Divine Justice



Murtada Mutahhari

Martyr
Murtaḍā Muṭahharī

Divine Justice

('Adl e Ilāhī)

Translated by
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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Foreword

The issue of Divine Justice is an important one in the history of Muslim intellectual thought, and it has given rise to important works in different periods of Islamic thought in areas like theology, law, and Islamic politics.

Because of the importance of the issue to Muslims, Muslim thinkers authored numerous works about the topic and various Islamic schools of thought gave it special importance. Thus, the topic of Divine Justice and researching the various views of different Islamic sects with respect to it has great importance in terms of the history of Islamic thought. In addition, the proliferation of atheistic and anti-religious movements in the modern era has bestowed renewed importance on the topic. Divine Justice can be studied from various dimensions. One of the most important contemporary challenges facing belief in God is the issue of evil, such that some philosophers of religion in the West mention evil as proof of the nonexistence of God. Utilizing the heritage of Islamic philosophers and relying on the transcendental philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā, the author has striven to present Divine Justice in a logical way; and with attention to the issues of free will and predestination and the ill effects of predestination, he has tried to explain it in a such a way that natural evils—unpleasant things like illness, floods, earthquakes, and so on—find a logical place in the edifice of theist thought and are no longer portrayed as evidence for atheism. In the author's view, Christian and Western theology has weaknesses that render it unable provide fitting answers to objections about Divine Justice. Thus, he has dealt with the topic of Divine Justice and its various dimensions and corollaries in numerous works, and by explaining the authentic Islamic belief he has aimed to prevent intellectual deviation in the young generation. He has dealt with this and related topics like the Argument from Design in the books *Man and Destiny* and *Causes of Inclination to Materialism* as well as in the lessons on "Ilāhiyyāt" of *al-Shifā*. The summation of his efforts in the present work—as he himself has said—is to present the issue of Divine

Justice in terms of creational or ontological justice in a new and novel way. The issue of Divine Justice in terms of legislative, legal, and also social justice has been discussed in the author's other books, such that by observing his works it can be understood that the issue of Divine Justice had a central role in the late author's thought. In this work, he studies the most fundamental issues related to God's justice. Another point that can be mentioned about the importance of Divine Justice in the author's thought is that in his view, a worthy and coherent solution to the issue can have an important effect on the dynamism of Islamic thought. It is for this reason that the International Center for Islamic Studies and the World Conference on Motahari's Thoughts requested the able translators Shuja Ali Mirza, Murtaza Alidina, and Syed Sulayman Hasan to take on the translation so as to allow the friends of wisdom and knowledge the world over access to this important work. It is our hope this measure, in addition to protecting the Islamic faith of the young generation, makes possible the progress and revival of Islamic civilization.

Research Department of the
International Center for Islamic Studies

Preface to the Translation

As a subject of inquiry, "Divine Justice" traditionally falls within the province of theology and *kalām*. Theologians of all ages and religions have had to grapple with this topic, mainly because of its centrality within the ideology and dogma of religion, and because of the consequences it has for the faith of believers. For it is held that until the knowledge of God is not spelt out and objectively understood, man can not correctly place himself in the grand scheme of things, and subjectively stands in danger of losing his bearings and going astray. In this appraisal of things, conceptual knowledge of the truth has direct implications for the human soul and its ability to will the good. To put it differently, it is not until man knows the ultimate Truth to be also the absolute Good, that he can himself be truly good and perform acts of virtue over and against vice. Hence the pressing need to absolve God of all evil on the one hand, and to instil man with freedom of will on the other. It is for this very reason that the "Problem of Evil" and the debate on "Freewill and Predestination" figure so prominently in discussions on Divine Justice, this present study being no exception.

Having stated that the discussion at hand is the special prerogative of theology, it is important to note that the author of this book is exceptional in that he chooses to approach the subject from an altogether different perspective. He uses philosophy as his base and primarily applies philosophical methods to solve the problems and questions that surround the issue of Divine justice. This departure from the norm is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows the level and substance of the author himself—that he was not just an Islamic ideologue, dogmatist, or activist given to fiery apologetics, but beyond that, he was a seeker of truth and a philosopher in the best sense of the word. Secondly, it belies the inadequacy of the theological approach—something which the author explicitly mentions in his introduction. Thirdly, and as an indication of how and

why an inadequacy was perceived in the first place, it bespeaks of the situation cum dilemma of religion in the modern world. This last reason will be briefly explained in what follows, as it is an inherently significant matter and will throw into relief the importance of this work.

Religion is from God and is His special device for mankind by which the greatest number possible are saved. But given the nature of fallen and falling man, religion is obligated to speak to him on his own grounds and at whatever point it finds him on the arc of descent. So where the former generations had more of a direct access to Revelation and the vision of the prophet through whom the religion was established, the latter—due to their distance and the entropic conditions of the Fall—have more difficulty in "seeing" the truth. They need to be helped from the outside, so to speak. They require aids to achieve the vision and intellection of the former generations. These aids and "artificial" constructs are providentially provided, and are a part and parcel of the religious tradition as a whole. So while they are in reality instruments which compensate for the overall decline, they are seen ostensibly as "developments." After the initial vision there is for instance the development in the religious universe and orthodoxy of a doctrine, theology, ideology, sociology, and political system.

Now, as far as the Islamic tradition goes, the problem of evil and the issue of Divine justice—something which from the Qur'ānic perspective is not a problem at all and is a non-issue—became the subject of heated debate on the level of theology. For a time the theological answers, ones that pertain to a discursive and rational understanding of religious truths, were satisfactory and sufficient, as reason was still based on higher levels of the intellect and the sense of the sacred and holy was still alive and strong. Further on this was not the case and reason was increasingly divorced from its higher principle—namely the sacred intellect or *al-'aql al-qudsī*—and a purely human rationality came to take its place; a rationality that insisted that all aspects of being fall within the pale of its discursive and deductive methods. To complicate matters even more, in the Christian world—which was further ahead in its decline

and due to its greater emphasis on the moral and ethical level—the problem of evil took on humanistic connotations and gravitated towards what might be called the justification of "personal" evils and suffering. Evil was now described as "the sum of the opposition...to the desires and needs of individuals," something very different from the privation of being and goodness that St. Thomas had earlier postulated. With the advent of the modern age, these sentiments found their way into Muslim lands and compounded the existing problems caused by materialist and rationalist tendencies. It is under these complex and trying conditions that the author gave a series of lectures on the topic of Divine justice and chose to proceed as he did.

To explain, as extreme situations call for extreme measures and further decline and deviation call for greater corrective and compensatory actions, the author consciously chose to up the ante and go the next higher level of intellectuality in his responses to the objections on Divine justice. Moreover, even within the field of Islamic philosophy, he did not suffice himself with the peripatetic school of thought, but rather employed the firm bases of the transcendental school of Mullā Ṣadrā and its emphatically unitive view of being. Finally, by his constant use of and reference to the works of great Persian poets such as Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī, he alluded to the further development of the subject at the hands of the *'urafā'* and mystics of Islam.

Thus, with the framework of transcendental philosophy in place, the author makes his final argument in favour of Divine justice by holding that "justice" is a formal Divine attribute that is inseparable from His essence and other Divine attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence. Hence the justice or injustice of Divine acts should not be sought on the level of His operation and efficiency. His justice is as necessary as is His existence. He further holds that evil exists not as an objective fact, but as a subjective notion; things are evil not in and of themselves, but by reason of their relation to other things. All realities are in themselves good. Any perceived evil is subsumed under God's infinite wisdom and is ultimately good. On the question of moral evil and the issue of human free will, the argument takes on a different shape. He states, as is the classical

Shia position, that it is not the case that man is totally predestined and under Divine decree and compulsion, nor is it true that he is totally free and beyond the scope of the Divine will. Rather, the reality is something between the two positions. In an attempt to try to locate this "something" the author says that, "the Divine decree and destiny which has willed the human has also willed his freedom of choice." In other words, man is compelled to be free.

This paradoxical way of speaking is the forte of the mystics. It is an attempt to try to get man to go beyond the dualisms of discursive rational thought and to arrive at a unitive understanding—by way of a direct knowledge or "tasting"—of the fundamental matters of being. It is to try to overcome the dichotomy implicit in the knower-known paradigm and to achieve a vision of the unity that comprehends and composes all reality. The supra-rational resolution of this paradox is accomplished by the perfect man and it unites him with his Maker in such a fashion that he becomes God's hand, face, and hand on earth, and in short, His vicegerent *(khalīfah)* and highest manifestation.

It is appropriate here to quote Imam Khumaynī,[1] the author's teacher and perpetual source of inspiration, who writes:

> In conclusion, it is known that both *tafwīḍ* (free will) and *jabr* (compulsion or predestination) are invalid and impossible on the basis of metaphysical reasoning and rational criteria. The creed of the middle position *(amr bayn al-amrayn)* is one which is affirmed by the way of the people of gnosis as well as by transcendental philosophy. ... That which is the soundest of views and most secure from controversy and more in consonance with the religion of *tawḥīd* is the creed of the illustrious gnostics and the people of the heart. However, this creed, on every topic pertaining to the Divine teachings, stands in the category of "simple and impossible" *(sahl wa mumtani')* whose understanding is not possible through discursive proofs and arguments and is

unattainable without complete piety of the heart as well as Divine succour.[1]

Having said this, Imam Khumaynī acknowledges the need to discuss the topic by way of logical demonstration and philosophical discourse—as rationality, positively seen, is nothing but the shadow of the sacred intellect. What follows is perhaps one of the best attempts at such an explanation and places this book among the classics of contemporary Islamic literature.

* * *

Some notes about the translation are in order here. The translation is unique in that it was done by students of the *Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah Qum*, who are is some wise familiar with the theological and philosophical arguments contained in this work. Parts of it were carried out during Muḥarram of 1425 while the translators were involved in the commemorative ceremonies of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn ('a) on three different continents. This, alongside the time constraints, presented considerable logistical problems which, by the grace of Allah, were overcome. A final editing was done to ensure the consistency of terminology used. The quotes from Persian poets—which occur quite often in the book—were researched, and in most cases the references to either the original or published English translations were found and documented in the footnotes. Endnotes were added that contain the lengthy explanatory notes not appropriate for footnotes, biographical material on most of the important personalities mentioned in the text, and the original text—in Persian or Arabic—of many of the poems and traditions quoted in the work.

Translations of Qur'ānic verses were mostly adapted from the recent translation by Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī titled *The Qur'ān with an English Paraphrase*. Most of the biographical endnotes are the contribution of Ḥujjat al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn Ḥamīd Pārsāniā. A number of individuals were helpful in finding the references for and explaining the meanings of the many

[1] Sayyid Rūḥullāh al-Mūsawī al-Khumaynī, *Forty Ḥadīth*, ḥadīth 39.

instances of Persian poetry that occur in the book. Among them we may especially mention Āqā Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Arābī and Maḥmūd Najafī. We would like to acknowledge with gratitude here the help of all these people, as well as those others who have gone unmentioned.

Shujā' 'Alī Mīrzā
Qum
8 Ṣafar, 1425/March 29, 2004

About the Author

Martyr Murtaḍā Muṭahharī was born in Farīmān, in the province of Khurāsān (Iran) in February of 1919. His father Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn[i] was a religious scholar and a pious man who spiritually inspired the precocious Muṭahharī. At the age of twelve, he joined the traditional Islamic School at Mashhad where he pursued his studies for five years. Then he proceeded to Qum, the famous theological Centre of Shia Muslims where for fifteen years he pursued his religious education under the supervision of Ayatullah Burūjardī in jurisprudence and its principles (who had comprehensive knowledge of Islamic sciences and remarkable insight in socio-political issues), Imam Khumaynī[ii] in spirituality and principles of jurisprudence, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī[iii] in Islamic philosophy, and Mīrzā 'Alī Āghā Shīrāzī[iv], amongst many other distinguished scholars.

In 1952 he migrated to and settled in Tehran, teaching traditional Islamic philosophical texts in Madrasah-i Marvī and modern Islamic philosophy in the Faculty of Theology at Tehran University. More importantly, he devoted his scholarly research to contemporary challenges to the Islamic faith, creating a rich and profound legacy of original exposition of the Islamic world-view which he presented through lectures, articles, and books to Islamic associations of students, doctors, engineers, traders and in mosques and which covered issues ranging from Islamic philosophy, responses to communist arguments against religion, doctrinal matters like Divine unity and justice, predestination, Resurrection, commentary of the Qur'ān and *Nahj al-Balāgha*, social issues like *ḥijāb*, women's rights, economic issues like an Islamic economic system and banking

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[i] "who was my first guide through his faith, piety and integrity"

[ii] "an important part of my personality was shaped in those spiritual and other classes over twelve years"

[iii] "he was inspired by God in his exegesis of the holy Qur'ān"

[iv] "whenever I recount the past, my biggest spiritual treasure is having won the company of this great man"

without usury, and political topics like global Islamic movements and revolution in Iran.

