far from being philosophically uninteresting. On the contrary, it raises numerous questions about reality, God-man relationship, human nature and fate, and the aim of life, furnishing an intriguing matrix for analyses within different philosophical frameworks. These characteristics have elicited the attention of many philosophically minded commentators from the Jewish and Christian traditions throughout history. With Abū al-Barakāt's commentary, we meet a unique representation of Kohelet in an Islamic garb, as it engages the text with current debates in Islamic thought. Additionally, this commentary exhibits an interest in utilizing Kohelet's systematic reflections on the different aspects of human life and God's relationship to the world to explore the problem of evil and suffering, offering unique dimensions to the subject, as explored further below.

The commentary in consideration is an invaluable yet understudied work by Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, a 12th century philosopher who converted to Islam.[5] This philosophical-theological commentary presents a significant avenue for examining not only the adoption and adaptation of Islamic philosophical and theological trends into Jewish literary genres but also developments in post-Avicenna's thought. The prominent Muslim philosopher Avicenna (11th century) played a crucial role in shaping Islamic philosophy and theology for succeeding generations. The deep-rooted impact of his thought is evident in numerous commentarial and independent writings that served distinct goals; either supporting, expounding upon, or criticizing his ideas. Additionally, Avicenna's thought laid the foundation for new mystical and theological trends within Islamic, as well as Jewish, circles (Gutas 2016). Abū al-Barakāt contributed to this post-Avicennian environment with his *magnum opus Kitāb al-Mu'tabar fi-l-ḥikma* (literally: the *Book of Carefully Considered Teachings*). In this work, he offers critical examinations of key philosophical and theological issues as addressed by Avicenna and earlier scholars, enriched with his own reflections.[6] Abū al-Barakāt's analyses result in what he considers a refined version of the intellectual legacy of his predecessors, with conclusions drawn from his independent speculations (Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu'tabar* 1938, 4).

[5] The only published study is a brief edition of a few excerpts from the manuscript. See Pines (1964).

[6] The title is translated by Pines as *The Book of What Has Been Established by Personal Reflection.* See Pines (1979).

Applying a similar critical approach, yet without identifying his sources, Abū al-Barakāt delves into Kohelet's reflections on the varied aspects of human life. Through his commentary on Kohelet, which forms his only direct engagement with Judaism, Abū al-Barakāt proposes to solve the "puzzles" (*alghāz*) of this scriptural text and to illuminate the worthy reader about its concealed wisdom (Abū al-Barakāt, MS: Pococke 274, 3r). While Abū al-Barakāt's main purpose is to solve puzzles, he occasionally ends up creating additional puzzles. The problem of evil is one such puzzle for which a convincing solution is not immediately apparent, yet it can be constructed through an analysis of isolated comments on various issues, along with a consideration of relevant discussions in *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, as will be explored further below.

Before delving into the commentary, it is important to clarify my perspective on the relationship between Abū al-Barakāt's roles as a philosopher and a commentator. In this study, I view Abū al-Barakāt's commentary as providing significantly more than a mere detached interpretation of Kohelet. Specifically, Abū al-Barakāt seeks to address urgent questions of his era by initially ascribing these questions to Kohelet and subsequently developing solutions within his interpretive notes. Consequently, I refrain from strictly separating Abū al-Barakāt the commentator from Abū al-Barakāt the philosopher in his pursuit of rationally grounded answers to pressing philosophical and theological inquiries. However, I recognize that the commentator and the philosopher might have held distinct religious affiliations and understandings of theoretical issues—the commentary was obviously written before Abū al-Barakāt's conversion to Islam, whereas *al-Mu'tabar* was written over a period extending beyond his conversion. Ultimately, both the commentary on Kohelet and *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*, despite their differences in length and intended audience, present what Abū al-Barakāt considered carefully considered teachings at the time of their composition. In other words, the commentary holds no less epistemic significance than *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*. Abū al-Barakāt emphasizes in the preface to the commentary that all proposed interpretations are derived from knowledge of the truth, rather than baseless speculations. Even if doubts could be raised regarding the accuracy of these interpretations in reflecting the inner meaning of Kohelet's sayings, the reader is encouraged to accept them for their intellectual merit (Abū al-Barakāt, MS: Pococke 27, 6v).

3. Can Evil be a Possible Defeater of Theistic Belief?

3.1. Setting the Framework

Arguments against the existence of God frequently center on two fundamental problems of evil. The first of these is the logical problem of evil, which underscores a perceived logical inconsistency between core theistic beliefs and the reality of evil. Within the framework of this particular problem, the argument posits that the undeniable presence of evil in the world stands in opposition to the conviction that God is simultaneously all-powerful and perfectly good. The reasoning follows that a perfectly good God would not permit the existence of evil, while an all-powerful God would possess the capacity to eliminate it entirely. Therefore, the pervasive existence of evil seems to suggest that theism is not only inconsistent but also irrational (Mackie 1971, 92). Nevertheless, this specific argument arising from the logical problem of evil has encountered significant and substantial challenges, including well-reasoned counterarguments that effectively demonstrate the absence of any genuine incompatibility between the existence of evil and the existence of God (Plantinga 2000, 460-466). Furthermore, critical analyses directed at the argument from evil have effectively illustrated its inability to persuasively establish the non-existence of God.[7]

The second problem, which constitutes our primary focus in this discussion, is the evidential problem of evil. Arguments from the evidential problem of evil do not challenge the consistency of theism but rather question the likelihood of the existence of God—the Perfect Being of theism who is believed to be all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful. Some philosophers argue that the existence of unwarranted evil and suffering in the world—evil and suffering that are not necessary to prevent equally bad or worse outcomes or to achieve a greater good—makes the existence of God unlikely. The argument proceeds as follows (quoting Rowe 1979, 336):

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3. [Conclusion:] There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good.

[7] See, for example, the criticisms in Plantinga (1974).

Rowe supports the evidential strength of this argument by defending the truth of its premises. Starting with premise 2, he argues that it "seems to express a belief consistent with our basic moral principles, principles shared by both theists and non-theists (*Ibid*). Premise 1, however, is more contentious. One might object that suffering which appears pointless and unjustified to us may, in fact, be serving a greater good that cannot be achieved by any other means. In response, Rowe asserts that even if we cannot prove premise 1 with certainty, we have "rational grounds," based on our experience and understanding of "the variety and scale" of animal and human suffering, for believing it to be true (*Ibid*). For instance, the horrific cases of a fawn dying in a forest fire and the rape and murder of a five-year-old girl make it difficult to accept the existence of a hidden good that an all-good, omnipotent, omniscient God could not have achieved by other means, or worse evils that God could not have otherwise prevented. By defending the plausibility of premise 1, Rowe concludes that "it does seem that we have rational support for atheism, that the God of theism does not exist (*Ibid* 338).

Rowe's examples address physical suffering. However, the scope of suffering in the world is boundless, extending to non-physical, cognitive conditions. The existence of such conditions in the world can be seen to form another supportive basis for atheistic claims, as suggested by the widely discussed argument from divine hiddenness. In this argument, the existence of nonresistant, blameless nonbelief in the world is presented as evidence for God's non-existence (Schellenberg, 1993, 7).

The argument from divine hiddenness was advanced by Schellenberg in his *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993) and has since given rise to multiple modified versions. The essence of this argument is the idea that specific aspects of the nature of God would secure that no nonresistant nonbelief exists. But the fact that instances of such inculpable nonbelief do exist warrants denying the existence of God. As Schellenberg argues, a morally perfect God (the Perfect Being of theism, believed to be all-good, just, and perfectly loving) would desire a reciprocal relationship with every person capable of it. Such a relationship requires (as a "logically necessary condition") that everyone capable of it believes in God's existence. Thus, God would ensure that everyone capable of such a relationship possesses sufficient evidence that results in belief in His existence. Nonetheless, nonresistant nonbelievers do exist. This fact, clashing with the assumption that God is perfectly loving, prompts the conclusion that God does not exist.

