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Abstract

Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī on Theodicy

The present paper aims to explore the position of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, a twelfth-century Muslim philosopher, on the problem of evil. It shows that although Abū al-Barakāt does not devote a single full work to this problem, instead he wrote very sparse and scattered passages; he seeks to reconcile between the existence of evil and suffering in the physical world and the belief in the existence of a perfect, beneficent, and omnipotent God. In doing so, he, as the present paper argues, brings together elements deriving essentially from Avicenna's optimism theodicy and the Mu'tazilī free-will theodicy.

The paper initiates with a brief elaboration of Abū al-Barakāt's perspective on God and God-world relationship to the extent that enables us to understand his position on evil. It continues by drawing together his thought on the questions that come under the rubric of theodicy and expositing, analysing, and translating his theodicean writings. Meanwhile, the paper will also examine his intellectual context to shed light on his theodicy's location in the broader Islamic tradition and trace precedents for his thought.