Politically, he engaged in covert struggle against the Shah's tyranny and in 1963 was arrested along with Imam Khumaynī. After the latter's exile to Turkey and later to Najaf, he maintained close contact with his mentor for fifteen years and guided the Islamic resistance movement, culminating in the victory of the revolution. Subsequently, he was nominated President of the Revolutionary Council, but his activities were intolerable for the followers of the materialistic schools whose deviation he actively opposed and exposed, who therefore decided to eliminate him. Eventually they assassinated this eminent scholar on May 1, 1979. His martyrdom was a great tragedy for the revolution and the Muslim *ummah*. When the sad news was conveyed to Imam Khumaynī he could not control his tears (he held his beard and cried "Muṭahharī! Muṭahharī! Muṭahharī!"). In his condolence message he said: "In him I have lost a dear son. I am mourning the death of one who was the fruition of my life."

His bier was laid to rest in Qum in the precincts of the Holy Shrine of Fāṭima al-Ma'ṣūma, the sister of the eighth Shia Imam, in Qum. May his soul rest in peace.

Murtaza Alidina
Qum
7 Ṣafar, 1425/March 28, 2004

Divine Justice

Introduction

From the perspective of religion, our age is an age of anxiety, ambiguity and crisis—most especially for the youth. The conditions of this age have not only brought with them a recent set of doubts and questions, but they have also taken old and forgotten issues and have tabled them afresh.

Should we become upset and anxious in the face of these doubts and queries—especially as sometimes they are quite extreme?

In my opinion there is no reason to be upset; for doubt precedes certainty, questions are prior to answers, and anxiety is a prelude to tranquility. Doubt is both a good and necessary point of transition, even though it is highly undesirable as a station and final destination. The fact that Islam places so much stress on certainty and calls man to think and deliberate alludes to man's initial state of doubt and ignorance, as well as to the truth that he must reach the station of conviction and certainty by way of correct thought and reasoning. There was a certain philosopher who would say, "If my comments have no greater effect than to throw you into doubt—forcing you to set off in search of [greater] truth and certainty, then it is enough".

Doubt is accompanied by restlessness, but this does not mean that just any type of peace and tranquility should be preferred to it. For animals also don't doubt, but does that mean that they have reached the state of certainty and belief? The type of peace and quiet that they are endowed with can be said to be "lower" than and preceding doubt, whereas the tranquility of the holders of certainty is "above" and a consequence of doubt.

Putting aside those very few who are providentially endowed with certainty, the rest come to it by first crossing the bridge of doubt and apprehension. So just because our age is

an age of doubt cannot be seen to be the reason for it being an age of deviation and decline. What is for sure is that this type of doubt is not any less than the simpleminded instances of "certainty" and "peace" that are much witnessed these days.

Now the thing that is a source of sorrow is that the doubt of a person should not lead him to a search for truth; or that the doubts and misgivings of a society should not prompt individuals to answer its needs in this area.

* * *

It has been over twenty years since I took pen in hand and began writing articles and books. During this time and in all of my writings my sole purpose has been to respond to and resolve the questions and problems that have been posed regarding Islamic issues in our time. Even though my works cover such different subjects as philosophy, sociology, ethics, jurisprudence, and history, my purpose and goal in all of them has been one and the same.

Islam has become an unknown religion. Its tenets have steadily been undermined in the eyes of people. The main reason for this fallout of a group of people has been the incorrect teaching that they have been given in the name of Islam. Presently, and more than anything else, this sacred tradition is being damaged by those who would make claims of being its helpers. The overt and covert western "imperialist" onslaught on the one hand, and the faults and shortcomings of the would be helpers of Islam in our age on the other, have led to Islamic thought—in all its fields and branches—coming under attack. Hence I feel that I must perform my humble duty in this regard, to the extent of my capacity, [and defend Islam from these attacks].

Published works on religion, just as I have pointed out in some of my other works, are not systematic. Putting aside those works which are fundamentally damaging and disgraceful, even useful works are not thought out and have not been produced after taking into account the needs at hand. It seems that every author writes and publishes whatever he himself deems useful. Hence there are many useful and necessary sub-

jects that do not even have a single book on them, while there are some subjects that have countless books written on them and more are being written all the time.

We are like a country whose economy is not based on the society at large. In such a country, every person produces goods according to his own taste or imports things according to his fancy, without there being an overseeing authority which regulates these affairs and which sets the levels of production, import, and export according to the needs of the country. In other words, everything has been left to chance. The state of affairs being so, it is only but natural that some goods are produced in excess of their demand and remain unutilised while others are not to be found in the market at all.

So what is the solution? It's simple. Its seeds lie in coordination and consultation that must take place between the various groups of writers and researchers.

Unfortunately though, we are usually so enamoured by our own way of doing things and our preferences, we think that the only correct way is the one that we ourselves have discovered. I have on occasion put forward this proposal to writers, only to find that they see it as a hampering of their style.

I am by no means claiming that the subjects that I have chosen and written about are the most pressing and necessary subjects. The only thing that is being claimed is that I have stayed within the bounds of the [above] principle—according to my own understanding of it—and have, to the extent of my ability, attempted to untangle and resolve the problems surrounding Islamic matters. In so doing, I have wherever possible, presented Islamic truths as they are; for though it is impossible to eliminate deviant practices, it is in some way possible to fight deviant thoughts and erroneous ideas and especially to expose the stratagems of the enemies of Islam. In this endeavour I have tried to prioritise issues and deal with them in order of importance—at least as I see it.

In the last three or four years I have spent a great deal of my time on Islamic matters pertaining to women and women's rights—with the result that a series of articles on the subject

have appeared in magazines and periodicals, or have been printed in book form.

I spent time on this issue because I felt that it was not just a matter of incorrect and deviant practices that have come about as of late [regarding women]—the [real and more pressing] story is that there is a certain group of persons who, in their speeches, school classes, books, and articles, explain the Islamic position on women's rights, limits and duties, in an incorrect manner. These things are then used in propaganda campaigns against Islam. Now it is very unfortunate that the majority of Muslims are not aware of Islam's logic in this—as in many other subjects. As a result of this they have regrettably made many people—both men and women—pessimistic and negative towards Islam. It was because of this that I saw it necessary to demonstrate the logic of Islam on this subject, so that they no longer find faults in the argument, but rather so they start to see that the well-founded and rational arguments that Islam espouses regarding women, women's rights and responsibilities, is the best proof of Islam's truth and supranatural dimension.

* * *

The contents of this book, as was also pointed out in the first print, are the result of the reordering and exposition of a number of speeches that were given at the Islamic Institute—Ḥusayniyyeh Irshād. Needless to say, speeches—at least my speeches—are not worthy of being put into print unless they are fixed up beforehand. What's more, when they are put into printed form, the material of the speech on its own is not sufficient. It was because of this that both in the first print and here in the second print, I reviewed the discussions thoroughly and added a lot of new material to the original.

We can say this much about the topics discussed in this book that all of them are carefully "chosen" and that none of them are there by "chance", as it were. They are issues that were taken up with me many times over—especially by the youth. What I have included in this book is in reality a general

answer to all those that repeatedly posed questions on the subject. The questions were so many [and similar] that they called for a general and public response.

The arguments presented here have two perspectives or dimensions: intellectual and authoritative[i]. Of course in respect of the latter, references have been made to verses of the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams (upon them be Peace). With respect to the intellectual arguments though, it was possible to proceed in two ways or "styles": theological and philosophical. Now because I do not endorse the theological methodology in addressing such issues, but rather see the arguments of the philosophers to be correct and convincing, I totally abstained from using the methodology of the former. Of course, wherever it was called for, I did refer to the arguments of the theologians—and even to other arguments such as those of the Traditionalists *(ahl al-ḥadīth)* and materialists (or sensationalists).

Experts in this field know full well that Islamic philosophers, unlike their theologian counterparts, have not discussed "justice" under a separate heading or category in their works. It is for this reason that the beliefs of the philosophers regarding "justice" had to be derived from their discussions on other topics—presenting me with a formidable task, to say the least.

I have not, as of yet, found any philosophical treatise, article, or even chapter, that deals directly with "Divine Justice" and treats the subject in a philosophical manner. Even though Ibn al-Nadīm in his *al-Fihrist* wrote, "Y'aqūb ibn Isḥāq Kindī has written a treatise on Divine Justice", I do not know if exists at present or not? I also don't know if he wrote it in the manner of the theologians or the philosophers? Some of the philosophers, such as Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī for instance, treated the subject in the manner of the theologians. But if their philosophical opinions are any indication, then we must assume that these theological digressions of theirs were for the sake of argument and oratorical prowess, and not formal proofs.

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[i] Literally "transmitted" or *naqlī*—signifying the recourse to traditions and sayings of immaculate religious personalities and saints who are the recipients of Revelation and Divine Inspiration.

Y'aqūb ibn Isḥāq Kindī, whose book Ibn al-Nadīm mentions, is the oldest of Islamic philosophers and because he was an Arab, he is known as "the Arab philosopher". It is unlikely that al-Kindī would have argued in the manner of the theologians. He most likely used the method of the philosophers.

I have recently been told by a respected scholar that the master of the Islamic philosophers, Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)[2] has a short treatise on this subject which was written in response to a question posed to him. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get hold of that treatise.

In spite of the shortcomings of the philosophers in addressing this issue, theologians—due to certain historical and religious reasons—have made the subject of Divine Justice their forte. It has become such an important subject for theologians that the various groups of theology are measured and differentiated according to their position vis-à-vis this subject.

Predestination and Freewill

Theological discussions made their debut halfway through the first Islamic century—as is discernable from available history texts. From amongst these discussions it appears that oldest one is the discussion on free will and predestination or determinism. The issue of free will and predestination is primarily an issue that concerns man as such and only secondarily involves God and nature. This is because on the one hand, the subject up for discussion is "man" and the question as to whether he is free or predestined? On the other hand, the problem pertains to God and nature—as it is asked whether Divine decree and destiny or the laws of cause and effect in nature have left any room for man's freedom or whether they determine and compel him [to do things]. In any case, because the issue is one that pertains to humanity and has to do with the destiny of man, it is difficult to find a man, with any philosophical or contemplative potential at all, who has not at some point thought of this issue. Similarly, it is not possible to find a society which has entered any of the stages of abstract thought and which has not posed this question for itself.

Islamic society, due to many reasons, entered the stage of scholarly and abstract thought very soon after its inception and one of the very first issues that it grappled with was free will and predestination. It is not necessary to try to trace these reasons as the posing of this question and problem was a very natural development. If it hadn't been tabled and discussed then it would have begged the question that why, in such a society, no attention has been paid to the problem.

Islamic society was a religious one and in the Qur'ān—the religious book of the Muslims—there is repeated mention of free will and predestination, Divine decree and destiny, rewards and punishments.... This, put together with the fact that Muslims put a lot of stress on the intellection and contemplation of Qur'ānic verses—something that the Qur'ān itself has called them to—invariably led to the discussions on free will and predestination.

The Issue of Justice

The discussion on free will and predestination automatically led to deliberation on the idea of "justice". This is because there is a direct connection between free will and justice on the one hand, and between predestination and injustice on the other. In other words, it is only when man is presumed to have free will that responsibility, due rewards, and just punishments take on any meaning whatsoever. If man did not have this freedom then his hands would be tied and he would be entirely at the mercy of the Divine Will and the contingencies of natural forces and laws. In such a case, he would no longer be held responsible and rewards and punishments would be meaningless.

From the outset the theologians were divided into two groups. The first, which favoured free will and justice, was called Mu'tazilah. The second, which opted for predestination, was a group of Sunnis which later came to be known as the Ash'arites. Needless to say that those who opposed justice, did not openly and directly say that they deny Divine justice. This is because both groups claimed adherence to the Qur'ān, and

the Qur'ān strongly negates injustice with respect to God and affirms His justice. What the opponents of justice did do though, is to define justice in a special way. They said: Justice is not a reality in itself that we can describe "beforehand" and set as the standard by which to judge God's acts. In fact, setting such a standard and point of reference for Divine acts is to in some way impose obligations on God and to constrain and limit His will. For can rules and laws be set for His acts which have authority over Him?! All laws are created by Him and fall under His jurisdiction, and He is the ultimate Authority. Any type of "superseding" authority which He must follow is against His absolute Immensity and Dominion. Divine justice does not mean that there are a set of previously defined "just" laws which He must abide by. Rather Divine justice means that He is the source of justice; whatever He does is just, not that He does what is just. Justice and injustice are consequences and derivatives of Divine acts. Justice is not the standard to judge Divine acts by, rather, Divine acts are the standard by which justice is defined.

Mu'tazilites were known for their support of [Divine] justice. They argued that justice is a reality in itself and that God, because He is bound to be just and wise, carries out acts in accordance with this standard of justice. To explain, when we look at the very essence of acts, irregardless of whether or not the particular act is associated with God's creative act or His commandments, we see that some of them are different from others. Some of these acts, in their essence, are just—such as rewarding the doers of good deeds; While other acts are in themselves oppression and unjust—such as punishing those who do good deeds. Now because these acts are different on the level of essence and because God is good and absolute in His perfection, wisdom and justice, He chooses acts that are in accordance with the standard of justice.