Schellenberg designates nonresistant nonbelief in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* as "a special instance" of the problem of evil (Schellenberg 1993, 7), though he later rejects the assumption that the problem of divine hiddenness is reducible to

the problem of evil (Schellenberg 2017). To avoid conflating the two problems, let me focus, then, on their thematic and structural similarity, instead of positing the existence of nonresistant nonbelief as an instance of evil: both arguments challenge theism on the grounds that certain facts observed in the world clash with fundamental theistic beliefs about God's moral nature. The observed fact about gratuitous evil in the world warrants denying the likelihood of the existence of God who, given His omni-attributes, would have prevented such instances of evil. The same is true of nonresistant nonbelief; its existence in the world challenges the existence of a loving God, and therefore it is concluded that God does not exist.

As can be seen, the core twofold characteristic of God that underlies the argument from divine hiddenness is Him being a perfectly *loving person*, a characteristic that presupposes God's constant openness to a *personal* relationship with any finite individual. The argument's embeddedness in this characteristic of God, which is essential to Christian theology, renders its validity at stake within theological systems where belief in God's absolute transcendence alienates the notions of personhood and relational-personal love. From this consideration, recent responses by McGinnis (2015, 157–174) and Aijaz (2024, 182–202) to the argument from divine hiddenness question its ability to pose real threats to the rationalism of Islamic theism. The same can be confirmed regarding Jewish theology, viewed along the line of the outlook of a central figure such as Maimonides[8].

Yet the absence of the perfectly-loving-person characteristic from Islam and Judaism does not militate against the prospect of engaging the argument from divine hiddenness, or at least some of its elements, in reflections about God within their theological schemes. Indeed, the argument still poses threats, as Aijaz ultimately approves, when its simplified version is considered. In this version it is argued that:

1. If God exists, there are no nonresistant nonbelievers
2. There are nonresistant non-believers,
3. Conclusion: God does not exist. (Aijaz 2024, 196)

The crux of this argument is the conflict between the existence of God, which presumably secures "an abundance of compelling evidence" for His existence, and the fact that nonresistant nonbelief exists. Islamic, as well as the Maimonidean form of Jewish, theology would hardly reject the assumption that God's existence

[8] Maimonides' conception of God's transcendence is best represented in his Negative Theology; see *the Guide of the Perplexed* (I:50–60)

provides ample signs that, arguably, leave no room for nonresistant nonbelief. That inculpable nonbelief exists, as proponents of the argument acknowledge, reinstates the challenge of the divine-hiddenness argument to Islamic, as well as Jewish, theism. It is thus warranted attention within the Islamic and Jewish contexts along with the problem of evil and suffering, especially given the thematic and structural similarity of the two problems.

The relatedness of the problems of evil and hiddenness-indeed, their inseparability in the works of some writers, as Van Inwagen remarks (2002, 25)-presents a fitting frame of reference through which intertwined dimensions of Abū al-Barakāt's commentary on Kohelet can be thoroughly analyzed. The link between these dimensions in the commentary and their philosophical profundity would otherwise remain either unrecognized or poorly presented.

3.2. Evil and Hiddenness in the Commentary

The problem of evil and suffering is eminent throughout the commentary. Abū al-Barakāt frequently raises this problem in his interpretations of verses that directly address it, as well as in his discussions of verses that seemingly have no connection to it. This consistent engagement reflects the profound extent to which this problem perplexed the commentator. His bewilderment regarding the existence of evil and suffering in the world is further evident in his departure from the conventional, aporetic approach to this problem prevalent in his intellectual milieu. As, he embarks on a novel and potentially challenging intellectual path, one that illuminates the denial of God's existence as a possible consequence of observing the sheer magnitude of evil and suffering in the world and comprehending the inherent tension between this observed reality and the existence of God. This newly introduced dimension, despite its concise treatment within the commentary, is coupled with another perspective that considers God's apparent indifference to nonbelief, when such nonbelief is triggered by evil occurrences, as yet another aspect of the pervasive evil in the world, capable of generating further doubts and disbelief about God. These two dimensions not only merit Abū al-Barakāt's commentarial notes a comparative advantage to contemporary trends in philosophy of religion, but also render them worthy of rigorous analytical studies, preventing them from being relegated solely to a historical overview of intellectual thought, which might otherwise overlook some of their significant philosophical depth.

Bearing this in mind, it is crucial to establish a methodological clarification before proceeding with the analysis. As previously mentioned, the primary text under examination in this study is a commentary on the Bible, albeit one exhibiting a

distinct philosophical inclination. This characteristic accounts for the lack of systematically developed arguments for the commentator's philosophical perspectives. The problems of evil and divine hiddenness are no different in this regard; they are not addressed through explicitly structured lines of reasoning. Nevertheless, Abū al-Barakāt's contemplations on the diverse forms of evil and suffering, as well as on God's perceived silence in the presence of evil, furnish at the very least a non-argumentative basis for considering the skeptical and atheistic implications inherent in the arguments from evil and divine hiddenness. Moreover, the foundational premises of these arguments can be discerned both from the commentary itself and from his work *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*, which lends credence to the undertaking of analyzing pertinent commentarial notes in relation to these specific arguments.

To commence our analysis, let us first acknowledge that, consistent with the tradition of Perfect Being Theism, Abū al-Barakāt affirms the omni-attributes of God. His considerations regarding the nature of God's attributes include debates and disagreements with other philosophers and theologians, some of which pertain to the appropriateness of ascribing positive attributes to God, as opposed to solely negative ones. However, these intellectual exchanges never resulted in any compromises or diminishment of God's essential attributes. Within the framework of *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*, God is affirmed as the ultimate First Cause, the Creator of all existence, and the absolutely Good and Munificent Deity who possesses will, knowledge, and power.[9] In relation to God, these attributes of knowledge and power, along with other benevolent qualities, are understood as perfect and transcendent, characterized by completeness, eternality, self-sufficiency, and an utter absence of any form of deficiency. While the commentary on Kohelet does not explicitly provide an analysis of divine attributes, it unequivocally operates within the same fundamental conception of God that was subsequently philosophically substantiated in *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*.

With this conception of God, significant perplexities emerge concerning the moral justification for the overwhelming presence of evil and suffering in the world. Evil and suffering, according to Abū al-Barakāt, constitute a profound "puzzle" (*lughz*) that remains incomprehensible to both the ordinary individual and those possessing wisdom (MS: Pococke 27, 116r). To articulate this perplexing issue, Abū al-Barakāt adheres to the dynamic flow of the biblical text itself. Kohelet's contemplation on

[9] Abū al-Barakāt discusses divine attributes in several places, most importantly in al-*Mu'tabar* 3: 19. See the following for references to God's absolute goodness (3: 3, 10), omniscience (3:1-14), omnipotence (3:10, 81), generosity (3:14, 68), and to the perfection and transcendence of the attributes (3: 13, 67-68).

the diverse aspects of reality not only justifies but even intensifies this bewilderment. There exists evil in the world for which the reflections of even a wise man such as Kohelet are woefully inadequate in providing any solace or reassurance. Quite the opposite occurs; the more Kohelet meditates on all that transpires "under the sun," the more confounded he becomes by the suffering of the innocent, the prevalence of inequality and injustice, the existence of despotism and atrocity, the presence of malicious envy, and the experience of profound frustration.[10] Abū al-Barakāt explicitly reiterates Kohelet's observation of all the "evils" (*shurūr*) that occur under the sun and their deeply distressing impact on him. As the sequence of the commentary reveals, Kohelet undergoes a profound existential crisis, expressing a distinct preference for the tranquil state of the deceased over that of the living, as the former is no longer subjected to the unpredictable changes and adversities of life, which invariably lead to evil and suffering (MS: Pococke 27, 47v).

