

SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGIOUS PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Suffering is the reality of religious people, so suffering is an important theme of almost all religions. The negativity and depression involved with suffering invite religions to discuss it. Suffering is the constitutive reality of all humans. All human beings must suffer, but their faith makes them have a different perspective in reacting to it. This paper wishes to examine the theme of suffering in hermeneutic and phenomenology studies. The research model used in this paper is a qualitative model with as much as possible using hermeneutics by comparing several texts and understanding about suffering. The expected goal of deepening this theme is to find a more comprehensive understanding of suffering as a believer, and finally be able to unite spiritual suffering in the light of God. Life is not to suffer and die silly. Life is also not filled with the solitude of suffering merely, because clearly God created man not to make him suffer. Suffering is not sent to destroy the righteous, but it is suffering that will purify the righteous even more. Suffering is the reality of religious people, so suffering is an important theme of almost all religions

Keywords: suffering, meaning, religion, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Today various forms of suffering are inherent in everyday human life, whether it is suffering mildly or suffering to the heaviest degree. Isn't it true that Indonesian people are very familiar with a series of burdens of suffering? Even in the last 20 years, Indonesians have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic disasters, Lapindo mudflow, the Aceh Tsunami, and an AirAsia plane crash in early 2015, catastrophic floods, landslides, soaring prices of basic necessities that oppress the poor, occasional riots, and a series of other forms of suffering that is so inherent in the everyday life of Indonesian people. Frequently asked questions are: "Why do humans have to suffer? Is there no other way to live besides going through suffering? Could the suffering have passed? Or is it possible to have life without suffering?"

One of the goals of religious people is to find the meaning of life to become virtuous, pious, and pleasing to God. Being a virtuous person is not easy, because

humans have to go through many life tests. Suffering is one of the tests of this virtue and piety. When all religions compete to be pious, that is when suffering becomes inevitable. This theme is relevant to be discussed, given the current world situation, plagued by immense suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Various scientific writings often only discuss suffering from a certain religious point of view or a certain philosophical understanding, so this paper intends to examine suffering as a religious phenomenon that often afflicts people who want to achieve the virtue and piety of life.

Suffering is one of the central themes in philosophy and religion, and even becomes a conversation in the Phenomenology of Religion. This paper will examine the theme of suffering using a hermeneutic approach. Etymologically, the word “hermeneutic” comes from the Greek “hermeneut” which means “to interpret”. This term comes from a Greek mythological figure named Hermes, an intermediary in charge of conveying messages from the god Jupiter to human beings (Rahardjo, 2020: 54). Hermeneutics is the process of turning something or a situation of ignorance into understanding. Hermeneutics is the interpretation of a text or written meaning (Fanggidae: 2020: 105). So in general, hermeneutics can be understood as the process of extracting the meaning of something (including text) so that the original message can be captured and contextualized in a current context. Basically, hermeneutics deals with language, because humans express their mental treasures through language, both orally and in writing. Every word has no meaning, because humans relate to themselves, other people, and their world by using language. Hermeneutics emphasizes that authentic humans (in Heidegger’s language called “Dasein”) must always be seen in the context of space and time in which they experience it (Suddick, 2020: 19). Hermeneutics requires the researcher to repeatedly come into contact with the text, try to understand the meaning (‘verstehen’) for its creator, and attempt to integrate it with the ability for today’s readers to understand.

The interpretation of the meaning of human suffering and religion in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic becomes a methodical element at this stage. All of these steps eventually lead to a stage of critical interpretation and reflection. The research model used in this paper is a qualitative model using hermeneutics to compare texts and understand suffering in several religions. Humans experience a long process in religion that begins with ancient religions whose religious expression may be different from existing religions. That is the reason why this paper includes archaic culture in a long phase of religious history that is worthy of investigation as well. The expected goal of deepening this theme is to find a more comprehensive understanding of suffering as a religious person. Almost all religions talk about suffering. Christianity (Christianity and Catholicism) even prominently includes suffering at the core of its faith, and is even explicit that Christians must carry the cross as Jesus was also crucified. Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of patience in dealing with suffering, just as the prophets endured it when experiencing various rejections from mankind. Eastern religions also teach humans how to respond to suffering, and Buddhism in

the Four Noble Truths strictly says that life is suffering itself.

Religion is human reality itself. Religion provides a way for humans to respond to the daily situations of its adherents. It is important to examine the understanding of suffering in this paper, not debating which religion is the most correct, but rather attempting a dialogue which today is very urgent to be echoed. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic is a relevant framework for discussing this problem of suffering, because almost all humans, countries, cultures, and religions experience it. Many people in all religions are suffering from this pandemic. The world seems to be gloomy, so a comprehensive reflection of all religions is needed to further ground religion itself in the midst of suffering humanity.