Essential Goodness and Essential Evil

The next topic that arose as a "development" and expansion of the subject of justice is that of good and evil actions. In gen-

eral, is it the case that good and evil can be attributed to actions and deeds in their essence? For instance are deeds such as telling the truth, keeping trusts, generosity and the like, good in and of themselves? While telling lies, treachery, and usurpation and their like, are bad and reprehensible in themselves? Are qualities such as goodness and nobility of the order of the real and essential qualities of actions; implying that any action [having this quality]—regardless of its subject or any other external condition—assumes this quality in and of itself while negating the opposite of this quality?

Rationally Derived Realities

As the previous section talked of essential qualities of actions, it perforce touched upon the intellect, or reason, and its independent role in the perception of these qualities. The argument at hand has been put forward in these terms: Is reason able to perceive the goodness or badness of things by itself—unaided and "independently"? Or does it have to take recourse in revelation and the Divine law? It is with this in mind that essential good and evil has been referred to also as rational good and evil.

In this debate, the Mu'tazilites affirmed the existence of the good—essentially, innately, and rationally—and put forward the argument of "rationally derived realities". They said: We obviously perceive that acts are, in their essence, different from one another. We also obviously know that our intellects become aware of these realities without needing to be guided by revelation from the outside, so to speak.

The Ash'arites, in the same way that they previously denied justice being an essential and a priori quality, also denied good and evil being essential, rational, and a priori qualities. They saw good and evil as relative realities that adapted themselves to the conditions of time and space and that were influenced by customs and indoctrinations. Moreover, for the perception of good and evil, they saw reason as being not only in need of revelation, but they even saw reason to be a consequence of revelation.

Because the Ash'arites denied intellectually derived realities, they countered the Mu'tazilite belief in the self-sufficiency of human reason, saying: What's justice? What's injustice? What's good? What's evil? Revelation must speak to these questions; the Islamic tradition—and it only—must be followed in handling these issues. Hence, they referred to themselves as the "People of Tradition". Moreover, the Ash'arites used this name and label to make a social platform and movement for themselves amongst the masses. In other words, this dispute between them and the Mu'tazilah—which was primarily based upon accepting or rejecting the idea of "rationally derived realities"—came to be cast into the acceptance or rejection of tradition (*sunnah wa ḥadīth*) in the popular eye. It was also portrayed as the conflict and opposition between reason and tradition, and for this reason the public platform and popular appeal of the Ash'arites grew, while that of the Mu'tazilah became weaker and weaker.

It is not that the Mu'tazilah disbelieved in tradition, it's more that the Ash'arites chose such a [noble sounding] name for themselves and by placing the Mu'tazilah in the opposing camp, set them up for a fall. What is for certain is that this factor was very effectual in the popular defeat of the Mu'tazilah during the first part of the third century [of the Islamic calendar]. This misunderstanding and error on the part of the masses was so widespread that even some orientalists—knowingly or unknowingly—labelled the Mu'tazilah as "enlightened anti-traditionalists". The truth, as is affirmed by those in the know, is that the difference of opinion between these two groups is totally unrelated to their adherence and loyalty to Islam, or lack thereof. In fact and in practical terms, the Mu'tazilites sympathized and sacrificed more for the Islamic cause than their Ash'arite counterparts.

It seems that usually when there is an intellectualist movement—no matter how sincere—that is opposed by exoteric pietists—no matter how insincere, it comes under these same old attacks and accusations in the public eye.

Even though this dispute between the Mu'tazilah and the Ash'arites started from their disagreement on the rights and

scope of human reason and its independence or lack thereof with respect to the issue of justice and essential goodness, it later spread to other topics, such as *tawḥīd*.[3] In this latter subject as well, the Mu'tazilah believed that reason had a say on the matter, while the Ash'arites felt that an exoteric and literalist understanding of the traditions was what was necessary. We will expand on this at some later point.

The Motive and End of Divine Acts

Now we turn to the fourth problem, which is also one of the fundamental issues of theology and a consequence of its precursors—namely, are Divine acts the effects of motives and ends?

As we know, and is obvious, human beings have motives and ends for their works and actions. In every action, man has a "for" or "because". Why does he study? "Because" he wants to be knowledgeable. Why does he work? "Because" he wants to make a living. For every "why", there is a "because" or "for". It is these very same "because's" that give meaning to human deeds. Every act that has a rational end and purpose—that is, there is good in it—is counted as meaningful. An act or deed without purpose is like a word without meaning—an empty shell. Now of course every "because" and every "meaning", in their own turn, might themselves have another "because" and "meaning". But the fact is that this chain must end up in a reality which is in its essence an end and a meaning. This reality is what the philosophers call absolute goodness or the Good.

In any case, man has a motive and goal for every rational act of his and in response to every "why?" he posits a "because". If he performs an action but refrains from giving a "because", then that action is considered purposeless, meaningless and absurd.

Philosophers have proven that a completely purposeless and absurd act can never be performed by man, as it is an impossibility. All such absurdities are relative. For instance, an act which issues from an imaginative temperament has a purpose

and end that is appropriate to that temperament. Now because such an act lacks a rational end, we call it "absurd" and "vain". In other words, with respect to the agent and subject which performed the act, it is not absurd and purposeless. But with respect to any other source that could have performed it but didn't, it is considered absurd.

The opposite of absurdity is wisdom. The wise act is one which is never—even relatively—without a motive and purpose. In other words, it is an act that must have a rational motive which must in all conditions be considered the better option.

Hence, the fact that any action is wise depends upon it having a purpose and end—one that is rationally acceptable and always the better and precedent choice. The wise man is he who firstly, has a purpose and end for his works; secondly, chooses from amongst the many purposes and ends, the best of them; thirdly, chooses the nearest and best and most expedient means to achieve his end. In other words, wisdom or man being wise entails that he, with perfect knowledge, chooses the best possible conditions for the best ends. Once again, wisdom or being wise necessitates that man have a "because" for every "why"—regardless of whether this "why" pertains to his choice of "ends" or his choice of "means."

Why did you do so-and-so?

Because of this-and-that purpose.

Why did you give preference to that purpose and end?

For the reason of this-or-that particularity.

Why did you use such-and-such means?

Because of this-or-that distinction and priority.

Any human act that can not give a rational answer to "why"—to the degree that it is imperfect in this respect—gives lie to the defective wisdom of the man who carried out the act.

What about God? Are Divine acts, like their human counterparts, the result of motives? Do God's acts also have a "why" and a "because" and involve preponderance and expediency? Or are all these things particular to man—making their generalisation to God a type of anthropomorphism and comparison of the Creator to the created?

The Mu'tazilah naturally became the proponents of God's creation having an end and a motive. They saw God's wisdom—something that the Qur'ān clearly emphasizes over and over again—to lie in that fact that He has specific motives and purposes for His acts and that He—with perfect knowledge—carries out these acts by choosing the best and most expedient means.

The Ash'arites on the other hand, denied motives and ends for God's acts. They explained away the concept of wisdom—which appears repeatedly in the Qur'ān—in the same way that they had dealt with justice. That is to say, it was their belief that whatever God does is wise, not that He does what is wise.

According to the Mu'tazilah, Divine acts are the result of a series of expedients. According to the Ash'arites, it is wrong to say that Divine acts are due to certain expediencies. For, just as God is the creator of creation, He is also the creator of any such things that are named "expediencies"—albeit, without having created anything because of some expediency and without that thing having an ontological, essential, or causal connection with any expediency.

Lines of Demarcation

When the fact that issues of good and evil are rationally derived and the fact that Divine acts are the result of motives were put alongside the two previous issues of justice and predestination and free will, the lines and trends of theological schools became demarcated and abundantly clear. The Mu'tazilah were die-hard proponents of justice, reason, free will, and wisdom (i.e. Divine acts resulting from motives and intentions). The Ash'arites, who still went by the name of "Sunni" or *ahl al-ḥadīth* in that time, adamantly opposed the Mu'tazilah and their method of thinking.

The Mu'tazilah were also called the "justifiers" *('adliyyah)*. This word did not just represent their idea of justice. In addition to their doctrine of justice, it also portrayed the ideas of human free will, rational basis for good and evil, and Divine expediency.

Justice or Divine Unity?

The Traditionalists had a criticism that the Mu'tazilah could not properly answer, it was as follows: Justice (in its meaning where it includes human free will, rational or natural morality and Divine expediency) is not compatible with the unity of God—neither in His acts or even in His essence. This is because the freedom that the Mu'tazilah give man is a type of delegation of authority on God's behalf which negates His own essential freedom. Moreover, it is opposed to the doctrine of the unity of God's acts—something which has been conclusively proven and which is seen throughout the Qur'ān. With the excuse of exonerating God from certain acts that you deem ugly, how can you possibly ascribe a partner for Him in His acts!? For by positing agents who are independent of Him you are in effect ascribing a partner to God; whereas the Qur'ān clearly states:

لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ شَرِيكٌ فِى ٱلْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ
يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلِىٌّ مِّنَ ٱلذُّلِّ وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًا[1]

God, who has neither taken any son, nor has He any partner in sovereignty, nor has He [taken] any ally out of weakness, and magnify Him with a magnification [worthy of Him].[1]

So the wisdom and expediency that the Mu'tazilah posit for Divine acts, runs counter to His essential unity and self-sufficiency as well as conflicting with His incomparability and causal transcendence. This is because when a man performs acts towards certain ends and purposes, he in fact becomes influenced and motivated by those ends. For is it not the case that the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause. That is to say, the final cause is what causes the efficiency of the agent; in its absence the agent is no longer an agent. Now the man who

[1] Qur'ān 17:111

has a motive, purpose and end in his actions is in reality governed by the determinism called for by that purpose and end. But God is free from any form of determinism and limitation, even the one that is caused by a purpose or motive.

The Ash'arites claimed that the issue of innate or rationally derived good and evil and the verdict that Divine acts must conform to this standard of good and evil was like setting rules for God to follow. It was like saying, "God is obliged to make His acts conform to the framework that our human brains have setup." Now of course, the absolute nature of the Divine Will refuses to accept any such limits.

In short, the Ash'arites claimed that what the Mu'tazilah propounded under the name of justice, reason, freedom, wisdom and expediency was firstly, a form of anthropomorphism and confusion between Creator and creation, and secondly, a negation of the unity of Divine essence and acts.

The Mu'tazilah, on their part, held that the beliefs of the Ash'arites were in opposition to the principle of incomparability that is oft repeated in the Qur'ān. They argued: Ash'arite positions necessitate that we ascribe qualities to God that He is absolved of—the Qur'ān being very clear on this matter. Things such as injustice, caprice, and vice become ascribed to Him. This is because if we don't accept Divine justice and human free will, then we must hold that God is unjust; for He has created and made created beings totally obliged [and compelled to do only His will], whereas at the same time he has made them responsible for their actions and goes on to punish them when they sin. So whatever deed man—God's handiwork—does, in reality it is not he who does it but rather it is God. So then it follows that it is God who becomes implicated in vices and crimes, not His creation and vassal. What's more, because the Ash'arities hold that Divine acts are not goal-oriented, God is seen to act capriciously and without purpose. Hence the logical consequence of Ash'arite beliefs is to ascribe qualities to God—such as injustice, capriciousness, and vice—that both reason and revelation clearly absolve Him of.

Each one of the two schools of thought, the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite, had a strong point and weak point. Their strong

points came to the fro when they found fault with the opposing school; and their points of weakness were revealed when they tried to defend their school as a complete self-contained system.

The followers of each of these schools wanted to prove the truth of their school by proving the invalidity of the other school—without necessarily having properly defended their own school and without having answered the criticisms made regarding it. Each school knew the weak points of the other school quite well and hence they fiercely attacked one another.

There is a well know anecdote that goes like this: One day Ghīlān Damishqī, an advocate of the free will argument, happened to meet Rabī'at al-Ra'iy, an opponent of free will, and said to him: "You are the one who thinks that God likes to have people sin and rebel against Him." (That is to say, the necessary conclusion of the belief in determinism and predestination is that the sins of mankind are willed by God Himself, and hence He prefers that people should rebel against Him).

Upon hearing this and without defending his own position, Rabī'at al-Ra'iy homed in on Ghīlān's vulnerable point and said: "You are the one who thinks that God is obligated to like what people like." (That is to say, you think that God wills something and man wills something else and in conclusion, God is subjugated by the whims and wishes of free man).

One day Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār—a Mu'tazalite—was in the audience of Ṣāḥib ibn 'Ubbād. Just then Abū Isḥāq Isfarāi'nī made his entrance. Abū Isḥāq was an Ash'arite who believed in predestination, while Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār was a Mu'tazilite who held that man had a free will. As soon as Qāḍī saw Abū Isḥāq, he said: "Holy God, the One who is clear of all vice". (Meaning that, you hold that all things, including vices, are from God.)

Abū Isḥāq, without bothering to defend his own belief, immediately retorted, "Holy God, the One in whose kingdom nothing transpires but by His Will". (An allusion to that fact that you—Qāḍī—with your belief in total freedom and delegation of power, have effectively accepted the existence of a partner alongside God in His kingdom; you believe that man is in-

dependent in his acts and that he has been left on his own—having no need of God now.)