It is natural to question whether Abū al-Barakāt himself remained untouched by the unsettling state of mind he attributes to Kohelet. It is plausible to suggest that Abū al-Barakāt strategically utilized the commentary as a vehicle to articulate his own anxieties and contemplations on this weighty issue, adopting the voice of Kohelet to perhaps grant himself the intellectual courage to explore the perplexing problem more deeply and venture into more challenging territories of thought.

Thus, although Kohelet seldom directly interrogates God throughout his contemplation of earthly events, Abū al-Barakāt finds it increasingly difficult to mask the central role of God in this dilemma. Evil and suffering occurring under the sun, which is understood by Abū al-Barakāt as "the place of God's rule" (*makān al-ḥukm*), would scarcely generate such profound theological and existential quandaries were it not for the fundamental theistic presupposition that God possesses the power to intervene to alleviate or prevent them, yet regrettably does not do so. These perplexing issues arise from the inherent tension between humanity's expectation of a morally ordered world under God's governance and the perpetual presence of evil and suffering within that world, for which no discernible justification appears evident. What we witness in the world is, in the words of Abū al-Barakāt, a divine "inaction akin to remissness" (*imhāl shabīh bil-ihmāl*). God conceals His presence, mirroring the lamentations of other biblical figures who voice their complaints regarding His silence and perceived indifference during times of hardship (as seen in Psalm 10:1 and Job 13:24). This perceived hiddenness of God engenders frustration and despair, even while faith in God's existence persists. Yet,

[10] References to these evils appear in different places throughout the commentary; for example, MS: Pococke 27, 38r, 38v, 40v, 47r, 71r, 75r.

paradoxically, this faith intensifies the struggle for those who earnestly implore God for action, only to be met with silence. Their unanswered prayers and fervent supplications yield them nothing but "distress and weariness" (Abū al-Barakāt, MS: Pococke 27, 40r; 48r).

These initial contemplations reiterate the problem of evil and suffering as it is conventionally addressed within the context of classical theism, wherein it is rarely regarded as evidence contradicting the existence of God. However, Abū al-Barakāt notably executes a radical departure from this tradition, drawing attention to skeptical and atheistic viewpoints that may emerge as one comprehends the sheer magnitude of evil and suffering prevalent in the world and experiences the profound frustration of the absence of a comforting divine response. The underlying assumption, rooted in core theistic beliefs, that God possesses the capacity to eliminate nonbelief or its underlying causes yet chooses to remain silent, further amplifies these atheistic inclinations. It is not solely evil and suffering that instigate nonbelief; rather, the perceived hiddenness of God also plays a significant role. In his commentary on Kohelet 5:7,[11] Abū al-Barakāt states:

> Just as the alterations of your reflections and thoughts strike you with fallacies, doubts and perplexities, so do the host of signs and evidence you find in the world take their toll on you. For example, when you see oppression of the poor and deprivation of rights, you fall into perplexity and say: for God is in heaven. Why does He accept (*Yarḍā*) nonbelief (*al-kufr*) and injustice (*al-dhulm*) for His servants and the creation of His hands? How powerful He is over their thoughts and over that which inspires some people to the good and others to [the contrary]. Surely, He possesses the power to deter them or to accelerate the oppressors' and perpetrators' punishment so that injustice may be lifted, and people may be disciplined. Surely He has the capacity to leave no wrong doer, evil, or deviant [on a false claim to] rightfulness, and to inspire them with the word of godfearing [...], instead of putting off [justice] until their beliefs turn corrupt and until their imagination and thoughts—confounded by all that they witness of [how God] delays the wicked person's punishment, makes the oppressors prosper, and forsakes the oppressed—lead them not only to *doubt* the divinity (*al-shak fī al-rubūbiyya*h) but even to *deny* it (*jaḥdiha*).

This densely packed passage articulates two interconnected challenges to belief in God. Firstly, the very existence of evil and suffering within the world presents a

[11] The verse reads: "If you see oppression of the poor, and the suppression of justice and right in the State, do not be astonished at the fact, for there is One higher than high Who watches and there are high ones above them."

significant threat to theistic belief. In a real sense, it functions as evidence weighing against the existence of God. Analogous to the evidential argument from evil, the passage at hand suggests that the world abounds with instances of evil that cast doubt upon the existence of an omnipotent, just, and benevolent deity. Crucially, the evils described are implicitly understood to be gratuitous, as evidenced by the commentator's complete omission of any assertion regarding their instrumental role in achieving greater goods or preventing more severe harms. Indeed, from the commentator's viewpoint, the described evils stand in direct opposition to God's justice; the alternative course of action that a just, powerful, and caring God would be expected to take is to actively establish justice by rectifying anomalies and restoring things to their proper, harmonious order. The task of reconciling the perplexing existence of these evils in the world with God's power, justice, and providential care through theodic explanations lies beyond the scope of the commentator's aims in this particular context. By focusing solely on illuminating the evidential weight of evil, Abū al-Barakāt concludes this segment of his commentary by stating what appears to be a valid consequence of observing the stark reality of evil and suffering in the world: namely, skepticism or even outright denial of the Divine.

Secondly, the passage additionally posits that God's apparent lack of intervention to address nonbelief or to inspire those who are misguided with "the word of godfearing," despite possessing the capacity to do so, represents yet another doubt-inducing factor that appears to contradict God's presumed justice, omnipotence, and providential care. Arguably, the implications of God's nonintervention in this regard bear a strong resemblance to the problem of divine hiddenness, although this particular framing might, upon initial consideration, appear unconvincing for certain reasons. Most notably, the problem of divine hiddenness typically centers on the perceived incompatibility between the existence of nonresistant nonbelief and the existence of a perfectly loving deity who is understood to be a personal being. Both of these elements—nonresistant nonbelief and God as a perfectly loving person—seem to be absent from the specific commentarial passage under examination.

Let us examine the apparent absence of the concept of nonresistant nonbelief. Contrary to initial impressions, the nonbelief being referenced within this specific context aligns with the category of nonresistant nonbelief. This classification is appropriate because the denial of the Divine in this instance does not stem from obstinacy or hubris, but rather arises as a consequence of God's lack of intervention to rectify people's misguided thoughts, to inspire them with the principles of

reverence and piety, or to eliminate the very evils that seem to provide evidence against His existence.

Furthermore, the absence of the specific characteristic of God as a perfectly loving person is not a sufficient reason to dismiss the proposed parallel between God's noninterference and the concept of divine hiddenness, nor their respective implications for theistic belief. As discussed above, the simpler formulation of the argument from divine hiddenness does indeed omit this particular characteristic, yet it retains its validity and, notably, presents a significant challenge to theistic religions such as Islam.

Moreover, the characteristic of God as a perfectly loving person need not be entirely dismissed, especially considering that the passage portrays a conception of God who presumably exercises providential care for *individuals*. Although God is not explicitly described as loving, He is believed to possess traits that are essential for a morally balanced relationship with human beings. God is depicted as caring and powerful, and thus there is an expectation that He would compassionately oversee the affairs of His servants and the entirety of His creation. Conceptually, the notions of providence and love converge within the present context, and this convergence establishes the groundwork for the problem of noninterference (or hiddenness): a God who supposedly cares for His "servants" and "the creation of His hand" would logically undertake every possible providential act to rectify nonresistant nonbelief or to eliminate the evidence that supports it, namely, unwarranted evil. In stark contrast to this expectation, He refrains from doing so despite His purported capability, and, instead, seemingly "accepts" that well-intentioned individuals undergo significant cognitive struggle. In this instance, nonresistant nonbelief itself constitutes another form of evil that God's supposed omnipotence, providence, and justice fail to address. All of these forms of evil, being in conflict with the existence of such a God, present skepticism and even atheism as a potential and rationally justifiable conclusion.

As is evident, Abū al-Barakāt, building upon Kohelet's contemplation of the world, articulates observed realities that present atheistic challenges. His expressed ideas might have originated from his own personal skeptical anxieties or simply from a desire to address problems that could potentially confound believers, ultimately leading them towards skepticism or outright nonbelief. Regardless of the initial motivation, it is unlikely that Abū al-Barakāt would introduce such a discourse within a scriptural commentary only to arrive at an impasse, which could consequently dissuade individuals from belief in God. As one might anticipate, Abū al-Barakāt endeavors to provide a reassuring resolution. However, his immediate

response does not appear to be entirely satisfactory, reflecting what might initially seem to be a significant leap of faith.