SUFFERING AS A RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

Suffering is a human reality. There is not a single human being who does not suffer. Humans certainly want to be free from suffering, but unfortunately, the negative feelings will always repeat themselves. While some sufferings can be overcome, and others cannot. Suffering is an important momentum for every human being. On one hand, resilience in life will grow if humans are able to overcome this suffering, but on the other hand, despair is a natural complication if humans fail to push through the struggles.

Prophets in the Samawi religion are often depicted as people who must suffer for good. All religions also teach the importance of the inner human attitude in dealing with suffering. The right mental attitude will further foster faith in God, while the wrong attitude will lead to being blasphemous, being fatalistic, and blaming fate. Suffering seems to prevent humans from arriving at happiness. If the highest happiness is understood as God, then the reality of suffering often prevents people from reaching God.

This difference in attitude in dealing with suffering causes religious teachings that speak about it to be always subjective in nuances. Suffering is almost always experienced differently by each human being. There is suffering that is communal (for example when the world is experiencing a pandemic like today), but the attitude in dealing with it personally is very subjective. Subjective attitudes lead humans to existential discoveries of themselves. The reality of suffering is thus closely related to the existence of humanity. Humans always try to find meaning in every incident of suffering, so awareness (intentionality) becomes very important to reflect on every painful event. Suffering is thus present before humankind and invites understanding. Suffering is a phenomenon, a symptom, and a reality for which the meaning must be sought. The meaning of suffering is what makes the difference between religious people and non-religious people. The phenomenon of suffering exists

in all religions and invites all religions to answer it.

The Phenomenology of Religion starts with an understanding of various religious phenomena. The context of phenomenology is philosophy, and philosophy itself is a reflection of man and all its dimensions, including his God:

“Philosophy is about people, because the problem of humans is a matter of the world of my life. Philosophy reflects who I am, because the discourse about me as a historical person points directly to the world of my life. And, even then, philosophy conceived of God, because the reflection of the Absolute There fills the world space of my life ...
“(Riyanto, 2018: 134)

Phenomenology (as outlined by Husserl) has the motto “back to the thing itself.” The awareness of phenomenology is intentional to reality itself, and very close to existentialism. Phenomenology explores perceptions and asks an individual’s interpretation of what they experience (Firmanto, 2018: 258). Then what about the Phenomenology of Religion?

The Phenomenology of Religion allows everything about the practice of religion to be critically examined before the researcher. The Phenomenology of Religion describes how the object and all its symptoms appear exactly as they are. Husserl proposed the method of reduction as a tool to understand this, by getting rid of everything subjective, compiling all the researchers’ knowledge about the investigated object, and eliminating the traditions of knowledge possessed by humans (Firmanto, 2018: 258). Husserl (1952:127) asked researchers to return to the object itself so that the nature of the object can be captured intuitively.

Gerard van der Leeuw (1963: 178) then put forward a subjective relationship in understanding objects. The Phenomenology of Religion developed by Gerard van der Leeuw (1963: 180) also examined the relationships between subjects and objects. Van der Leeuw’s approach was not yet complete, because it did not take into account the hermeneutical process for understanding religious life as developed by Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Wilhem Dilthey (Dewantara, 2019: 112). The hermeneutic process is needed to understand the meaning of religious phenomena more deeply, because this process provides a place for a comprehensive explanation that is historical, sociological, and psychological. Eliade (1969: 58) even said that hermeneutics was needed to explain the form of a sacred encounter between humans and the Divine.

The Phenomenology of Religion then incorporates this hermeneutical process

to open a further horizon of the religious character inherent in all phenomena. The Phenomenology of Religion is not only directed towards outward forms, rites, cults, and/or symbols, but also touches on fundamental and universal questions that have befallen mankind throughout history (Firmanto, 2018: 263). Some basic universal questions existing in all of these religions include: “What is the relationship between human freedom and the fate that has befallen it? What is the relationship between independence and human destiny? Why do prophets and many pious people suffer? The goal of this paper is to immerse itself in the circle of universal problems, namely by examining the suffering of innocent and pious people who have been cultivated by the Phenomenology of Religion. This paper attempts to find and understand the basic structure of the problems of the sufferings of the righteous in one horizon which contains basic lines of thought regarding this matter.