The Mu'tazilah called themselves "the People of Justice and Unity". "Unity" or *tawḥīd* here refers to the unity of the Divine Attributes. The Ash'arites were of the belief that there were Divine Attributes external to the Divine Essence. For example, they held that knowledge, power, or life were attributes that in reality resided outside of the Divine Essence and like it, were eternal. The Mu'tazilah held the opposite and did not see the Attributes to be apart from the Essence.

The Mu'tazilah saw this belief of the Ash'arites to be a type of *shirk* and ascription of partners to God. They argued: The logical consequence of the beliefs of the Ash'arites is that there exist a series of Eternals alongside God. Now being eternal means that they have no cause and are not created and are essentially self-sufficient. Hence the belief of the Ash'arites leads a person to believe that there are as many Eternals and self-sufficient beings as there are attributes of God; meaning that there are as many "gods" as there are Divine attributes. As the Mu'tazilah themselves did not agree to the separation of the Divine attributes from the essence, they believed that there was only one Eternal.

We have seen why the Mu'tazilah called themselves the People of Justice and Unity—meaning the Unity of Divine attributes. But when it came to the Unity of Divine acts, they fell short of the mark and it was the Ash'arites who outdid them—calling themselves the "People of Unity."

The truth is that while the Mu'tazilah found valid criticisms with the Ash'arite doctrine of the Unity of Divine attributes, their own position respecting it was also flawed. For while the Mu'tazilah did not believe in any disparity between the attributes and the essence, they were not up to the task of proving their identity. Instead, they resorted to the introduction of the idea of the essence "representing" the attributes. This idea was a major point of weakness in their school of thought.

Over and beyond their not being able to properly place the concepts of justice, reason, free will, and wisdom, the

Ash'arites had other weak points as well. They found themselves extremely frustrated on the issue of Divine unity—an issue over which they showed great sensitivity. For instance, with the excuse of defending the Unity of Divine actions, they were forced to deny the order of essential and formal causality and held that everything was the direct and unconditional effect of the Divine will. Now, the experts in the field know that such a belief is in opposition to the simplicity, sublimity, and eminence of the Divine Essence.

Both these schools of thought saw themselves as having to take sides between Divine justice and the Unity of Divine acts. The Mu'tazilah imagined that they had to sacrifice the Unity of Divine acts to save Divine justice, while the Ash'arites thought that they must forfeit Divine justice to salvage the Unity of Divine acts. The fact is though that, on the one side, the Mu'tazilah could not properly expound Divine justice, and on the other side, the Ash'arites could not profoundly explain the Unity of Divine acts.

Although the points of contention between the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilah are plentiful, the major ones are Divine unity and justice. As was previously shown, the theological discussions took justice as their point of departure and ended up in the arguments over Divine unity. Divine unity has stages. There is Unity of the Divine essence, Unity of the Divine attributes, Unity of Divine acts, and Unity of acts of worship. The Unity of the Divine essence means that the Sacred Essence is One and incomparable.

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

Nothing is like Him.[1]

Nothing is on par with His essence. All things are His creation and in need of Him. He is the Creator of all things and independent of everything. With regard to this stage of Divine unity there is consensus among all Muslims.

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[1] Qur'ān 42:11

When it comes to the next stage, the Unity of the Divine attributes, there is a difference of opinion. The Ash'arites denied unity on this level and believed in multiplicity [of attributes].

On the level of the Unity of Divine acts, the situation was reversed; the Ash'arites believed in unity and the Mu'tazilah in multiplicity.

In the case of the Unity of acts of worship, once again there was not the slightest difference of opinion among Muslims. That is to say, no one from among the Muslims was of the opinion that there is "multiplicity" involved on the level of the acts of worship [in principle]. Some Muslim scholars though, chiefly Ibn Taymiyyah, came to hold the opinion that many common beliefs and practices of the Muslims [today] were opposed to the Unity of acts of worship. For instance, they held that "intercession" *(shifā'ah)*, or beseeching and using the saints as mediums [to God] was in violation of this Unity. These ideas later led to the formation of a sect known as "Wahhābiyyah".

The Effects of Islamic Theology on Islamic Philosophy

Though the debates of Islamic theology *(kalām)* remained inconclusive, they did much to help Muslim philosophers on issues of theology. One of the reasons why Islamic philosophy was able to open up new frontiers in theology and increase its distance from Hellenic and Alexandrian philosophy, had to do with this impetus that it received from traditional theology *(kalām)*. Hence theologians can make claims to helping philosophers reach new horizons and posing unique problems—even though they themselves were not capable of resolving any of them.

In addition to paving the way for philosophers by tabling a series of new questions, theologians performed other important services. In particular, theologians were opposed to Greek thought and did not "give in" to it. They attacked and tarnished the image of philosophy and philosophers whenever they could. They wrote books criticising and denouncing philosophy and philosophers—refuting their arguments. It was the theologians

who opened the door of doubt and uncertainty with respect to philosophical ideas. This friction and locking of horns between traditional theologians and philosophers and the resultant vigorous attempts of the latter at trying to escape deadlocks and [conceptual] dead-ends, initiated a certain movement and development in Islamic philosophical theology. Such exertions and efforts lead to flashes of inspiration, revealing new ground and uncharted territory.

The Shia Intellectual School

Among the various schools of theology, the Shia school of theology and philosophy is worthy of attention. The two schools of theology—Ash'arite and Mu'tazilah—that have so far been mentioned pertain to the Sunni world. The Shias, in the same way that they maintained independence in matters of jurisprudence and the "branches" of faith, were also independent in the "roots" and principles of religion: theology, philosophy, and what is termed as Islamic Scholastics *(ma'ārif islāmī).*

The issues of Divine justice and unity were also tabled in the Shia school of theology and philosophy, and the opinions expressed in their regard in this school were some of the most profound. On the four famous issues of justice, reason, free will, and wisdom, the Shia school supported the Mu'tazilah stance and consequently also came to be called "justifiers" *('adliyyah).* But in the Shia school, the concept of each one of these four was different from that of the Mu'tazilah. For instance, in the Shia school the concept of free will was not posed as absolute delegation of authority and freedom—which would amount to a type of negation of Divine freedom and an affirmation of the pure independence of human actions; a type of deification of man, naturally implying polytheism or *shirk.* Instead, and for the first time, the immaculate Imams of the Shia (may Peace be upon them) who were the source of inspiration for the Shia school, put forth the principle of "an affair between the two affairs". Their statement in this regard became famous:

لا جبر و لا تفويض بل امر بين الامرين

Not determinism, not delegation—rather an affair between the two affairs.

Also in this school, the concept of justice—in its most comprehensive form—came to be accepted without compromising in the least the principle of the Unity of Divine acts or Unity of the Divine essence. Justice was put alongside unity and it was rightfully said:

العدل و التوحيد علويّان ، و الجبر و التشبيه امويّان

Justice and unity are 'Alawī (Shia); determinism and anthropomorphism are Ummayad.

In the Shia school, fundamentality of justice, sanctity of human reason, dignity of human free will and sagacious ordering of nature were established without any detriment to the principle of Divine unity—in essence or acts. Man's free will was demonstrated without him becoming a partner to God's dominion and power and without God's will becoming subservient to the human will. Divine decree and destiny was also proven to encompass all of Being without it leading to man being determined in his actions and subjugated to predestination.

All the tendencies in the Shia school of theology were unitive or *tawḥīdī*. To explain: in the debate over the unity or multiplicity of attributes, the Shia sided with unity. In so doing, they denied the Ash'arite belief in this regard and agreed with the Mu'tazilah—with this difference that the Mu'tazilah denied the [independent existence of the] attributes and spoke of the essence "representing" [and performing the functions of] the attributes. The Shia though, held a belief—one of the most profound beliefs in the divinities—in the unity and identity of the essence with the attributes. When it came to the Unity of Divine acts, the Shia sided with the Ash'arites, but with this discrepancy that they did not deny causality. Hence the doctrine of the Divine unity of the essence, attributes and acts was

propounded by Shia theology at a height and intensity not yet witnessed in the world.[i]

In the introduction to the fifth volume of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* we dealt with how Islamic philosophers and divines took their inspiration from Qur'ānic sciences as well as all other Islamic sources—including traditions, speeches, supplications, etc. and hence we do not see the need to expand any further on the matter here.

Because Islamic philosophers were aware of correct principles of demonstration on the one hand, and had recourse to the intuitions of Islamic sciences on the other, they were able to establish—after a millennium of toil—a sound system of philosophical theology *(ilāhiyyāt bi al-ma'nā al-akhaṣṣ).*

From the perspective of Islamic philosophers, justice was seen to be a reality, without this leading to God being subjugated to any determinism or any law, and without it tarnishing in the least His absolute dominion and might. Rationally based good and evil was also explained in a different fashion. It was no longer defined within the parameters of intellectual speculation—such as were worthy and capable of revealing reality. Instead, the issue was brought within the domain of arbitrary and necessary practical notions. Hence it could no longer be accepted as the standard for Divine acts. In consequence and unlike the traditional theologians, the philosophers did not make use of these concepts when speaking on the level of the divinities and about God.

The issue of final causes, ends and purposes [being attributed to God] was also resolved by dividing final causes into final ends of the action and final ends of the agent or actor and by equating the concept of wisdom as it pertains to the Divinity with the concept of Providence and the arrival of things to their final ends. In the view of the philosophers, every action has a final end and purpose and God is the ultimate End—that is, He is the final end of all ends. All things are from Him and go towards Him.

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[i] We have dealt with this subject in our work, *Glimses of the Nahj al-Balāgha* and in volume 5 of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism.* We have also discussed Divine decree and destiny in our book, *Destiny of Man.*

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ٱلْمُنتَهَىٰ

and that the terminus is toward your Lord.[i]

Of course there is much more to all of the above mentioned subjects, but it can not be covered here in this introduction.

The Idea of Justice in the Field of Jurisprudence

The roots of the issue of justice in the Islamic world must not be sought only amongst its theologians. It has other roots as well and they are to be found in Islamic jurisprudence *(fiqh)*.

From its inception, Islamic society was founded on the basis of the Book and Tradition *(sunnah)*. This community obtained its laws and regulations—whether personal, commercial, civil, penal, or political—from Revelation. Religious responsibilities were clear at the outset because the Qur'ān was explicit in its rulings on matters and because Tradition was established and there was easy access to the Prophet or the Imams (according to the Shia). But where there was no explicit verse or evident tradition on a matter and recourse to an Immaculate *(ma'ṣūm*, meaning Prophet or Imam) was not possible, laws were derived and deducted from available sources *(ijtihād wa istinbāṭ)*.

As to exactly when the method of *ijtihād* was instituted and what developments it went through in the Shia and Sunni worlds requires a long and involved discussion whose place is not here. There is no doubt that *ijtihād* existed at the time of the Prophet, or at least from the time of his death. But whether or not it was correctly carried out at that time or not is another question. We have covered this topic in another place.[ii]

Islamic jurisprudence, like other sciences, quickly developed and evolved leading to the formation of different systems. Among the Sunnis, two main systems or schools of jurisprudence developed: the Traditionalist system *(ahl al-ḥadīth)* which was popular amongst the jurisprudents of Medina, and

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[i] Qur'ān 53:42

[ii] See the book by the author entitled, *Ten Speeches*.

the Analogist system *(ra'y wa qiyās)* which was influential amongst the jurisprudents of Iraq.

The methodology of the Traditionalists was that at the first they would refer to the Qur'ān, and if they did not find the ruling on the issue that they were looking for there, they would turn to the Prophetic traditions. If they found the traditions to be different from one another, they would give preference to one depending upon the chain of transmission. But if they either did not find a tradition on the issue, or if they could not give preponderance to any single tradition among a group, then they would turn to the opinions and rulings of the Companions of the Prophet. If this latter way was also to no avail then they would try to find useful hints and intimations in the texts at hand. Hence it was very rare that they would take recourse in analogy or baseless opinions *(qiyās wa ra'y)*.

The methodology of the Analogists was different from that of the Traditionalists. If they did not find the ruling on an issue in the Qur'ān or in categorical and definitive Prophetic traditions, they would not so readily turn to and trust the transmitted *(manqūl)* traditions—for they held them to be for the most part made-up and doctored. They were of the belief that a Muslim jurisprudent, due to his command over and experience of categorical Islamic rules and regulations, was in tune with the spirit of the Law and could come to the ruling on any particular issue by way of analogy and comparison.

Along these lines, the Analogists were of the opinion that "justice" and "expediency" were good guidelines for jurisprudents to follow. Hence it was incumbent on the jurisprudent to ponder and deliberate on the "dictates of Divine justice" and the "callings of expediency." It was due to this that terms such as *istiḥsān* and *istiṣlāḥ* were coined.

The Traditionalist-Analogist Dispute

The Traditionalists saw the method of the Analogists to be somewhat extreme in its referral to reason and faulty in its recourse to traditions. In other words, they saw their method to be a type of short sightedness with respect to the discovery of

true expedients. They would say: The [Divine] Law is founded upon collecting and bringing together differing elements and variegated collectivities—something that is beyond the scope of normal intellects. Reason, by an act of simplification, presumes that it has arrived at the root and spirit of the Law, while this is not the case. For their part, the Analogists would accuse the Traditionalists of being backward and rigid.