Contrary to initial impressions, I contend that this immediate response lays a robust foundation for a solution that affirms the rationality of accepting belief in God as a fundamental, or basic, belief. Following the establishment of this crucial solution, which is paramount for addressing the atheistic challenges raised, I will reconstruct another complementary solution. This supplementary solution will align with some of the central tenets of skeptical theism, drawing upon pertinent notes within the commentary concerning the doctrine of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* (Divine decree and predestination).

It is crucial to emphasize that these reconstructions specifically address the problem of evil and suffering, as divine hiddenness does not receive focused attention from Abū al-Barakāt after its initial mention. While some contemporary responses to the problem of divine hiddenness have employed lines of reasoning that parallel solutions offered for the problem of evil (Howard-Snyder 2022), adopting a similar approach and extending the solutions presented below to Abū al-Barakāt's critique of God's hiddenness would involve introducing speculative interpretations into the commentary, a practice that this study aims to avoid.

4. Possible Complementary Solutions

4.1. A Conformist Approach

Philosophical and theological responses to the problem of evil and suffering are diverse, with theodicy standing out as a particularly influential approach. Given that the challenge posed by evil to theism often centers on its apparent lack of purpose, theists offer explanations, or at least plausible reasons, for God's permission of evil and suffering in the world. The act of justifying God's actions, specifically by proposing reasons for His allowance of evil, serves to defend the internal consistency of theism's core beliefs in the face of evil's existence, thereby undermining the basis for atheistic arguments. Theodicy is far from being a novel strategy in the defense of theism. Notably, one can identify significant theodical endeavors within Abū al-Barakāt's own intellectual context.[12] While contemporary and medieval theodicies address distinct levels of philosophical challenges, they

[12] For theodicies in the Jewish context, see Goldschmidt (2014). For theodicies in the Islamic context, see Ormsby (1984).

share a common overarching framework: both aim to provide specific or at least possible explanations for God's permission of evil and suffering in the world.

As previously discussed, Abū al-Barakāt highlights the fact that the overwhelming presence of evil and suffering in the world constitutes a significant challenge to belief in God, a challenge he further intensifies by introducing the perplexing issue of God's hiddenness. However, the commentator's immediate response does not primarily focus on a direct defense of theism; it neither counters skepticism or denial of the Divine with reasoned arguments nor offers justifications for God's permission of evil and unbelief. Instead, Abū al-Barakāt proposes an alternative approach: that one should initially establish belief in God through conformism (*taqlīd*), and subsequently seek rational methods to address theological and existential difficulties.

Abū al-Barakāt's immediate response is indeed unexpected, particularly given that conformism is generally considered the least epistemically valuable basis for belief within the framework of medieval philosophy and theology. Prominent thinkers in both Islamic and Jewish intellectual traditions readily acknowledge the epistemic superiority of beliefs grounded in reason over those based on mere conformism. They emphasize that beliefs supported by credible rational arguments possess a far greater capacity to engender genuine certainty than beliefs accepted solely on the authority of others or through an uncritical adherence to tradition (Frank 1989, 58). In light of this, belief in God is distinctly situated among beliefs that require "rational inference" (*nazar*) to attain certainty. This is because it doesn't belong to categories of knowledge that produce certainty without the need for rational justification, such as necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*), sense perceptions, or self-evident (*badīhī*) premises (Doko and Turner 2023, 153–154). Pertinently, philosophers and theologians alike affirm the crucial necessity of providing rational justification when religious beliefs are confronted with challenges. This is deemed essential not only for effectively refuting opponents and detractors of religion but also for dispelling internal doubts and re-establishing a firm sense of certainty within the believer (Al-Ghazali [2013], 12–13).

Abū al-Barakāt himself exhibits a distinctly critical stance towards conformism in his seminal work, *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*. In the preface to this book, he explicitly states that it "encompasses only what is carefully considered, and what is verified by rational inquiry." Teachings and opinions lacking satisfactory explanations or rational verification were deliberately excluded from its contents (Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu'tabar*, 1:4). This rigorous and critical approach extends to fundamental theistic principles, which are presented with rational justifications rather than being imposed as mere matters of conformist belief within *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*. Such an

intellectual approach firmly situates Abū al-Barakāt within the framework of classical foundationalism, which, operating under the assumption that propositions are accepted as rational only when supported by evidence, actively promotes the pursuit of rational justifications for religious beliefs.[13]

Given this context, it is indeed puzzling why the commentary on Kohelet, despite its overarching emphasis on thoughtful reflection and intellectual investigation, appears to permit conformism specifically when addressing the atheistic implications arising from the existence of evil and the perceived hiddenness of God. Could this disparity suggest an underlying acknowledgment that attempts to provide fully satisfactory rational responses to this significant counter-evidence against theism are ultimately deemed futile or exceedingly difficult within the framework of pure reason alone?

Perhaps Abū al-Barakāt suspected the limitations of rational arguments when confronted with the evidence of evil. As a potential resolution, he proposed a form of fideism, permitting the acceptance of belief in God on non-epistemic grounds, such as the authority of an individual or a tradition. This type of conformism dispenses with the process of reasoning, requiring neither transmitted nor intellectually grasped arguments. Unquestioning acceptance of propositions based on authority suffices to justify one's belief. Abū al-Barakāt mentions this form of *taqlīd* within the context of his discussion of the origin of the world in *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*. However, consistent with his generally negative stance toward *taqlīd*, he ultimately concludes that "one who diligently pursues the truth as it is about this matter (i.e., the origin of the world) through speculation so that [he] may [attain] what this [rational route] leads to shall avoid conformism (*taqlīd*) in pursuing this matter" (Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu'tabar*, 2:7, 31; Pines 2000, 314–315). The negative attitude toward *taqlīd* prominent in *al-Mu'tabar* might encourage with urges us to align the commentary with the former's emphasis on rational justification, which represents Abū al-Barakāt's most evident commitment. This can be achieved by considering the conformist belief in God to be rationally justified, in a manner analogous to evidence-based beliefs. Applying Alvin Plantinga's non-classical foundationalist perspective offers a theoretical framework for this proposal.

[13] For this view of classical foundationalism, see Plantinga (1983, 48; 2000, 285). Plantinga highlights the similarity between the outlooks of classical foundationalists and contemporary evidentialists. The same view can be gathered from an analytic study of some aspects of Islamic philosophy by Booth (2017, 117), where he classifies Mu'tazilite theologians as evidentialists, Ash'ari theologians as anti-evidentialists, and philosophers and some Ash'ari theologians as moderate evidentialists.

Plantinga argues that belief in God can be properly basic. Propriety and basicality signify that this belief is fundamental to an individual, not accepted on the basis of evidence or other propositions, and that the individual is within his epistemic rights, i.e., justified in holding it. Consequently, one may believe in God's existence without needing evidence to convince objectors to theism, including evidentialist objectors who maintain "that belief in God is irrational or unreasonable because there is no evidence for it," and proponents of the argument from evil (Plantinga 1983, 16).