UNDERSTANDING THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The development of religion has gone according to the development of human civilization. Since ancient times, humans have always tried to find meaning in their lives, including the suffering they experience. Ancient religious reflections on suffering must have differed from those of more modern religions. This happens because humans have also experienced the development of an increasingly advanced civilization and intelligence. There is an essential understanding that can be eternal, but the reflective prowess of humans that continues to develop in each era certainly produces a more advanced meaning. If in Ancient Greek religion human suffering was almost certainly caused by the deeds of the gods, then the reflection on human independence would certainly be more prominent in more modern times. The following explanation is intended to capture the phenomenon of suffering from the various phases of the emergence of religion in human life. The explanation will then converge to the question: “Why should a righteous person suffer? If God loves His godly people so much, why does God allow Him to suffer too?”

Archaic Culture

Archaic culture generally refers to ancient or old culture and was imposed on native culture before the start of the writing tradition. Human life in archaic culture is largely determined by the fate that befalls it unexpectedly. Fate has powers that are unpredictable and cannot be calculated. An archaic man seeks to secure himself from the grip of fate through a variety of cultural and magical deeds (Dewantara, 2019: 111). There is hardly any discussion about the suffering of godly men in this archaic phase, and there has been no

reflection about such experiences. However, that does not mean that there is no problem with it. The conception of a just and trustworthy order to uphold justice as a human priority has not been thoroughly thought out, even though the structure of socio-economic life is already running. In archaic culture, no concept contains reflexive understandings of an overall order which is used as a tool to guarantee the order of human life.

The character “cannot be predicted and cannot be calculated” on the strength of its fate, precisely overshadows and motivates the lives of archaic people blindly and darkly (Dewantara, 2019: 111). Although blind and dark, the power of fate still plays a role to guide their lives. Archaic humans actually reveal and demonstrate the forces of this fate through mythological stories and certain belief practices. The ancient Greeks recognized Moiren as the goddess of fate that played a role in humans. The Mesopotamian tradition introduces “Me” as a power of fate that is dark and cannot be calculated. The Indonesian archipelago community knows the myth about “Hambaruan” from the Ngaju-Dayak tribe, Kalimantan (Zoetmulder: 1965: 112). Some of these examples present a basic idea that the power of fate is so strong, that archaic humans in this phase must accept it as something natural and not have to question it. If someone suffers, then the suffering must also be accepted as one fate.

Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian history reflects the second phase of human experience, which is already somewhat different. Ancient Egypt was based on a phase of state and community life that followed a single world order law covering all fields of life. In this orderly law, a leader must guarantee the world order which is seen as divine cosmic order. Socio-economic and political relations in society not only allow the growth of myths about the orderly and chaotic cosmos as their opponents, but also enable the development of an understanding of a divine cosmic order law. There is an orderly law which guarantees both the life of the community and the life of individuals. This order is a whole that guides regularly, fairly, and correctly. Justice is identical with the divine cosmic order law. In ancient Egyptian culture, such cosmic order is called “maat” (Dewantara, 2019: 116). People need to practice certain basic teachings to realize “maat” in the world. Parallels of this can be found in Mesopotamian, Zoroastrian, Indian, Taoist, and Old Javanese culture. Complete order in the life of the Mesopotamian people was guaranteed only through the union of the king with “Me”. Zoroastrian followers in Iran recognized the order by the name “Asha”. Indian society names it “Rta” (before the Vedic period) and “Dharma” (after the Vedic period). Chinese Taoism also recognizes the idea

of “harmony and respect” as also exists in Javanese society (Suseno, 2015: 88).

The most important thing in this instance is a basic principle of justice, which is based on cosmic divine order. Ancient Egyptian culture translated this concept into its ethical teachings. The sound of the teachings of Ptahhotep (the city administrator and vizier (first minister) during the reign of Pharaoh in the Fifth Dynasty) for example, is: “Do not commit violence among people, because they will be punished in the same way” (Eliade, 1986: 113). Violence, terror, and murder are various actions contrary to the divine order. The existence of violence indicates that the divine cosmic order does not function properly, because humans do not live it in concrete life. The result is that humans will be punished accordingly for their actions. On the contrary, happiness and justice can be obtained if humans maintain divine order and live it in concrete actions. Divine intervention in human life and equal reward are truly in alignment with human actions. That is the basic idea of justice, which is only reflected in the functioning of the cosmic order law. That principle is known in the Phenomenology of Religion as “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*” (The principle of the link between action and its effects).

How can this concept answer the question of righteous people suffering? Suffering is understood as a result of actions that are not in accordance with the cosmic, divine order. There are violations and mistakes, so the perpetrators must make it up through the experience of suffering. People who suffer are those who must bear the consequences of their mistakes, and do not participate in the enforcement of the cosmic divine order. The guilty human must suffer for making amends. In this principle, there is no place for understanding the suffering endured by innocent people.