In the field of the Principles of Jurisprudence *(uṣūl al-fiqh)* there is a rule known as the Rule of Correspondence *(qā'idah mulāzimah)* or the correspondence of the rulings of reason with the Law. This rule is put forward in this way:

كل ما حكم به العقل حكم به الشرع

و كل ما حكم به الشرع حكم به العقل

The Law dictates what reason dictates

and reason dictates what the Law dictates.

What this means is that whenever the intellect categorically realizes something to be good and beneficial or to be bad and harmful, by way of reasoning from causes to effects we conclude that Islamic Law must have a ruling that promotes this expedient good or repels this corruptive bad, even though we do not find such a ruling in the transmitted sources [of Law]. Likewise, whenever we come across a ruling of the Law—whether prescriptive, proscriptive, or preferred—by way of reasoning from effects to causes we conclude that there is some good and benefit or some bad and harm involved, even though we may not be currently, consciously, and intellectually aware of its existence.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudents, especially those who were more inclined towards analogy or unfettered opining *(qiyās wa ra'y)*, there exists perfect harmony and correspondence between reason and the Law. Islamic laws and rules are not a set of cryptic, hidden, and unknowable laws which demand only [blind] obedience. Rather, intellection and ration-

ality also have a role to play in the understanding and derivation of these laws.

These scholars took the issue of rational good and evil—which was previously discussed in theology—and introduced it in the subject of the principles of jurisprudence and saw those goods and evils as the *manāṭāt* and *malākāt* (i.e. the bases and criteria) of laws. They said: Among the bases and criteria, reason perceives the goodness of justice and benefaction and the evil of injustice and vice more evidently than anything else. It was in this way that justice and injustice began to play the role of a standard and criterion in Islamic jurisprudence.

The Traditionalists held that there were three sources of jurisprudence: the Book (Qur'ān), Tradition *(sunnah),* and consensus. The Analogists on the other hand held that there were four sources of jurisprudence: the above mentioned three in addition to analogy *(qiyās wa ra'y).*

The Traditionalists found fault with the Analogists and by bringing forth a series of examples, they made it clear that depending upon analogy led a person to making mistakes and deviations in apprehending the Law. The Analogists on their part accused the Traditionalists of trusting a series of transmitted reports and traditions whose correctness and validity was not clear.

The Shia Jurisprudential Method

Shia jurisprudence *(fiqh wa ijtihād),* just like Shia philosophy and theology, developed in an independent way. In the jurisprudence of the Shia, the principle of the subordination of the Law to actual expediencies and the Rule of Correspondence *(qā'idah mulāzimah,* or the correspondence of the rulings of reason with the Law) was accepted and the rights of reason in the process of *ijtihād* were maintained. The principle of analogy *(qiyās wa ra'y)* though was refuted by the Shia even more so than by the Traditionalists amongst the Sunnis.

The Shia refutation of analogy was not due to the argument used by the Traditionalists among the Sunnis—namely, reason lacking the authority to be one of the sources of the Law. It

was rather due to two other reasons: firstly, the fact that analogy is based on supposition and not on certain knowledge—it is the preference of imagination over the intellect; secondly, turning to analogy or unfettered opinions is tantamount to saying that the general principles of Islam are insufficient; and this is either an injustice to Islam or an ignorance of it. While it is true that not all the rulings of all issues are spelled out in detail—something which is not even possible because particulars are unlimited, the general principles of Islam are laid out such that they meet the demands of these endless particular instances and the differing situations of various times and places. Accordingly then, the responsibility of a jurisprudent is not to be pedantically stuck on literal words—wanting the particular ruling for each and every event from the Qur'ān and traditions; nor is it his obligation—with the excuse of not having a ruling for a particular issue—to let his imagination go wild and make liberal use of analogy [to come up with a ruling]. On the contrary, the mandate of a jurisprudent is deduction *(tafrī')* and inference by reasoning from the general to the specific (i.e. weighing particular facts or instances against general principles). Islamic principles already exist in the Book and Tradition; only one skill is necessary, and that is *ijtihād* or the skilful correlation and application of general Islamic principles to transient and changing particulars.

In the book *Usūl al-Kāfī*, there is a chapter heading which reads, "There is no issue but that its principle is to be found in the Book and Tradition."

Hence, the principle of justice, the principle of subordination of the Law to actual expediencies, and in consequence the principle of essential good and evil along with the validity and authority of reason made up the foundations of Shia jurisprudence. In the end, the principle of justice regained its place within the edifice of Islamic jurisprudence.

Shia jurisprudence made distinctions between reason and imagination—in other words, between logical proofs and irrational *(ẓannī)* analogies (which are the same as the "analogies" of formal logic). It was affirmed that the sources of jurisprudence are four in number: the Book, Tradition, consensus, and

reason. Hence, while analogy was rejected in this school of jurisprudence, in its stead reason and formal proofs were given credence.

The Idea of Justice in Society and the Political Forum

What has been said so far had to do with the scholarly debate on the subject of justice in intellectual and academic circles within the Islamic world. It all had to do with understanding how it is that the issue of Divine justice—whether on the ontological or the legislative level—was introduced into the Islamic sciences from the earliest times and how it gained such importance that some groups actually named themselves the "justifiers" *('adliyyah)*—counting "Divine justice" as one of their pillars of belief and the distinguishing factor between themselves and other factions. In a similar vein when we Shias recount the pillars of faith, we make mention of "Divine justice" as one of them.

In addition to these academic debates, this issue was prevalent and popular in another form from the dawn of Islam: the application and practice of justice. For in the most rudimentary and basic thinking of any given Muslim, it was abundantly clear that the leader and head of a community must be just, a judge must be just, a legal witness must be just, a witness to a divorce must be just, and according to the Shia, the leader of the Friday and daily congregational prayers must also be just. Consequently in lieu of these positions and posts which called for justice, each and every Muslim felt a certain sense of responsibility. For instance the following tradition of the Prophet (ṣ) had become a commonly used figure of speech:

إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَةُ عَدْلٍ عِنْدَ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ

The best [way of] holy war is [true and] just speech in front of an unjust ruler.[1]

It is remarkable to note what acts of courage and bravery this short sentence gave rise to.

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[1] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 60

The issue of justice, as practiced and applied in society, has a long and involved history which, because it is beyond the scope of this book, will not be followed up here.

The Real Origin

After deliberating upon the theoretical developments and practical aspects that were referred to above, one fundamental question still remains unanswered: Why did Islamic theology treat of Divine justice more than any other subject? Why did Islamic law and jurisprudence table the issue of justice more extensively than any other issue? Why is the word "justice" more widely used in the world of Islamic politics than any other word? The fact that in all of these fields, currents, and levels there was talk of justice, points to the reality that there must be one single root and particular source in the works.

Was there an original current which was the source of these offshoots or which fed and gave rise to these minor streams?

In our opinion the provenance and real origin of the theoretical and practical facets of the issue of Divine justice in the Islamic world must, first and foremost, be sought for in the Qur'ān. It is the Qur'ān that sowed the seed of justice in the hearts of men and cultivated its growth—causing them to be preoccupied with the issue, whether intellectually and philosophically, or practically and socially. It is also the Qur'ān that put forth the issue of justice and injustice in their various forms: ontological justice, legislative justice, moral justice, and social justice.

The Qur'ān explicitly states that the existential and created order is based upon justice and balance—on rights and potentials. If one was to overlook the many verses that explicitly and emphatically negate injustice from the Divine; or overlook the verses that put forth the conclusive argument against man by recounting those modalities of Providence whose existence is a type of justice and man's certain extinction by virtue of their non-existence is a type of injustice; or overlook those verses which explain that creation is founded on truth—the complement of justice; overlooking all of these, in some verses Divine

agency and expediency itself is known as the station of sustentation *(qiyām)* and justice.

شَهِدَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَأُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمِ
قَآئِمًۢا بِٱلْقِسْطِ

God bears witness that there is no god except Him—and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge—maintainer of justice [i]

In other verses justice is called the balance of God in the created order:

وَٱلسَّمَآءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ ٱلْمِيزَانَ

He raised the sky and set up the balance [ii]

It is with regards to this verse that the Prophet (ṣ) said:

بالعدل قامت السموات و الارض

The heavens and the earth are maintained with justice.[iii]

"Legislative justice" means that the principle or idea of justice was—and is—always taken into consideration in the legislative process or lawmaking. This has been explicitly referred to in the Qur'ān. For instance the Qur'ān mentions that the wisdom behind the sending of prophets is the establishment of justice in the human order.

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ ٱلنَّاسُ بِٱلْقِسْطِ

[i] Qur'ān 3:18
[ii] Qur'ān 55:7
[iii] *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, vol 2, p. 638 or vol. 5, p. 106

Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice [i]

Now it is quite obvious that the establishment of the principle of justice in the social order depends upon the legal system being just in the first place and the practice [or legislative] enactment of the law in the second.

In addition to this general principle regarding all prophets, the Qur'ān speaks to the Islamic legislative order in this way:

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّى بِٱلْقِسْطِ

Say, 'My Lord has enjoined justice.' [ii]

Or with regards to some laws, the Qur'ān has this to say:

ذَٰلِكُمْ أَقْسَطُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ

That is more just with God [iii]

The Qur'ān sees leadership to be a Divine covenant and a position [intrinsically] against injustice and attended by justice. For instance when the Qur'ān speaks of Abraham's suitability and worthiness for leadership it says to the effect: When Abraham was tested and came out successful from all of them, it was said to him that We have chosen you for leadership *(imāmah)*. At that point Abraham requested or asked whether this Divine bounty would continue in his progeny. He was told that leadership is a Divine covenant which is never made with the unjust.

لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ

My pledge does not extend to the unjust.[i]

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[i] Qur'ān 57:25
[ii] Qur'ān 7:29
[iii] Qur'ān 2:282

In the Qur'ān, the moral man is called a "just man". In a number of places in the Qur'ān where there is talk of the judgement or witness status of men who are morally and spiritually trustworthy, they are called by the above mentioned title. For instance in one verse:

يَحْكُمُ بِهِۦ ذَوَا عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ

as judged by two just men among you [ii]

Or in another verse:

وَأَشْهِدُوا۟ ذَوَىْ عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ

and take the witness of two just men from among yourselves [iii]

Following the translation of Greek texts in the Islamic world, the Platonic maxim "Justice is the root of all moral virtues" became popular. But approximately two centuries before this saying of Plato was ever known among the Muslims, they had already heard it from the Qur'ān.

Most of the verses on justice have to do with collective or group justice—whether familial, political, legal, or social. I have estimated that there are sixteen verses in this category.

From *tawḥīd* or Divine unity, to eschatology and the End; from prophethood to imamate or leadership; from personal ideals to social goals, all of these are founded upon and revolve around the principle of justice. Qur'ānic justice is among other things: the counterpart to *tawḥīd*, the cornerstone of Resurrection and Judgement day *(ma'ād)*, the objective of the Law of the prophets, the philosophy behind leadership and imamate, the criterion of personal success and perfection, and the barometer of social wellbeing.

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[i] Qur'ān 2:124
[ii] Qur'ān 5:95
[iii] Qur'ān 65:2

When Qur'ānic justice pertains to *tawḥīd* or *ma'ād*, it offers a unique perspective on being and creation; in other words, it gives shape to a certain "world view." Now when justice is applied to the level of revelation (or prophecy), legislation, and the law, it plays the part of a "criterion" or "standard" in legal matters; in other words it forms a foundation upon which reason can stand and be counted as a source of jurisprudence alongside the Book and Tradition. When justice is used for matters of leadership and imamate, it is seen as a "worthiness" and "propriety." When it is used in moral matters, it is seen as a human ideal and aspiration. Finally, when justice is applied to society, it becomes a "social responsibility."

So how could the Muslims have remained indifferent to the issue of justice when the Qur'ān—something to which they gave utmost favour and attention—gives it such importance; to the extent that it sees it as a world view, the frame of reference for knowing the law, the criterion of a leader's merit and suitability, a human ideal, and a social responsibility? It is for this that I believe that we need not tire ourselves in search of other reasons and causes for the pervasive presence of the word "justice" in all the intellectual and practical endeavours of the Muslims from outset.

The ultimate reason for Muslim sensitivity on the issue of justice and its outreach into the fields of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and society was without a shadow of a doubt the Qur'ān. The taking up of different and conflicting positions on this issue—in that some have accepted it in its bare and unadulterated form, while others have watered it down and neutralized it by means of a series of excuses and interpretations—goes back to a number of factors, some of which are psychological, some sociological, and others political. This then was my opinion regarding the real origin and source of the issue of justice in the Islamic community. Other people, depending on their particular perspective, may analyze and deduce things in a different way. For we know as a fact that the followers of certain schools of thought analyze social currents in a different manner. The followers of these schools have readymade moulds

into which, by hook or by crook, they try to force or fit all phenomena.