To establish the proper basicality of belief in God, Plantinga contests the evidentialist claim that there is "a *prima facie* obligation to try not to believe in God" without propositional evidence. He argues that if the evidentialist objector insists that "*no* proposition" can be believed without evidence, then "*every* proposition" one believes must be supported by evidence. Yet this condition is infeasible due to time and capability constraints, which paves the way for the assumption that some propositions can be believed without evidence, that is, as basic beliefs. If this is the case, Plantinga questions, why not consider belief in God as one such basic belief, held without argument or evidence? (*Ibid*, 39)

In addressing the criteria for proper basicality, Plantinga engages with classical foundationalism, specifically challenging its exclusion of belief in God from the realm of foundational beliefs. Classical foundationalism posits that a proposition *p* is properly basic for a person *S* if and only if *p* is self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses for *S*. Belief in God does not fall into any of these categories, as it is accepted based on other propositions, thus it "is not properly basic for any one" (*Ibid* 59). In essence, the "noetic structure" of a rational person, that is, the set of propositions he believes, along with the epistemic relations holding among him and these propositions, does not include belief in God at its foundation. Plantinga concurs with classical foundationalists as regards locating proper basicality in self-evident, incorrigible, and perceptual propositions. However, he disputes the restriction of this characteristic solely to these types of propositions, arguing that no rational justification has been given for this limitation. To be rational, Plantinga contends, classical foundationalists must accept this proposition (that proper basicality is limited to self-evident, incorrigible, and perceptual propositions) as properly basic. Yet this proposition meets none of the above conditions, which leads to a self-referentially inconsistency in the foundationalist viewpoint. Ultimately, classical foundationalism fails to offer a criterion for proper basicality that avoids self-referential difficulties and can convincingly exclude God from the category of foundationalist beliefs (*Ibid*, 60–61).

Plantinga concludes that belief in God can be properly basic, not only because classical foundationalism lacks evidence to exclude it but also because it shares

characteristics with accepted basic beliefs. More precisely, belief in God is not groundless, similar to (a) perceptual beliefs (e.g. "I see a tree"), (b) memory-based beliefs (e.g. "I had breakfast this morning), (c) beliefs about mental states (e.g. "that person is in pain"). These basic beliefs, although not derived from other propositions, are grounded in experiences that, under certain circumstances, justify holding them. Plantinga suggests that belief in God can be evaluated similarly. Experiences like guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence, or perceiving the world prompt beliefs such as (1) "God is speaking to me," (2) "God has created all this," (3) God "disapproves of what I have done," (4) "God forgives me," (5) "God is to be thanked and praised."

Beliefs (1)–(5), all implying God's existence, are considered properly basic by analogy to basic beliefs (a)–(c) (Ibid 78–81). They are not derived from other propositions but arise from specific experiences that, in the right context, provide justification for holding them.

Turning our attention now to Abū al-Barakāt, we can explore how the characteristic of basicality might furnish a rational justification for conformist belief in God. Having noted that belief in God could be embraced through conformism as a means of navigating skeptical and atheistic challenges arising from the problem of evil, Abū al-Barakāt introduces a pivotal point that directs us toward understanding conformist belief in God not as something derived from inference or authority, but as properly basic.[14]

Abū al-Barakāt appears to propose that belief in God functions as a bedrock for human knowledge such that it serves as a foundation upon which other beliefs are built and remains resilient even when confronted with counter-evidence. He states this proposal through what could be seen as a quasi-argument. Observing that reflection can lead to contradictory knowledge claims concerning the same subject, Abū al-Barakāt contends that rational inquiry may lead an individual S to believe in the existence of X, while simultaneously providing grounds for S to believe in the non-existence of X, depending on the available supporting indicators. This can result in S holding conflicting rational beliefs about God's existence. S's reflections might, based on certain signs and evidence, necessitate belief in God. Conversely, another set of signs and evidence could lead S's reflection to necessitate nonbelief. Furthermore, S might then reinstate belief in God based on new signs and evidence, only to later renounce this belief due to even newer signs and evidence, creating a cycle. These instances of inconsistency and vacillation between belief and nonbelief

[14] The thesis that belief in God is properly basic was not typical within the context of medieval Islamic and Jewish thought. However, recent studies have linked interpretations of the relevant Islamic concept of *fiṭra* to Reformed Epistemology; see Turner (2021).

ultimately prevent the formation of any fixed dogmatic beliefs: "if whenever you see disorder you turn into nonbelief and whenever you see uprightness you turn into belief you end with no fixed dogma (Abū al-Barakāt, MS: Pococke 27, 65r–65v)." The solution to this potential epistemological predicament, according to Abū al-Barakāt, is to firmly hold onto a foundational belief–one that does not require justification and remains unwavering despite challenges–and to proceed from this foundation to investigate non-foundational, derivative beliefs. Belief in God, he argues, constitutes precisely such a foundation. In essence, belief in God is presented as a basic belief (Ibid).

Why belief in God qualifies as basic is left unexplained. Nevertheless, Abū al-Barakāt appears firmly persuaded of its foundational character. This conviction becomes evident in an analogy he draws between an individual's *conformist* belief in God and the *acceptance* of foundational, axiomatic principles within a given science (MS: Pococke 27, 65v; 67r). Within this analogy, Abū al-Barakāt references the Euclidean understanding of axioms. Through this reference, he seems to suggest that certain propositions are accepted as inherently true, without the need for justification, and consequently, they serve as the bedrock from which a science's non-basic principles are deduced.[15] While this analogy does not constitute a direct argument for accepting belief in God as basic, it does affirm that such a belief is properly justified. The analogy resonates with the classical foundationalist application of the criterion of basicality to self-evident propositions, and it also foreshadows Plantinga's inclusion of belief in God within the realm of basic beliefs. By establishing a connection between belief in God and the self-evident principles of sciences, Abū al-Barakāt intends to convey that belief in God, much like these principles, lies at the core of all derivative beliefs in theology. This belief is presented as akin to an axiomatic principle that must be steadfastly maintained, regardless of challenges, to safeguard the entire edifice of theology from collapsing.

Having secured "the foundation" (*al-qāʿidah*), namely belief in God, one can then engage in unfettered reflection upon the world and the Divine. This allows for the development of explanations regarding God's relationship to evil states of affairs, not to provide justification for belief in God—which is already a stable, basic belief—but rather to endeavor to comprehend the wisdom inherent in God's creation and

[15] In his study of Abū al-Barakāt's metaphysics, Pavlov (2017, 367-368) appeals to this analogy to argue that Abū al-Barakāt implicitly suggests that theology and metaphysics can be conceived "as a set of axiomatic principles." As it appears, this view unnecessarily expands Abū al-Barakāt's analogy to incorporate several principles of metaphysics, whereas the analogy's primary and sole focus is belief in God.

governance. This paves the way for proposing reasons behind God's permission of evil.

4.2. A Skeptical Response Based on the Doctrine of Al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar

Although Abū al-Barakāt's direct engagement with the solution to the problem of evil does not take the specific form of classical theodicy, his ultimate aim is not to champion anti-theodicy as the definitive resolution. Some theological contemporaries of Abū al-Barakāt adopted this latter approach, arguing from the perspective of God's absolute sovereignty that God is too exalted and transcendent to be subjected to accountability. For these theologians, the attempt to provide justifications for God's permission of evil is not only futile, given that the motivations behind God's actions surpass human understanding, but also presumptuous, representing an overreach of what is fitting in relation to God.[16]

Insofar as Abū al-Barakāt places value on reason and rational endeavors, he encourages the investigation of God's ways and the pursuit of understanding why God permits the existence of evil and refrains from immediately enacting justice to restore belief in Him. Therefore, from his viewpoint, it is commendable that, having established belief in God as an indispensable foundation, one then turns his attention to "the world of opposites" (*ʿālam al-ʾaḍdād*) and endeavors to discern the inherent wisdom underlying God's governance, thereby navigating the theological intricacies associated with the problem of evil.

Upon further reflection, one might realize that, despite apparent "evils" (*shurūr*), God "rules with a view to [bringing about] the best (*al-aṣlaḥ*) for the majority, in most cases" (Abū al-Barakāt, Ms: Pococke 27, 43v).[17] Moreover, by considering "the different aspects of every state of affairs" and the overall picture, one arrives at the understanding that "justice and fairness" (*al-inṣāf wa al-intiṣāf*) define God's governance of the world (Ms. Pococke 27, 41v).[18] For instance, evil and suffering serve a constructive purpose, contributing to the development of individuals' moral and spiritual qualities (Ms: Pococke 27, 43r). In another theodicy, the suffering of innocents who experience injustice in this life provides a basis for their anticipated reception of generous rewards in the afterlife, where divine justice reaches its

[16] For the anti-theodicy approach, Ghaly (2014, 383-391); Shihadeh (2019, 61–84).