Mesopotamia: Job of Sumeria

The third phase shows a phase of experience that indicates the malfunctioning of the divine order. The divine cosmic order has been destroyed because suffering is not in accordance with the principle of “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*”, or at least, the experience of suffering questioned the validity of that principle again. The history of religion shows several phenomena that reflect this problem. Mesopotamian sources, especially the four sources: the Sumerian Job, the title of bel nemeqi, Theodizea Babylonia, and AO 4462 reflect problems that the concrete experience of suffering proves the existence of another understanding of the principle of “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*” as the principle of justice (Eliade, 1986: 66).

The teaching that people who suffer is the result of sin and guilt turns out

to be incompatible, as in the poem about the Sumerian Job. The poem tells of a man who suffered deeply. His suffering was not due to his mistakes, but of the evil power that fell him (Eliade 1986: 89). People in general still hold fast to the teachings of justice according to the principle of “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*.” The public said that the suffering was the result of his mistakes. The most appropriate attitude of the suffering person is to humbly acknowledge the power of the gods while praising the justice of the gods. This poem about the Sumerian Job turned out to show another alternative understanding. The starting point is the empirical experience of the concrete suffering faced with the ancient ideological-dogmatic understanding. Schmid (1966: 90) in his book “*Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*” shows the possibility of another understanding when talking about the Sumerian Job.

Samawi Religion

The problematic suffering of innocent people in the poetry of the Sumerian Job is sharpened in the story of the Prophet Job from the Old Testament in the Bible and the Holy Quran. Job’s concrete experience says that the teachings of “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*” no longer work. The understanding of God’s justice has also changed. God introduced Job as the most devout person in the world at the beginning of this book. Job holds the basic position that his suffering is not the result of sin and guilt (Pareira, 2000: 69). Job felt he unjustly suffered (Lasor, 2005: 56). This stance is clearly reflected in his rejection of the advice of his three friends (Job 3-31) and Elihu (Job 32-37) who remained fixated on the principle of “*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*.”

Job did reject the arguments of his three friends and arrived at an introduction that with the suffering he was experiencing, new wisdom would emerge. The new wisdom was that Job must accept and acknowledge every cosmic order that could afflict humans any time, any place. The suffering that arose not because of his mistakes apparently cannot be explained rationally. Job was encouraged to see and transcend his narrow understanding of humanity. Schmid (1966: 135) comments that the Book of Job does not focus on healing illness and suffering, recognizing a cosmic law which was then very strongly described theologically at the end when God answers Job (Book of Job, 38).

Job’s suffering in verses containing God’s answer to Job needs to be understood as God’s power that functions to regulate and guarantee cosmic order. The old wisdom principle (“*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*”) is thus not a closed, fixed principle (Stevanus, 2019:113). The law of justice needs to be interpreted in a new way based on the empirical, historical experience of a pious person who must suffer though it is not the result of his own sin (Pareira, 2000: 99). In fact,

Job was a very pious person, even though God still allowed him to experience suffering. (Illu, 2019:105).

Eastern Religion

The problem of suffering as experienced by Job is not much reflected in China, but according to Klimkeit (1988: 89), this kind of thing can be traced to the concept of “Tao” in Confucian ethics. Confucian ethics revived the doctrine of “Tao” for the malfunctioning of the cosmic order of the Chou period. “Tao” is understood as a fair ethical code of conduct (Bahm, 2012: 108). One must live the “Tao” by carrying out virtues (Te) that are demanded of him, and carrying out the rites and customs (Li) passed on to him. Justice is achieved through that path, and people acting in this way are called virtuous people. The Book Lun-yu XV, 17 as quoted by Fang (1957: 52) says:

“... virtuous people see justice as essential. He does it according to manners, expresses it with humility, completes it with honesty and sincerity. That is the way of life of virtuous people...”

Virtuous people bring influence to their surrounding environment, including fellow subordinates. Virtuous people are the main pillars of society. Harmony and justice are guaranteed by Him. Harmony will be disrupted and people will suffer if humans do not experience the “Tao” (Bahm, 2012: 115). The conclusion from this point is that justice is not understood in a closed dogmatic principle. The suffering of the pious is a fact that opens up new understandings to free oneself from a principle of wisdom that is no longer suitable from time to time. The whole reality that is full of mystery refers more to a scope that is mutually pervasive, mutually transcends between dimensions (worldly and eschatological), or between immanent and transcendent. This process runs in secret.