In such schools of thought class conflicts and social stratifications based upon haves and have-nots, play the fundamental and major role in all movements and uprisings. According to them, all manifestations of human intellectuality, spirituality, emotionality, and art are just reflections of material needs and economic factors; all things are superficial and that which is fundamental and the basis is economy and economical realities. Hence the intellectual, imaginative, emotional, and artistic characteristics of any person must be sought for among his particular class stratifications. If Sa'dī has said, "The essence of human pleasure lies in the stomach," then according to this group it is not only the essence of pleasure, but also the essence of thought, feelings, emotions, imaginations, and in the end anything that can be called sacred. In short, it is as if all paths lead to the stomach.

In the opinion of the followers of this school, if we see that there is talk of justice in a society, then we much search for its roots in economic and social imbalances, and nowhere else. Moreover if we see two groups—in the guise of jurisprudence or theology—opposing one another: a group which seriously supports the principle of justice as a valid world view or a legal criterion and standard, and the other one which denies all of these principles, then we must understand that the intellectual, theological, or legal opposition here actually shows that there is a behind-the-curtains struggle going on. In this opposition, there is a group that is connected with the have-nots and the other with the haves or well to do class. Human thought is but a slave of the stomach. It is impossible for a well to do person to defend the cause of justice, just as it is impossible that a needy person should deny the ideal of justice. Now, in our opinion this is a one-sided and myopic accounting of history. No doubt, material needs are a very important factor in man's interests and tendencies—and sometimes it is even possible to find traces of economic causes in some Islamic intellectual, social, and political debates. But it is not possible to reduce all human tendencies and effects, and all the fundamental elements

of human history, to economic needs. Though it may be too soon to give a categorical judgement on the sum total of the fundamental elements and factors that govern man's individual and social life, what is for sure is that material needs cannot be accepted as the sole and most basic need.

With these rigid yardsticks and moulds, I don't know how one would explain away the fact that, for instance, Ma'mūn, Mu'taṣim, and Wāthiq were diehard supporters of the Mu'tazilah and accepted the doctrine of justice, whereas on the other hand, Mutawakkil—who was from the same class and lineage as they were—had opposing tendencies and behaved with the supporters of justice in the same way as his predecessors did with the opponents of justice.

Or for instance, how would one explain the case of Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād who despite the fact that he was one of the richest men in the world, was a strong advocate of the doctrine of justice; while almost all of the religious scholars of his time, who were also poor, denounced the ideal of justice and were followers of the Ash'arite school.

Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād was a government minister of means who had few peers as he, in contrast to the majority of ministers [of his time] who did not die peacefully and were much hated, remained a minister until his final days and was given an historical funeral—both numerically and qualitatively. Ibn Khalkān writes of him, "No one was like Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād in being able to combine success and prosperity during his life and after his death."

Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād was both a minister in the government as well as being a religious scholar. He lived his life much like the people of his class, the ministers, did—in perfect prosperity. But unlike those other ministers who left the world being despised and whose names were quickly forgotten, he was liked and had made a name for himself. His death was like that of the people of the other class that he belonged to—the *'ulamā'* or religious scholars—with this difference that they usually live their entire lives in anonymity and poverty and only gain fame and acclaim after their deaths.

In addition to the fact that he kept his ministerial post until the end and gained a good name like that of *'ulamā'* for himself, Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād had another unique characteristic: they say that he was the only minister in history whose father and grandfather were also ministers. Three generations, one after the other, passed on the ministerial post as an inheritance. Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād's name was Ismā'īl, his father's name was 'Abbād, and his grandfather's name was 'Abbās. Poets have written the following about him:

Notable after notable inherited the ministry,
Muniment linked to muniment;
'Abbād obtained ministerial authority from 'Abbās,
And Ismā'īl [acquired it] from 'Abbād.

Even with all these endowments and holdings, Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād was an obstinate defender of the doctrine of justice and saw this as a source of honour and pride. He wrote:[4]

If my heart were rent asunder, in its midst would be seen,
Two lines inscribed without a scribe;
On one side "Justice and *Tawḥīd*,"
On the other, "Love of the People of the House."

We see the same phenomena with regards to the justice of the law or the level of jurisprudence. For instance, Abū Yūsuf, the Hārūnī Head Judge, was a rigid supporter of the justice doctrine, while Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal categorically denounced it, despite being imprisoned and tortured [on account of it].

In my opinion then, analysing and explaining away human intellectual and dogmatic predilections exclusively with this criterion of economy and material needs, is too simplistic.

The main reason for having broached this topic in this introduction is double fold: Firstly, we wished to highlight the role of the Qur'ān in the elevation of human thought and intellectual endeavours; secondly, to shed light on the importance and principiality of [the doctrine of justice] from the vantage point of the Qur'ān.

We do not claim that this book has investigated the subject of justice from all of its angles and in an exhaustive manner—so as to be worthy of Qur'ānic sanction. But what can perhaps

be claimed here is that, to some degree, this book has looked at it from the perspective of Divine or "ontological" justice—one of the issues in the overall field of justice that the Qur'ān takes into consideration—in a new and novel fashion.

29 Khordad, 1352
17 Jamādī al-Ūlā, 1393
Murtaḍā Muṭahharī

Conceptual Outline of the Subject

Human vs. Divine Justice

When we humans take into consideration another individual of our species who: does not have bad intentions towards others, does not transgress their rights, is not biased or racist, is extremely impartial in exercising his authority, and who supports the cause of the oppressed and is an enemy to the oppressor in any conflict, we believe him to have a certain type of perfection and hold his actions to be praiseworthy, and call him "just."

On the contrary, when we see a person who: violates the rights of others, is biased in his extent of authority, supports the oppressor and treads on the weak—or at least remains neutral in struggles and disputes between the oppressed and the oppressors, we know such a person to have a type of defect called "injustice" and we label him as an "oppressor" and hold his actions to be blameworthy.

What about God? Is justice a perfection and injustice a defect for God just as it is for man? Or are justice and injustice, as commonly understood, just moral terms applicable to human societies? In other words, are they conventional concepts which pertain to the realm of practical philosophy and ethics *(ḥikmat-i 'amalī)* and not to theoretical philosophy *(ḥikmat-i 'ilmī)*—meaning that they do not extend beyond the human realm and man's voluntary actions?

Now assuming that justice and injustice apply to God in the same human and moralistic sense, that is to say moral justice is counted as a perfection and moral injustice is counted as an imperfection for God, can injustice have any actualised referent with respect to the Divine agent? The question is not being posed from the standpoint in which it impossible for God to do an unjust act. Nor is it being asked from the perspective that sees good and evil, justice and injustice, to be all legal and canonical terms and concepts instead of inherent intellectual ones—as is the opinion of the Ash'arites. These two aspects are another matter altogether and will be discussed later on. So

irrespective of whether it is possible or impossible for God to carryout injustice, and assuming that we have accepted the fact that the goodness or badness of acts is essential to them, or the fact that justice and injustice have actual and concrete meanings, we pose the question from this perspective that justice entails observing the rights of others and injustice is the transgression of those rights. This is to say, in the case where we can speak of rights and there exists an entity which has a greater claim to those rights than others, any infringement of those rights by others will be considered an act of injustice and an incident of oppression of the primary holder of the rights.

It follows, as is obvious, that it is meaningful to speak of priority and lack of priority or ownership and absence of ownership in the interaction and relationship between created beings. For instance, Daniel has priority and ownership with respect to his own life, his personal freedom, and the wealth that he has produced. Likewise, Adam also has precedence with respect to his life, freedom, and income. For Daniel to impinge upon the domain of Adam's priorities and privileges is an act of injustice, just as Adam's transgression of Daniel's privileges is an incident of oppression.

Now what about the relation that exists between the Creator and the created? Whatever the created being possesses is from the Creator. The created being's priority, privilege, and ownership falls under and within the vertical hierarchy of the Creator's precedence and ownership. That is to say, there is no ownership or priority on par with that of the Creator. For illustrative purposes we can compare God's and man's ownership to that of a father and his children. The father procures a toy for each of his children. Every child believes that he has the right of ownership and precedence with respect to the toy that he has been given. Hence, if another child uses his toy, he sees this as a hostile action and one which infringes on his personal rights. But the question is, does the precedence and ownership of the child negate the priority and ownership of his father? Or is it the case that the former ownership is vertically subordinate and subsumed under the latter and there is no contradiction at play here—meaning that if the father were to make use of the toys,

he would in actuality be using his own possessions? God is the absolute owner and has no partners whatsoever. In complete honesty and without a glimmer of allegory it must be said of Him:

لَهُ ٱلْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ ٱلْحَمْدُ

To Him belongs all sovereignty and to Him belongs all praise [i]

وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ ٱلْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ

and to Him all matters are returned[ii]

Accordingly, God's disposal of all things and affairs is in actuality a free right of disposal of things that are His to begin with. In comparison to God, no one has any right of ownership or precedence with respect to anything whatsoever. Hence injustice is negated from and does not apply to God; not because it is evil and God does not carry out evil actions, nor because good and evil have no meaning in the case of God and do not apply to Him—for even if the evil of injustice was innate and essential to injustice and essential good and evil were to govern Divine acts in the same way that they govern over the acts of man—but because a concrete and actual referent for injustice cannot possibly exist in the case of God (as no one has any right over anything relative to Him for injustice to actually take place).

It is said that Sayf al-Dawlah Ḥamdāni, a monarch of the Ḥamdān dynasty, was a well-read man whose court was frequented by the literati. On one occasion and speaking to the literary intelligentsia, which included Abū Farās the pedantic Shia Arab poet, he said: "I have composed a couplet that I deem no one can complete other than Abū Farās."

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[i] Qur'ān 64:1
[ii] Qur'ān 11:123

لَكَ جِسمي تُعلُّهُ فَدَمي لا تُطِلَّهُ

My body is yours, you torment it repeatedly,

But you do not spill my blood [once and for all].

Abū Farās retorted:

قال انْ كُنْتُ مالكاً فَلِيَ الأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ

[the Beloved] said: If I am a sovereign,

Then all things are at my disposal.

Now of course if we take justice and injustice in their common meanings, as moral concepts based upon the doctrine of essential goodness, and go on to explain Divine acts in their light—that is, if we wish to assay Divine acts by reference to the "rights of others"—then we must conclude that in this meaning, God is neither just nor unjust. This is because there is no "other" who has priority or primacy over God with regard to anything, so that by comparison we could label the observance of those rights as "justice" and a transgression of them as "injustice."

Now if we disregard the common meaning of justice or injustice, and instead take it to be a conventional concept limited to the sphere of human social activity, the question arises: is there a concept higher and greater than the common one that would justify the placement of the idea of justice among the ideas of theoretical philosophy and hence taking it out of the sphere of practical philosophy and ethics—which deal with conventional or agreed-upon concepts? If such a higher concept existed then would "justice" become a positive Divine attribute or perfection on par with attributes such as "knowledge" and "power", or at least similar to the attributes of "creator" and "sustainer"? Would "unjust" then be a negative attribute such as "composite", "material", or "limited"? On this basis, would the events and phenomena of the external world be explicable given such a conception of justice, or would it have to be taken on faith? A further point of inquiry pertains to the

Qur'ān. The Qur'ān depends on the ideas of justice and injustice quite a lot. Just what does the Qur'ān mean by these two ideas? It is necessary to find the correct and detailed answers to these questions. What is for certain is that in all religions, man's relation with God rests on knowing Him to be the "Enjoiner or Establisher of Justice." For while it is true that the God of the philosophers—like the "Prime Mover" of Aristotle—pertains solely to man's rational faculty and does not speak to his heart, emotions, and feelings, and is not seen from the perspective of justice or injustice; the God of the prophets on the other hand has dimensions over and beyond the logical, rational, and intellectual. He has an intimate connection with the inner heart and emotions of man. Naturally, man engages Him with these aspects and with love—the relationship being one of human need for a God that is without needs, omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, and merciful. Most definitely one of the attributes of such a God is justice. The question is: how are we to understand this Divine justice?

Justice in its sociological sense is the purpose and goal of prophethood, and in its philosophical sense it is the basis of eschatology or *ma'ād*. The Qur'ān says of the purpose of prophethood:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice; [1]

With regard to eschatology and the accounting and accountability on the Day of Resurrection, the Qur'ān says:

[1] Qur'ān 57:25

وَنَضَعُ ٱلْمَوَٰزِينَ ٱلْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ
نَفْسٌ شَيْـًٔا وَإِن كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا
بِهَا وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَٰسِبِينَ

We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed We shall produce it and We suffice as reckoners. [i]

In many verses of the Qur'ān, God has been exonerated from any and all kinds of injustice and oppression. For instance:

فَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ
يَظْلِمُونَ

So it was not God who wronged them, but it was they who used to wrong themselves. [ii]

The Qur'ān has not sufficed itself on just exonerating God from injustice, it has gone further and in some verses it has explicitly affirmed His justice.

شَهِدَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَأُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمِ
قَآئِمًۢا بِٱلْقِسْطِ

God bears witness that there is no god except Him—and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge—maintainer of justice [iii]

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[i] Qur'ān 21:47
[ii] Qur'ān 9:70
[iii] Qur'ān 3:18

Hence, it is abundantly clear from the Islamic perspective that "Divine justice" is a reality in itself and that "justice" is a attribute that must be ascribed to God.