[17] This comment is based on Kohelet 3:17: "I mused: God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for everything and for every deed there."

The theodicy introduced by Abū al-Barakāt in this context echoes the Muʿtaziliete's conception of divine justice; see Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī* v.14, 33-44.

[18] This comment is based on Kohelet 3:17.

pinnacle (MS: Pococke 27, 43r).[19] Yet another theodicy posits that the greater good behind evil and suffering lies in the attainment of a complete and harmonious design of existence. All instances of evil and suffering that we observe in the world are vital elements within a comprehensive scheme of existence, rooted in (divine) wisdom and virtue, wherein all contrary states of affairs achieve their respective realizations in due time, ultimately contributing to the fullness of existence. Abū al-Barakāt, speaking on behalf of Kohelet, writes:

> Wisdom and virtue, in general, irrespective of the details that you may witness, are grounded in balance and evenness. You may wonder when a dethroned king turns into a servant in the desert and feel pity for him, saying, "this one was a king yesterday," but you do not equally wonder that my father turned from a shepherd into a king. You may also wonder when you see death at the moment it happens, but you hardly remember the moment of birth. The same is true with respect to health and sickness that happen to bodies and with respect to what happens through generation and corruption within the world of opposites, where every opposite has a timely opposite that is necessitated by existence (MS: Pococke 27, 67v).[20]

Another theodicy elaborates on the concept of balance to emphasize the world's perfection and its detachment from any deficiencies that might lead to pointless suffering. According to this theodicy, the world is structured to adhere to a consistent and equitable pattern wherein opposing states of affairs, categorized as good and evil, occur in proportionate measure. Just as there is a time for distress, so too is there a time for happiness and prosperity. Nothing transpires arbitrarily; opposing states of distress and prosperity are rooted in specific causes within a fixed order. Consequently, prosperity and decline, and by extension other opposing states of good and evil, are the outcomes of an individual's success or failure to adopt the appropriate course of action at the opportune times.

> [While] effects follow the course of causes, in [relation to] movements and rest, take advantage of the delightful [outcome of] wind and cold breeze and the attainability [of benefits] before prevention [...]. Seize upon the world's attainable good in its specified time and predict opposite evils so that you may guard yourself against them with your effort, for Predestination (*al-Qaḍāʾ*) does not dispense this world's inhabitants from them [i.e., the evils]. Indeed, they constitute the foundation and structure in the world of opposites [...]. This is how no trace of deficiency or omission

[19] This comment is based on Kohelet 3:17.

[20] This comment is based on Kohelet 5:8: "The advantage of land is supreme; even a king is indebted to the soil."

> tarnishes His acts, for each movement effects a destiny in the moved and the mover, [as with the case] with the extinguishment of fire as opposed to the cooling off of snow and similar opposite cases on which the patterns of existence in the realm of generation and corruption are founded (MS: Pococke 27, 92v–93r).[21]

While these preceding theodicies might serve to lessen the theological weight of evil, their persuasive force is ultimately questioned by Abū al-Barakāt as he juxtaposes them with Kohelet's assessment that "this too is vanity." The term *hevel* is employed by Kohelet to denote insignificance in terms of size, value, or both. In Abū al-Barakāt's interpretation, Kohelet applies this judgment to either the situation under consideration (*al-maqūl ʿanhū*) or the "saying" (*al-qawl*), that is, the outcome of his reflection, or indeed both. By introducing the concept of vanity, Abū al-Barakāt diminishes the significance of the theodicies he attributes to Kohelet, thereby fostering a skeptical outlook on the potential for attaining definitive explanations regarding God's reasons for permitting evil. From this standpoint, Abū al-Barakāt's position shares similarities with that of contemporary skeptical theists. Although skeptical theists maintain that God permits evil and suffering in the world to achieve greater good or prevent worse harm, they deny the possibility of making informed judgments about the specific benefits intended by God in instances of evil and suffering. For a skeptical theist, the inference from "inscrutable to pointless evil" (Bergmann 2009, 375), which forms the core of the evidential argument from evil, is invalid if we acknowledge the limitations of human understanding concerning the realm of God's justifying reasons. This epistemological constraint does not prove the absence of underlying benefits for evil and suffering, nor does it bolster the argument from evil (*Ibid*). While Abū al-Barakāt does not present an argument that can be directly equated with the systematic arguments put forth by skeptical theists, this explanatory analogy is justified by the fact that he exhibits a strong skeptical stance towards the possibility of discerning the specifics of God's governance of the world. Nothing more clearly illustrates this inclination than his utilization of the doctrine of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* (Divine Decree and Determination).[22]

The commentary on Kohelet does not present a detailed definition of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*. However, its concise remarks on this matter display resemblance to the general perspective found in *Kitab al-Muʿtabar*. Within the commentary, Abū al-

[21] This comment is based on Kohelet 7:14: "Be pleased when things go well, but in a time of misfortune reflect: God has made the one as well as the other so that man should find nothing after Him."

[22] In the Islamic context, this doctrine received different interpretations from theological and philosophical perspectives. For a comprehensive study, see De Cillis (2014).

Barakāt approvingly recounts the following concerning a particular philosophical viewpoint on the subject.

> The opinion held by philosophers and those who engage in speculation about the world of generation and corruption is that all events are both decreed and determined such that they are decreed in the knowledge of the First in a general manner, whereas the determination manifests in a particularized fashion in relation to specific times, individuals, and circumstances. What is preordained within the knowledge of the First cannot deviate from how it is foreknown or from how it has been decreed and determined in relation to a specific time and place. It is inherently unavoidable and irreversible (MS: Pococke 27, 30r).[23]

As becomes clear, *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* originates in God's knowledge and comprises two interwoven aspects: *al-Qaḍāʾ*, which denotes God's decreeing or pre-ordaining of the inherent properties and universal laws that govern the world, and al–Qadar, which signifies His determination of the precise instances in which the elements of *al-Qaḍāʾ* are realized in relation to individuals and specific temporal and spatial contexts. To illustrate, *al-Qaḍāʾ* dictates the way in which death, a universal condition, marks the end of all human lives, while *al-Qadar* determines how death comes to each individual under particular circumstances, at a specific moment, and in a designated location.

To the extent that God's Decree and Determination are massively involved in worldly affairs, the opposing occurrences, evil and good, that transpire in the world of generation and corruption bear a close connection to the diverse ways in which the components of *al-Qaḍāʾ* are particularized. This implies that if we could fully comprehend the intricate pattern of God's involvement in *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*, we would be able to grasp the complete picture of God's governance of the world, and consequently, discern the greater good underlying instances of evil and suffering. However, this endeavor proves to be an unattainable aspiration. This is because human understanding is inherently limited with respect to the distribution of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*. While the world operates according to fixed rules and laws that function consistently in accordance with God's Decree (*al-Qaḍāʾ*), the Determinations (*Aqdār*) vary based on God's will to such an extent that customary relationships between causes and effects are, at times, mysteriously suspended. Consequently, causes do not invariably produce their expected effects, as some,

[23] This comment is based on Kohelet 3:8: "time to love; a time for war; and a time to hate and a time for peace".

though not all, states of affairs, rather than arising from their regular causes, originate from specific causes determined by God as part of His *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*.