The Phenomenology of Religion mentions several religious phenomena that reflect the process of mutual-pervasive between the immanent and transcendent dimensions. The process of breaking through the embodiment of justice in the eschatological dimension and the present dimension is experienced in the willingness to die as a martyr in extreme religious groups. A similar process is also reflected in the teachings of Mahayana-Buddhism. Early and classical Buddhism did not recognize the notion of needless suffering, because all suffering was caused by trials, but Mahayana-Buddhism illustrates a new relationship with suffering through the understanding of “Bodhisattvas.” Klimkeit (1988: 77) explains that

Bodhisattvas take over and endure suffering willingly to free the suffering of others. The problem of justice and the suffering of innocent people in the historical context is understood as the realization of the pervasive reality between the eschatological and present-day dimensions.

RELIGION INTERPRETS THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Religion from ancient times continues until now to wrestle the problem of the suffering of innocent people. The justification for the existence of suffering is often associated with the existence of God who is in power to do everything, including allowing godly people to experience negative life situations (Dearbantolo, 2020:78). When observing the symptoms of the world today, the question of justice and the suffering of the righteous is included as a very actual phenomenon. War, conflict, the plague of COVID-19, and violence throughout the world bring casualties to innocent people. Religion in the context of the reality of modern life seems powerless to confront the hedonic arguments offered by the modern world (Sentosa: 2015: 181).

The religious fundamentalism movement actually shows the inability of religion to confront this reality (Zada, 2002, 96). In this phase, it is not a matter of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., but a matter of religious reality which Schmid (1966:78) refers to as a transcendent reality that originates from the opposite world. This transcendent reality is in the process of infiltrating and breaking into the reality of the world today through the revival of religious humanist consciousness to offer salvation or deliverance from the threat of total destruction. The real function of the Phenomenology of Religion is to reflect philosophically on the threat of total human destruction, both threats that come from the negative impact of worldly forces and other sources.

Religious people are encouraged to be more intelligent and to reject total destruction (which arises due to suffering). Desperation was firmly rejected by various religions. The phenomenon of all religions says that God has power over all things, also over human suffering. Humans often silence the suffering experienced by evil people, but often wrestle violently when the same thing happens to godly people. Eastern religion says that this is karma, the fulfillment of the law of sowing, and the like. The suffering of pious people is often questioned. "Why did my father who was a doctor die of exposure to COVID-19 from the patients he treated? Why are innocent babies killed by wars inflicted by evil political power? Why did the prophet's experience rejection? "These are a series of questions waiting to be solved by religion and philosophy.

Religious people are always looking for the meaning of life. Wittgenstein (1979: 74) says: “to believe in God means to see that life has meaning ... and to understand the question about the meaning of life.” Understanding suffering in this perspective also helps understand the deepest meaning of life itself, driven by the belief in God. Nugroho (2015: 136) said that the action to deepen the meaning of life is a very valuable and noble leap, because this is how humans become better at living their lives.

Life is not to suffer and die silly. Life is also not filled with depression and sadness, because God created humans clearly not to make them suffer (Supriyadi, 2016: 79). Even woe to those who deliberately create suffering for others! Indeed, life is surrounded by a great mystery of suffering, and inevitably humans have to cope with it. God’s justice is too narrow if measured only from the point of suffering, even the phenomenon of all religions shows that there are pious figures (eg Buddha, Isa Al Masih, Noah, Job, Daniel) and the prophets (Sitepu, 2014: 78) who voluntarily suggest something that is caused precisely not by their mistakes (Dewantara, 2017: 10). These godly figures embraced suffering consciously, and there was not even a tone of despair there.

CONCLUSION

Suffering is not sent to destroy the righteous, but instead will purify the righteous even more. Suffering is the reality of religious people, so suffering is an important theme of almost all religions. The negative and depressing color of suffering invites religions to discuss it. Various religions do not view it as fatalistic, but consider suffering as a constitutive reality of all humans. All human beings must suffer, but faith makes humans have a different perspective in reacting to it. No human can rise nobly without experiencing suffering. There are difficulties that are born from human error, but there is also depression that also occurs. Relevant questions to ponder are: “Have loads, the Coronavirus, outbreaks, landslides, high cost economics, accidents, earthquakes, and various other misfortunes arisen because of our mistakes or did they just happen?”

If indeed everything happened because of human greed in exploiting nature, it would be a human responsibility to improve it. If the deterioration of the nation occurs because of corrupt behavior, it is a human obligation to take corrective measures. If a transportation accident occurs because of human carelessness, then it is a human responsibility to fix it. But what if everything bad that happened was not due to human error? It is at this point that man’s faith is challenged with a clear resurrection after it occurred, just as Job was righteous but had to experience suffering. All events must have meaning, and the task of religious people to interpret them.

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