Various Lines of Approach

Generally speaking, there are various methodologies and lines of approach used in the subject of eschatology *(mabda' wa ma'ād).* Traditionalists, theologians, philosophers, mystics and the adepts of the natural sciences—each have their own particular approach.

The Traditionalists' approach to the roots and fundamental principles of religion is similar to their methodology in the branches and laws of religion, in that they support a strictly exoteric and pietistic approach and are opposed to any type of deliberation, contemplation, demonstrative proofs and logic. According to this group, when it comes to matters of the faith—whether general beliefs or the Law, one must not bring forth demonstrative arguments or ask why. One must be only silent. In the Qur'ān and Tradition, we read that God is alive, omniscient, omnipotent, and willing, as well as just. Hence, we must trust the speech of the prophets and must accept all of these attributes without asking any questions. There is no need whatsoever to think about what justice is or by what logical reason we speak of God as being just. In fact, to deliberate on these matters is an innovation in the religion [tantamount to heresy] and hence is forbidden.

For them justice is a non-issue. They do not see it as at all necessary to answer the questions and doubts that sometimes arise with respect to Divine justice.

Now according to us, the opinions of this group are unfounded. We have dealt with the baseless claims of this faction in the introduction to the fifth volume of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, and hence do not feel that it is necessary to repeat the discussion here.

Aside from the Traditionalists, the other remaining groups permit thought and deliberation and proceed along these lines using various methods of research.

On the subject of justice, the theologians are divided into two groups. One group (the Ash'arites) has come to this conclusion that the attribute of justice is derived from the Divine act *qua* act. They hold that, essentially, any given act is neither just nor unjust. An act is only just if it coincides with a Divine act. Moreover, they insist that there is no agent or actor—whether independent or otherwise—other than God. Putting these two together, they conclude that injustice is meaningless. They have no other definition for justice than this, i.e. to say that it is what God does. Hence all acts, because they are God's acts, are just, and not that God does something because it is just.

For this group, there is no principle or rule in the works. For example, we can not use the principle of justice to categorically claim that God will reward the doers of good and that He will punish the evildoers. Moreover, we cannot even make the claim that God has made such a promise in the Qur'ān and that He will live up to the promise. On the contrary, if God rewards the good and punishes the evil, it is just; and if He punishes the good and rewards the evil, it is still just. If He carries out His promises, it is justice; and if He doesn't, it is also justice. This is because whatever God does is just. As the poet says:

آنچه آن خسرو کند شیرین بود

Whatever Caesar does is savory.

While it is true that the Ash'arites do not denounce "justice", their exposition of the issue is for all practical purposes a negation of the doctrine. It is for this reason that their opponents—that is the Shia and the Mu'tazilah—came to be called the "justifiers" *('adliyyah).* As for the Ash'arites, in so far as their arguments do not justify the doctrine of justice, they are tantamount to a denial of it.

According to this group, just like the first, one can not speak of the issue of Divine justice. But unlike the first group, they are freer and in some sense feel a greater sense of duty when it comes to answering the doubts and questions that arise vis-à-vis justice.

This group tried—as they saw it—to go the route of purity and exoneration. They wished to exonerate God not only from partners and associates in His capacity as Creator, but also from injustice and oppression. It is due to this that they, on the one hand, effectively negated the agency of all things other than God and, on the other hand, they situated the attribute of justice posterior to the Divine act. In this way, they denied the very existence of the essential goodness or evil of acts. They said, the meaning of an act being just depends on the act being attributed to God. In this way, they concluded that God has no associates in His agency, nor does He do any injustice.

In reality, this group did not exonerate God as much as they exonerated human oppressors. This is because the first and most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this line of thinking is that the acts of any given oppressor are not his acts, but God's! Moreover, because God does those acts, they are not counted as injustice—they are rather the embodiment of justice itself. The concept of justice was for them nothing other than acts—and acts are only the acts of God. Now because the acts of other-than-God were by no means even existent, there was no such thing as "injustice." Perhaps the reason why oppressors such as the Abbasid Mutawakkil supported the Ash'arites, lies in the fact that this conclusion was to their liking.

Given this logic and this conclusion, what is the role that the oppressed must play in defending their rights and in carrying out their religious duties? The answer is glaringly clear.

But as to what these theologians say with respect to all those verses in the Qur'ān that attribute injustice to a host of oppressors and the corresponding duty of the believers that it outlines in response to injustice and oppressors—this is a question that must be asked from the Ash'arites themselves.

The other theologians—who happen to be in reality the outstanding figures of theology—categorically rejected the Ash'arite arguments and logic. Unlike the Ash'arites, they neither negated the prerogative of agency from actors other than God, nor did they—with the pretext of [safeguarding] the unity of Divine acts—abolish human injustice and oppression from

the scene. What the non-Ash'arite theologians—the Shia and the Mu'tazilah—did do is confer validity on the doctrine of justice by seeing it as an actual and concrete reality in the phenomena of existence, irrespective of whether the phenomena are attributed to God or not. It is in this way that this group of theologians came to hold the belief that good and evil are essential, rational, and a priori qualities.

These theologians believe that the principle of [essential] goodness can be applied to the Divine affairs and function as a criterion in the same way that it is for human ones. It is for this reason that they always turn to this principle and use it as an authority in the divinities. By using this principle and the self-evident nature of the goodness of justice and the badness of injustice, they transform the issue of justice into a moral principle and proceed to apply it on the level of the Divine. They argue: justice is essentially good while injustice is essentially evil. God, who is infinite intelligence and intellectuality and who is in fact the benignant bestower of human reason, can never forgo an act that the intellect knows to be good and can never carry out a deed that reason knows to be bad.

As for the philosophers, they took another route—one which we will shed light on at some later point. For now it can be said that the philosophers, on the level of Divine acts, negated the existence of associates in the creative process, while at the same time they did not hold that agency was restricted to God. Moreover, while they believed that good and evil were posterior to the Divine act and were derived from existence, they also exonerated Him from injustice. This does not mean that they denied the doctrine of essential good and evil—as they considered the Ash'arite doctrine in this regard to be invalid. What they did do is to limit the scope of these concepts to the sphere of human life and activity. In their view, the concepts of good and evil do not have any place in the Divine realm and can not be used as criteria or standards in the interpretation of Divine acts.

According to the philosophers, God is just, but not because justice is good and the Divine will is engaged in only good acts. They hold that God is not unjust, but not because injustice is

bad and God does not do bad things. The criterion of God's justice, and even the concept of Divine justice, is something else and will be mentioned later on.

In the philosophical perspective, the ideas of good and evil and the goodness or badness of human acts—which are the substance of human morals and conscience—are considered as conventions and not as real and concrete ideas. The value of conventional ideas lies in the domain of practice and application and not in the realm of knowledge. In other words, the instrumentality of the notions gives them their sum total value. For it is the agent in potency, seeking to actualize its end with respect to volitional acts, which needs to create and make use of such ideas as "instruments of the act." God, who is absolute being, all perfection, and pure actuality, does not need such mediating-agencies and ideas or any sort of "instruments" whatsoever.

What is the difference between conventional *(i'tibārī)* concepts or ideas and real or concrete ones *(ḥaqīqī)*, and how does the mind construct concepts such as good and evil? This is an advanced and intricate discussion in Islamic philosophy and one which we can not enter into here.

The philosophers do not negate the efficiency of agents other than God—at least not in the way that the Ash'arites do. In consequence, they admit to the existence of human injustice and the responsibility that man has in trying to remove it from society. On the other hand, because the philosophers do not accept the principle of essential good and evil to be a criterion for appraising Divine acts, they have never applied it anywhere in Islamic philosophy or theosophy; For to apply it would in some sense be to "dictate responsibilities and duties" for God.

The philosophers, just like the non-Ash'arite theologians, feel that the set of doubts and questions on the subject of Divine justice, which will be listed here later on, must be faced and solved.

There was yet another group who claimed the invalidity of the approach of both the philosophers and the theologians, on grounds that their methodology was purely rational and mental and that it was not supported by any real or experimental ob-

servation. They were of the opinion that even in matters of the fundamental beliefs and doctrines of religion, one must follow the methodology of scientists. Moreover, they held that the outstanding questions on the issue of Divine justice should be solved by a study of natural phenomena and the hidden order within creation.

We have dealt with the claims of this faction in the introduction to the fifth volume of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, and hence do not feel that it is necessary to repeat the discussion here. The interested reader may refer to that work.

The outstanding problems and questions regarding Divine justice—which will be dealt with later—were also important for this group and were presented as issues which must be resolved. In fact, they were more important for them because they only had a single line of approach to the issues at hand, namely the argument from design. The philosophers and theologians on the other hand had recourse to a number of approaches. Even if they were not able to resolve the issues of justice and injustice by the methods of logic and demonstrative proofs, they still managed to salvage belief in God based on their faith and the other methods available to them. Due to this certainty, they were able to maintain a general belief in the workings of God's justice in creation, even if they could not give details and specify the exact causes. Such was not the case with the group under question. They were restricted to just one way. Hence if they came face to face with points of contention arising from the created order which their perspective on justice or their assumptions regarding the argument from design found problematic, they fell prey to a weakening of faith and were beset by doubts about God. For them, God's reflection was to be found in creation and in creation only. So if the mirror which was to reflect the image of Divine justice was in any way discoloured or if it was to show something other than the reality, then this would shake their faith to its foundations.

According to this group, it was not possible to speak about God in a categorical fashion without first having resolved the paradox of Divine justice. This is because the outstanding

criticisms on the issue of Divine justice present problems in the proof of God's existence. They do this by disfiguring the picture and argument of a perfect and complete created order from design. Hence we see that 'Allāmah Ḥillī in his *Sharḥ e Tajrīd*, under the discussion on Divine knowledge, asserts that unless the problem of evil and the blemishes of creation are not solved and explained, it will be counted as a defect in God's knowledge and wisdom.

What is Justice?

One of the first matters that must be addressed is the question: What is justice? What is injustice? Until the concept of is justice is not clearly and exactly defined, all of our efforts will be futile and we will be prone to error. Generally speaking, the word "justice" has been used in four senses or for four situations. These will be dealt with in what follows.

A. Balance

If we take a system or collectivity into consideration that is composed of various parts and that is made for a specific purpose, certain conditions—such as the amounts of the component parts and the way that they are put together—must be met before the desired effect is reached and the system subsists and continues to play the role that it was meant to. For example, if any given society wants to subsist and endure, it must be balanced. That is to say, everything in it must be to the extent required, but not necessarily in equal amounts. A balanced society needs various specialties and fields—political, cultural, legal, and educational. These must be divided up among the people and every field must have appointed to it the right amount of manpower. To be a balanced society, it is necessary that the right level and scale of needs is taken into consideration and the appropriate resources—human and material—are allocated. It is exactly here that the ideas of "good policy" and "expediency" come into play; or rather the idea of the "general good", meaning the good that involves the subsistence of the "generality" or "society" and its goals. According to this per-

spective, the part or individual is but a means and is not taken into account independently.

Much the same can be said about balances of the physical world. For example, if a machine that is made for a particular purpose and requires various components for its structure is to be in a steady state, it must have the necessary amounts of those components and elements.

Chemical balances are also like this. Every chemical agent has a particular formula and there is a particular relationship between the elements that compose it. It is only by following the formula and the various quantities that it calls for that a certain balance reached and the agent produced.

The world is balanced and in an equilibrium. If it wasn't, then it would not subsist; there would be no particular order, economy, or continuity. The Qur'ān says:

وَٱلسَّمَآءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ ٱلْمِيزَانَ

He raised the sky and set up the balance [i]

The commentators have said that the meaning of this verse is that a certain balance has been taken into account in the structure of the world. Each and every thing has been made using just the right amounts of the elements composing it and the right distances. In a tradition from the Prophet (ṣ) it is said:

بالعدل قامت السموات و الارض

The heavens and the earth are maintained with justice.[ii]

The opposite of "justice" *('adl)* in this meaning of the word (i.e. balance) is "imbalance" or "inexpediency", not "injustice" *(ẓulm)*. Hence, justice in this first sense of the word is not the subject of our discussion and is outside its scope.

Many of those who wanted to address the criticisms of the Divine justice doctrine related to the problem evil, discrimina-

[i] Qur'ān 55:7
[ii] *Tafsir al-Ṣāfī*, vol 2, p. 638 or vol. 5, p. 106

tion, and disasters, did so by recourse to the balance-imbalance paradigm of justice. They did this by sufficing themselves with the explanation that these evils, differences, and disasters are necessary for the general and overall order of the world. There is no doubt that from the perspective of universal order and the checks and balances required in its maintenance, the existence of all that subsists is necessary. But this does not answer the problem of evil and injustice.

The discussion of justice in its meaning of balance and propriety is with reference to the entire and total world order, whereas in the meaning where justice is opposed to injustice (and not imbalance or impropriety) the arguments pertain to each and every part or individual in isolation from others. Justice in the first sense talks about expediency and good of the whole, while justice in the second sense speaks to the issue of individual rights. If someone was to take the first meaning, an antagonist could argue in the following manner: I do not deny the existence of a balance and propriety in the world as a whole, but what I say is that the implementation of this balance and the observance of this propriety necessarily brings in its wake a series of inequalities and discriminations. These inequalities and partialities are justifiable in the big picture and according to the whole, but they are inexplicable in relation to the individual or part.