The *partial* irregularity and unpredictability entailed by *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* is highlighted by Abū al-Barakāt as he remarks: "To all the phenomena associated with *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* that he [i.e., Kohelet] observed, he added [the mystery] that effects are not bound to the particular causes one normally pursues in seeking [a goal]. In fact, they may be executed by unexpected and unknown causes" (MS: Pococke 27, 126v;[24] cf. 114–114v; 68r–68v). Thus, while perseverance and hard work typically lead to success, *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* determine whether or not a persistent seeker eventually succeeds in achieving his goal, and if so is determined, the specific causes, time, and place of his success. Similarly, while negligence and extravagance normally bring about failure, *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* determine whether or not a negligent person will experience failure, and if so is determined, the specific causes, time, and place of that failure. These examples, and others, highlight the mysteriousness of cause-effect coordinations within the realm of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*, which leads Abū al-Barakāt to assert that all people, "the righteous and the wise and their slaves, fall under the governance of causes and effects within God's decrees and determinations (*al-Aqḍiyah wal-Aqdār*) [...]. It is unknown how causes operate in relation to love, preference, or hatred" (MS: Pococke 27, 120r–120v).[25]

The more Abū al-Barakāt's Kohelet reflects on the governance of the world of generation and corruption the more convinced he becomes of the enigmatic nature of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* and the inscrutability of its workings. Particularly suggestive of these characteristics is what Abū al-Barakāt refers to as *al-muṣādafah* (or *al-bakhtiyyah*) *al-itifāqiyyah* (fortune and chance), signifying the possible ways in which causal chains meet and the possible outcomes of their meeting. In the realm of generation and corruption, every event involves either (1) a natural act, or a combination of natural acts, (2) a voluntary act, or a combination of voluntary acts, or (3) a combination of natural and voluntary acts. Of the three categories, only (1) falls *entirely* within the purview of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*, insofar as they pertain to matters that follow a uniform course. Events falling under the latter categories are

[24] This comment is based on Kohelet 9:11: "Once more I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the learned; but time and death will happen to them all. For man does not even know his hour: Like fish caught in a fatal net, like birds seized in a snare, so are men caught in the moment of disaster when it falls upon them suddenly."

[25] This comment is based on Kohelet 9:2: "All things come alike to all; the same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked, the good and the clean and the unclean, the one who brings a sacrifice and the one who does not. As is the good man, so is the sinner; as is the one who swears, so is the one who fears an oath."

not fully encompassed within the purview of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*. This is because such events are infinite, whereas God's foreknowledge, in which *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* is sourced, cannot encompass an infinite number of events.[26] However, even though these events do not *wholly* fall within God's foreknowledge, He retains the ability to intervene and determine the intersection of causal chains, either directly or indirectly, "if He wills and whenever He wills." [27]

To explain how the phenomenon of fortune and chance takes place, consider the following possible outcomes of the movements of two subjects, Zaid (Z) and a scorpion (S), moving from different directions towards an intersecting point (*P*). Zaid's movement is voluntary, while the scorpion's movement is due to both its "voluntary action" (*ḥarakatuhā al-irādiyyah*) and its "natural impulse" (*bāʿithatuhā al-ṭabīʿyyah*) (MS: Pococke 27, 33v).

(1) *Z* moves faster than *S*, and thus Z passes *P* without meeting *S* (*S* could be hindered from meeting Z at *P* for any other reason)
(2) S moves faster than Z, and thus *S* passes *P* without meeting *Z* (Z could be hindered from meeting Z at *P* for any other reason)
(3) Both *Z* and *S* meet at *P:*
    (a) Z steps over *S*, resulting in *S*'s destruction.
    (b) *S* stings *Z*, causing *Z* pain.
    (c) *S* stings *Z* and Z steps over *S*.

These represent just a few possibilities among countless others that may arise from the intersection of causal chains. Neither Z nor S possesses knowledge of these possibilities or the future outcome of their potential encounter. This implies that the specifics of the causal chains' meeting and its result cannot be attributed to any understanding or deliberate purpose on the part of Z or S, despite their movements being voluntary in nature.

---

[26] This view echoes a view espoused by some open theists that denies God's exhaustive foreknowledge (for this view, see Rhoda 2008, 225). Whether Abū al-Barakāt's theories of divine knowledge and future contingencies are amenable to an explanation in terms of Open Theism is a question that is left to a future focused study.

I am thankful to Dr. Ferhat Yöney for drawing my attention to the resemblance between Abu al-Barkat's position, as presented here, and Open Theism.

[27] This explanation is based on *Kitab al-Muʿtabar* 3:9, 188. The commentary does not offer many details, but it uses the same explanatory example used in *al-Muʿtabar*. Thus, here I assume that both the commentary and *Kitab al-Muʿtabar* share the same theoretical perspective about chance and fortune.

While Abū al-Barakāt does not explicitly elaborate on the implications of this example for our understanding of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*, his concluding remark that "no one, but the Creator and the Determiner (*al-Muqadir)*, and those to whom He revealed mysteries, foreknew of this [i.e., the possible encounter of Z and S]," suggests that it is God's will that determines the specifics of the causal chains' meeting and their particular outcomes. Therefore, although God's knowledge, in which *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* is rooted, does not encompass the infinite contingent events in the world of creation and corruption, God still intervenes in the progression of events, even if occasionally, depending on His will.

In the context of the previous example, Abū al-Barakāt states that God's intervention in the causal chains occurs either directly or through intermediaries. Expanding on this idea, he speaks of a multitude of intermediary "Angelic Spirits" (*Arwāḥ malakiyyah*) that are commissioned by God to act on human beings, inspiring them to behave in certain ways, such as acting courageously or cowardly, or fostering within them certain feelings, such as love and hatred. It is clear that the manner in which these agents act upon human beings is not arbitrary, but rather rooted in knowledge of surrounding causal circumstances and possibilities and leads to predetermined outcomes. An example of this is the death of Zayd under the rubble, caused by a voluntary movement that led to the collapse of a house in which he was sitting. The house's destruction, and consequently Zayd's death, resulted from his voluntary movement which impacted its weak ceiling. Zayd was unaware of the ceiling's poor condition. Had he known, he would not have been in that house or made the movement that triggered its collapse. However, the ceiling's condition was known to the divine agents that inspired Zayd to make the choices that ultimately led to his death through the ceiling's destruction (MS: Pococke 27, 114r).[28]

The preceding illustrative examples demonstrate that the arrangements of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* are inaccessible to human understanding, unless one is supported by a sort of divine inspiration that uncovers to him the secrets of *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar*. Being epistemically limited with respect to *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar,* we are thus deprived of the ability to accurately understand the pattern of God's governance of

[28] This comment is based on 8:8: "Man is powerless over the spirit — to restrain the spirit; nor is there authority over the day of death; nor discharge in war; and wickedness cannot save the wrongdoer."

It should be noted that the issue presented in this comment is closely related to the problem of free will and determinism (for a recent study of this question, see Shehata (2020). Here my goal is not to decide whether Abū al-Barakāt endorsed the doctrine of free will or not, a question that elicited a debate. Answering this question either in the positive or in the negative does not clash with the point made here, namely that *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* occasionally intervene, either directly or through intermediary causes, depending on God's will.

the world or to assign value judgments to His actions: "human knowledge cannot arrive at the causes (*al-asbāb*) operating in His Determinations (*Aqdārihi*) so that He might be challenged or objected to" (MS: Pococke 27, 78v). In other words, the greater good beyond some instances of evil and suffering may remain inaccessible to human knowledge. However, this state of ignorance does not negate the fact that God's governance is based on wisdom and justice, nor does it justify rebellion against God.

The skeptical attitude manifesting throughout Abū al-Barakāt's notes on *al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar* epitomizes the Quran's reflection on the state of ignorance with respect to God's reason in creation that characterizes beings other than God. Even angels are no less ignorant of God's ways. God's response to their inquiry about the reason for which the cause of evil on Earth, that is, human beings, is created, is met by His affirmation of their epistemic ignorance: "Surely I know that which ye know not" (2:30). Only God knows the reasons behind His creation and ways of rulership. Whether Abū al-Barakāt was influenced by this verse is a scope of inquiry that is left to more focused research on the Quran's impact on the commentary.

