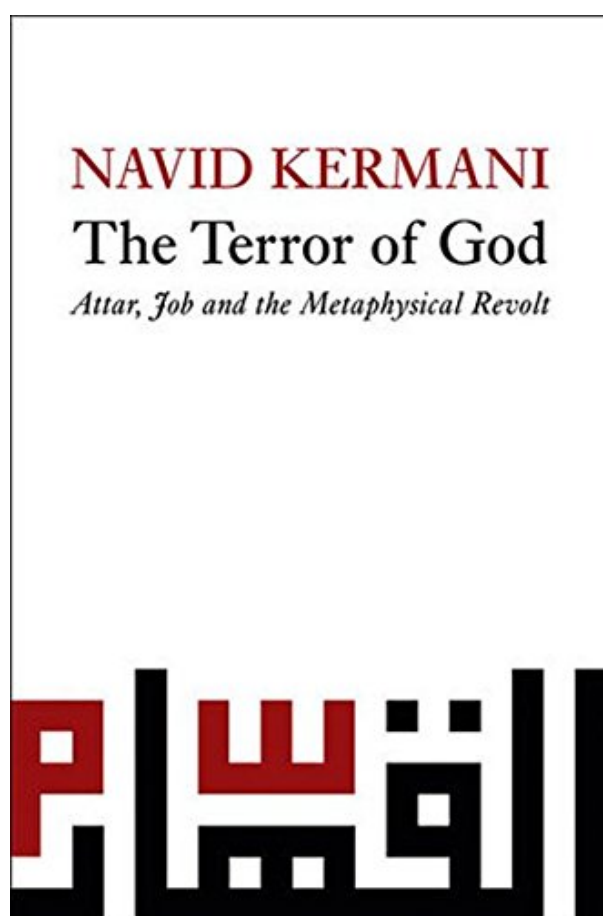


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How can suffering and injustice be reconciled with the idea that God is good, that he loves humans and is merciful to them? Job's question runs through the history of the three monotheistic religions. Time and again, philosophers, theologians, poets, prophets and laypersons have questioned their image of God in the light of a reality full of hardship. Some see suffering as proof of God's existence, others as a demonstration that there can be no God, while others still respond by rebelling against Him.

In this remarkable book Navid Kermani - a distinguished Islamic scholar of Iranian origin - sees this revolt against God as the central motif of one of the great but neglected works of literature: *The Book of Suffering* by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Faridoddin Attar. Through the prism of Attar's text Kermani tells the story of a religious faith that knows God but is angry with Him: a counter-theology that runs through many religions and connects Judaism, Islam and modernity.

With astonishing range and stylistic brilliance Kermani brings Attar to life as one of us, enabling the great Persian poet to speak directly to us today despite the time that separates us.

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Revealing cross-cultural exercise on theodicy

By Hans-Peter Muller

In Fariduddin Attar's (d. 1221) *Musibatname*, the tragedy of Satan's outsized love for God who won't submit to anybody else than Him (he is regarded by many Sufis as the only true monotheist), may lead to deep compassion in the reader for the fallen angel, irrespective of Satan's clear misconception. Adam might have been created from mud. But he received the Almighty's breath of life.

Attar's work as well as new aspects of Job's fate have come to my attention a couple of years ago when reading German/Iranian orientalist Navid Kermani's book about Attar, Job and the metaphysical revolt (*Der Schrecken Gottes*, C. H. Beck, Munich 2005). Attar, who was most probably killed in the Mongolian Storm

of the 13th century in the city of Nishapur in Khorasan, has something in mind which will be described as theodicy in 1710 by German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, the problem of Evil. Kermani's brilliant work assembles much of the medieval, enlightenment and contemporary literature on the topic without providing the reader with a final answer (except strengthening views of an agnostic). One impression I got is that in what the West in a misconception calls Middle Ages (in fact, darkness was prevalent but not in the Islamic World which was bright in these long centuries), Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians and Muslims were living in peace in, say, what is now Eastern Iran, knowing each other's Holy Books, and getting their inspirations for spiritual journeys from both the Qur'an and the Bible.

The knowledge of our common spiritual origins may really matter when it comes to mutual respect and understanding. When comparing the sober verses about Job in the Holy Qur'an and colorful legends most Muslims are able to tell about the fate of this just, whole-hearted and upright man which are nowhere narrated in the Qur'an, we have to assume that the common traditions are still alive.

No Muslim will, of course, believe that the Almighty was betting with Satan on poor Job. There are only four suwar briefly naming Ayyub, Q4:163 and Q6:84 listing him among the other prophets; and Q21:83f and Q38:41ff where his suffering and patience is mentioned. I was long wondering, why. I had my respective revelation when reading Kermani's book. All stories differ when told by different protagonists. Each of us has a different viewpoint, and conclusions may be to the contrary. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is God's uncreated Word. But the Bible has been written by many authors, edited, compiled, over many centuries, by humans. God's words may be reported, but it is not God who is speaking.

In the Book of Job, one protagonist, wretched Job, tells his version of the events. In the Qur'an, it is God Himself, who won't admit that He was betting with the devil (actually, he did it twice!) of His servant. He would not report on His disturbing speech out of the tempest.

Regardless any theories about when and how the Holy Qur'an has been revealed or written, one has to realize the consistency when compiling God's word, and only God's word. It is very clear throughout that it is not Muhammad who is ever speaking.

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toocomplicated

By Fereshteh Sarram

It is too detailed and full of personal opinion. Also the facts of life of Attar is looked upon in the light of Western thinkers and philosophers.

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