Conclusion

This study unveils, for the first time, a comprehensive analysis of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's commentary on Kohelet, revealing its profound engagement with the problem of evil and its implications for theistic belief. Through meticulous examination, this research has elucidated the commentary's unique philosophical-theological perspective, situating it within contemporary philosophy of religion and demonstrating its relevance to ongoing debates. Abū al-Barakāt's interpretation infuses Kohelet with significant theological insights, notably his extensive and nuanced treatment of evil and suffering. Transcending the typical aporetic approaches of his time, his discourse anticipates skeptical and even atheistic challenges that bear resemblance to certain contemporary discussions, and remarkably, offers a brief expression of the problem of divine hiddenness. Through original interpretations that weave together diverse philosophical and theological threads, the commentary's multifaceted discussions lay the groundwork for a response to the skeptical and atheistic challenges posed by evil and suffering that was remarkably unusual within its historical context. Primarily, its distinctive utilization of "conformism"—as an acceptance of belief in God akin to foundational self-evident principles—argues for the epistemic basicality of theistic belief, thus offering theists a justification for maintaining faith even in the face of contrary evidence. Furthermore, the commentary's reflections on the Islamic doctrine of

Qaḍāʾ wa al-Qadar, imbued with a keen awareness of the limits of human understanding regarding God's providential design, provide a complementary defense against the problem of evil by emphasizing the inscrutability of divine reasons. Ultimately, this study highlights Abū al-Barakāt's commentary as a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding the problem of evil within Islamic and Jewish philosophical discourses, offering fertile ground for future theological and philosophical inquiry that may find resonance with contemporary concerns.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Abd al-Jabbār, Qāḍi (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawhīd*. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī and Abū al-Wafā al-Ghunaymī. The Egyptian General Organization for Authorship, News and Publishing, The Egyptian House for Authorship and Translation.

Al-Baghdādī, Abū al-Barakāt. 1938. *Kitāb al-Muʿtabar*. Jamʿīyat Daʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmānīyah. Hyderabad.

Al-Baghdādī, Abū al-Barakāt. Manuscript, Bodleian Library Pococke 274, 3r.

Al-Ghazālī, Abu Ḥamid. 2013. *Moderation in Belief* [*Al-Iqtiṣād fi al-Iʿtiqād*]. Translated with an interpretive essay and notes by Aladdin M. Yaqub. University of Chicago Press.

Hume, David. 2007. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Edited by Coleman D. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maimonides, Moses. 1963. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Translated by Shlomo Pines. [Chicago]: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226842608.001.0001.

Quran. 1997. Translated by Muhamed Pickthall. Everyman's Library.

Spinoza, B. 2002. *Complete Works*, trans., S. Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Press.

Hebrew Bible [the Stone Edition: the Torah, Prophets, and Writings]. 1996. Translated and annotated by Rabbi Nosson Scherman. Mesorah Publications.

Secondary sources

Abdalla, Bakinaz. 2024. "Evil and Responsibility in the Quran," *Religious Studies*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412523001026.

Aijaz, Imran. 2013. "Some Ruminations about Inculpable Non-belief," *Religious Studies*, 9/3: 399–419. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412512000339.

Aijaz, Imran. 2024. "Islam and the Problem of Divine Hiddenness." In *Islamic Philosophy of Religion: Essays from Analytic Perspective,* edited by Saleh Zarepour, 182–202, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003327714-16.

Bergmann, Michael. 2009. "Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, 374–402. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199596539.013.0018.

Booth, Anthony. 2017. *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*. Londin: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54157-4.

De Cillis, Maria. 2014. *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, Al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī*. London: Routledge.

Doko E, Turner JB. 2023. "Islamic Religious Epistemology." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Religious Epistemology*, edited by Fuqua J., Greco J., and McNabb T., 148–162. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009047180.013.

Frank, Richard. 1989. "Knowledge and Taqlîd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ashʿarism." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109/ 1: 37-62. https://doi.org/10.2307/604336.

Fox, Michael V. 1989. *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. Sheffield: Almond Press.

Ghaly, Mohammed. 2014. "*Evil and Suffering in Islam*." In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings,* edited by Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, 383–391. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goldschmidt, Tyron. 2014. "Jewish Response to the Problem of Evil: Traditional Texts in Contemporary Categories." *Philosophy Compass* 9/12: 894–905. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12176.

Goodman, Lenn. 2017. "Judaism and the Problem of Evil." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107295278.011.

Gordis, Robert. 1955. *Koheleth: The Man and His World.* New York: Bloch Publishing.

Griffel, Frank. 2011. "Between al-Ghazali and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: The Dialectical Turn in the Philosophy of Iraq and Iran During the Sixth/Twelfth Century." *In the Age of Averroes*, edited by Peter Adamson. Warburg Institute Colloquia.

Gutas, Dimitri. 2016. "Avicenna." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-sina/

Hourani, Goerge. 1985. *Reason and Tradition in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511570780.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Adam Green. 2022. "Hiddenness of God," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/divine-hiddenness/.

Inwagen, Peter. 2002. "What is the Problem of the Divine Hiddenness of God?." In *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder & Paul Moser, 24–33. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606090.002.

Küng, Hans. 1976. *On Being a Christian,* translated by Quinn E. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2021. "The Islamic World." In *The Cambridge History of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, 159–180. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108562324.010.

Mackie, John. 1971. "Evil and Omnipotence," In *The Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Basil Mitchell. London: Oxford University Press.

McGinnis, Jon. 2015. "The Hiddenness of "Divine Hiddenness": Divine Love in Medieval Islamic Lands." In *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives,* edited by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump, 157–174. Cambridge: Cambridge University. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139939621.010.

Ormsby, Eric. 1984. *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazali's Best of all Possible Worlds*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400856336.

Pavlov, Moshe M. 2017. *Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Metaphysical Philosophy*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315636580.

Pines, Shlomo. 1964. "Towards the Study of al-Baghdādī's Commentary to Ecclesiastes: Four Texts." *Tarbiz*, 33, 198–213.

Pines, Shlomo. 1979. "Studies in Abu'l-Barakaat Al-Baghdadi: Physics and Metaphysics." *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, edited by Shlomo Pines. Jerusalem and Leiden: Magnes and Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004659865.

Pines, Shlomo. 2000. "Studies in Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi's Poetics and Metaphysics." In *Studies in Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi Physics and Metaphysics,* edited by Shlomo Pines, 314–315. Magens Press, Jerusalem.

Plantinga, Alvin. 2000. *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0195131932.001.0001.

Plantinga, Alvin. 1974. *God, Freedom, and Evil.* NY: Harper & Row.

Plantinga, Alvin. 1983. "Reason and Belief in God," *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstoff. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Rhoda, Alan R. 2008. "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof." *Religious Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2:. 225–34. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412508009438.

Rowe, William. 1979. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16/ 4: 335–341.

Schellenberg, J. L. 1993. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press.

Schellenberg, J. L. 2017. "Evil, Hiddenness, and Atheism." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Meister C, Moser PK l, 108–123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shehata, Mariam. 2020. "Abul-Barakāt al-Baghdādī on Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will." *Nazariyat* 6/2: 99–131.

Shihadeh, Ayman. 2019. "Avicenna's Theodicy and al-Rāzī's Anti-Theodicy." *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 7: 61–84.

Stern, Joseph. 2022. "Saadia on 'What is in the Hearts of People When the Reach the Limits of Endurance in Trial." *Abrahamic Reflections on Randomness and Providence*, edited by K. J Clark and J. Koperski 339–356. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stroumsa, Sarah. 1999. Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn Al-Rawāndī, Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Stump, Elenore. 1997. "Saadia Gaon on the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Reason* 14/4.

Turner, Jamie B. 2021. "An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology." *Philosophy East & West* 71.3: 767–792.

Walsh, Cary. 2012. "Theological Trace in Qohelet." *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 42, 1: 12–17.

Winter, Timothy. 2017. "Islam and the Problem of Evil." *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitley, Charles. 1979. *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*. Berlin: Waler de Gruyter.

Woudenberg, Rene Van. 2013. "A Brief History of Theodicy." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, edited by Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder. John Wiley & Sons.