Justice in its meaning of propriety and balance corresponds to the Divine attributes of wisdom and omniscience. For it is the wise and omniscient God who, due to His comprehensive knowledge and eternal wisdom, knows what component elements are needed and in what amounts and commissions those exact same amounts.

B. Equality and Non-discrimination

Sometimes they say that a certain person is just. What they mean is that he is not partial and does not differentiate between people. Hence justice is made to be the same as equality.

This definition needs to be explained. For if what is meant is that justice requires all merits to be set aside and that all are to be regarded in one way by an act of levelling, then this "jus-

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tice" is actually injustice and oppression. If an equal bestowal is justice then an equal retention is also justice. The famous figure of speech, "Oppression given out equally to everyone is justice," comes from such a perspective.

But if what is meant by this second sense of justice is the application of equality in cases of equal merit, then this is correct. For justice calls for such equal treatments and these equalities are the corollary of justice. But it must be noted that this meaning is based on the third meaning that will be presented next.

C. Rights—Giving to Each Thing its Due

The third sense of justice pertains to giving to every holder of rights, his rights. Injustice then becomes transgressing, withholding, or disposing of the rights of others. This meaning is the true meaning of social justice—the justice which must be observed in human legal codes and which must be honoured by all individuals. This type of justice is based on two things: First, rights and priorities. In other words, individuals acquire certain rights and priorities with respect to one another. For example, the person who produces a product with his labour has priority with respect to that product. The source and basis of this priority is his work and activity. Similarly, a babe that is born of a mother has certain rights and priorities over the mother's milk. The basis of this priority is Mother Nature who in its purposefulness created the milk for that child.

Another example pertains to an innate character trait of man, who has been created in such a way that he makes use of conventional ideas or concepts as instruments and a means to achieve his natural ends. These notions are imperative and are specified by "musts" or dos and don'ts. One of these is: If the individuals of a society are to be personally successful, they must observe rights and priorities. This is the concept of human justice that the conscience of every person recognizes and accepts. It is this meaning of justice which has as its opposite the reprehensible qualities of injustice and oppression. Mawlānā Rūmī[5] says in his famous poem:

What is justice? To put (a thing) in its (right) place.
What is injustice? To put it in its wrong place.[i]
What is justice? Giving water to trees.
What is injustice? To give water to thorns.[ii]
(If) you put the king in the rook's place, 'tis ruin;
Likewise, (if you put) the elephant (rook) in the king's place, 'tis ignorance.[iii]

This meaning of justice and injustice, because, on the one hand, it is based on the principle of precedence and priority, and on the other hand, it is due to an innate human predilection forcing man to make use of conventions, fabricate do's and don'ts, and abstract good and evil, it is peculiar to man and does not apply to the Divine realm. For just as we previously saw, God is the absolute owner and sovereign and no existent has precedence over Him in any manner whatsoever. However God wishes to dispose of a thing, He has a total right as that thing is dependent on God for its very being and is in His ownership. It is for this reason that injustice, in this meaning of transgressing on another's rights or violating his person or property, is inconceivable in God's case and is impossible in actuality.

D. Emanation or Bestowal of Being on Merits and Not Abstaining from This in Respect of That Which Can Possibly Exist or Be Further Perfected

We will see later on that the differentiation of existents is due to their varying potentials and abilities in receiving grace and emanations from the source and origin of being. Every existent, whatever its level, from the point of view of its potential for receiving grace, has certain merits and rights for itself. God, who is all-Perfect, all-Good, and the absolute bestower of

[i] Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1992), vol. 6, p. 402, vr. 2596.
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 5, p. 67, vr. 1089.
[iii] Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 401, vr. 2594.

grace, gives to each thing its possible existence and perfections. Hence justice is ontologically defined according to this perspective as: every existent acquiring the degree of existence and perfection that it merits and is possible for it. Injustice then lies in preventing an existent from receiving such grace as it merits and is its due. According to the philosophers and sages, the attribute of justice that is worthy of God and is affirmed of Him as a perfection is in this very meaning. In a similar way, the attribute of injustice that is an imperfection and is negated of God is also in the meaning mentioned above.

The philosophers believe that there is no existent that has any rights over God, so that we could speak of God being responsible for giving those rights to it; and then go on to call God "just" because He has performed all of His duties towards others to a tee. This is not the case and God's justice is His graciousness and is identical with His being. That is to say, God's justice lies in not withholding His grace from any creature that has any capacity whatsoever for receiving it. This is the meaning of the words of Imam 'Alī ('a)[6] where he says:

فَالْحَقُّ ... لا يَجْرِي لأَحَدٍ إلا جَرَى عَلَيْهِ وَ لا يَجْرِي عَلَيْهِ إلا جَرَى لَهُ وَ لَوْ كَانَ لأَحَدٍ أَنْ يَجْرِيَ لَهُ وَ لا يَجْرِيَ عَلَيْهِ لَكَانَ ذَلِكَ خَالِصاً لِلّٰهِ سُبْحَانَهُ دُونَ خَلْقِهِ

A right ... does not accrue to any person unless it counts against him also, and it does not count against a person unless it also accrues in his favour. If it were to accrue (only) in favour of a person without (in turn) counting against him, then this (situation) would be solely for Allah, the Glorified, and not for His creatures.[1]

Now with this the only correct yardstick of justice in hand, we must look among the many examples of so called "evil", "injustice", and "discrimination", to see if there really is in these instances an existent among existents that could have existed in the total order but did not acquire existence; or could

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1. Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ('a), *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 216.

have had a particular perfection in the grand scheme of things but did not receive it; or perhaps it was given something that it should not have. In other words, did God give such an existent something that is evil and a defect in place of something that is good and a perfection?

In the second volume of his book *Asfār*, during the discussion of specific forms, Mullā Ṣadrā[7] has a chapter entitled, "What is the Existential Modality of Contingent Existents?" In this chapter he refers to the concept of justice in the meaning and style of the philosophers. He writes:

> You previously saw that matter and form are the proximate co-causes of material things. From their mutual dependency it was concluded that there must be an efficient cause beyond the material and physical one. We will later prove in the discussion on "General Movement" that each and every motion has a metaphysical end. The metaphysical agent and the metaphysical end are two remote causes of material existents. If these two remote causes were sufficient in the existence of material things then material things would subsist forever and annihilation or non-existence would not apply to them. Moreover, they would have all the perfections they merit from the start, their first state being the same as their last. The two remote causes are not sufficient and the two proximate ones (matter and form) are also effectual. There is on one hand opposition between forms, and the initial states of forms are prone to decay—on the other hand, every matter has the potential for accepting opposing forms. Hence every existent acquires two opposing merits and aptitudes, one due to the form and the other due to the matter. The form calls for subsistence and maintaining the present state of the existent, whereas matter calls for change in state and taking on a form other than the first one. Because it is not possible for these two opposing "rights" or precedences to be

> fulfilled simultaneously, as it is not possible for matter to have simultaneous opposing forms ... Divine benefaction causes the completion and perfection of the matter of this world—the lowest of all the worlds—by means of forms. It is for this reason that God in His Divine wisdom ordained perpetual motion and unending time. He also destined matter to be perpetually in flux—constantly changing with different forms through time, one replacing the other out of necessity and every state or form having a specific period so that it can in its turn take advantage of existence. Now because matter is common to these forms, each form has certain rights over the others and demands rights from them. Justice dictates that the matter of this form be given to the other and the matter of the second one be given to this one. In this way matter is passed on hand to hand between the forms. It is because of this "justice" and the observance of the innate merits and rights of things that we see in the world the continuity and subsistence of species and not individuals.

Another question comes up at this point: If all things are equal before God, there is no such thing as "merits" or "rights" for there then to be "justice" as the observance of these rights. So if we speak about justice in the case of God, it can only be as the observance and application of "equality". This then means that justice in its meaning of the observance of rights and merits, and justice in its meaning of the observance of equality, both give the same results in the case of God. Hence Divine justice must dictate that there cannot be any differences and discriminations between created beings. But in reality we see that there are scores of differences—whatever there is comprises contrasts, differing types, and oppositions.

The answer to this is that the concept of the rights of things in relation to the Divine revolves around the need and possibility, or perfection, of existence. Because God is the agent par

excellence and the necessary bestower, He bestows existence or perfections on every existent that can possibly exist or has the possibility for any type of perfection whatsoever. Divine justice then—as we saw in the quote from Mullā Ṣadrā—is the bestowal of universal grace to all existents that have the possibility of existence or further existential perfections, without the least bit meanness or discrimination.

Now as to the question of the ultimate source of differences in merits and potentials: Given God's universal and infinite grace, how is it that things are essentially different—different in their potentials, possibilities, and merits or rights? We hope, God willing, to take up this discussion in the next section.

Objections and Criticisms

Let's see what questions have been posed in this regard.

The first question is: Why are there distinctions and variety in the world? Why is one person white and another black, one ugly and another handsome, one healthy and another ill? Or why, for that matter, is one being a human and another being a goat or a worm? Why are some things mineral and others plants? Why are some people angelic and some others devilish fiends? Why aren't all things the same? Why aren't all people white, or all people black? Why aren't they all ugly or all beautiful? Assuming we accept that there should be differences, why is it that the white man wasn't made black, or the black wasn't created white? Why wasn't the ugly man made handsome or the beautiful woman ugly?

Another set of questions pertain to annihilation and non-existence. Why do things come into existence and then become non-existent? Why has death been ordained? Why does man come into this world and then leave it before he has tasted the pleasures of this life or before having found faith in an eternal afterlife?

To throw light on the connection between this question and the issue of justice, one can quote the saying: "Utter non-existence is better than an imperfect existence." To explain: nobody and nothing has any rights while it is non-existent. But

as soon as it comes into existence, it gains the right to subsist and perpetuate. If it didn't exist at all it would have been better off and at ease as that is better than being created and being taken away as a loser; hence such a coming into being is injustice.

Another question is: Setting aside the temporal limitations of created beings, what is the reason for such imperfections as ignorance, incapacity, weakness, and poverty?

This question pertains to the issue of justice in the following manner: It is imagined that the withholding of graces such as knowledge, power, and wealth from creatures that need them is injustice. In this objection it has been assumed that the thing that has not come into being yet has no rights, but as soon as it comes into being it naturally gains the rights that accompany life and existence. Hence ignorance, incapacity, weakness, poverty, hunger, and the like, are a type of deprivation from rights.

Granted the existence of differentiation and discrimination and the fact that all things must at one point cease to exist, and given the reality that some things come into this world while not being given some of the necessities and accessories of life, the question remains: what is the purpose of disasters, plagues, and calamities that exterminate an existent half the way down the road, or that make its existence full of unease, pain, and suffering? What is the rhyme and reason behind killer-viruses, diseases, oppressions and repressions, robberies, floods, storms, earthquakes, separations, calamities, wars, oppositions, Satan, the carnal soul...?

These then are the types of questions that are posed surrounding the issue of justice and injustice. No doubt these very same questions or ones resembling them with minor variations could be asked with regard to other theological topics. For instance, topics such as: ends and final causes, cause and effect, providence, and the Divine attributes. It is said, if creation had a purpose and end or some type of overruling wisdom in the works, then all things would have some use. Hence, a useless or harmful creature should not have been created; or a possibly useful one should not have been left uncreated. But the exis-

tence of discrimination, contrast, annihilation, ignorance, impoverishment and incapacity, shows that certain phenomena should have been created and present. Phenomena such as: equality, subsistence, knowledge, power, and the like, should have been there but were not created. On the other hand, things which are either useless or harmful were created—things such as diseases, earthquakes, etc. When all of these things are put alongside God's supreme wisdom and justice in its meaning of equality and balance, it just doesn't add up.

These questions and issues, with slight variations, can also be posed with regards to the subject of *tawḥīd*, in the discussions on "good and evil." In this case the objection put forth is: There is a double standard at play in the universe, hence there must be duality at the root of the matter. Philosophers discuss the topic of "good and evil" sometimes in the subject of *tawḥīd* when arguing against the theory of "Duality," and sometimes in the subject of Providence where they speak of God's overruling and encompassing wisdom. In the latter discussion it is said that Providence dictates that all that exists must be good and perfections—the existing order and design must be the best one possible—hence evil and imperfections, things which ruin the best order scenario, must not exist; while we see that they do exist.

We are going to approach the issues and questions here from the perspective of justice and injustice, but whether we like it or not, other aspects will come into the scene and will also be resolved along with the rest. We have previously stated that the idea of justice as the opposite of injustice is to be taken in its meaning of the observance of innate merits and capacities and not in the meanings of balance or equality. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, the observance of merits and rights in the case of God corresponds to what the philosophers have seen and understood and not to what others have assumed or thought.

Justice as a Pillar of Faith and Principle of Religion

Doubts and objections regarding theological issues normally pertain to theologians, philosophers, and experts of the field. The substance of these debates is usually beyond the scope of laymen and both the objections and the responses are discussed on a level higher than that of the laity. But the outstanding objections and problems surrounding the issue of Divine justice are not like this, and they are current even on the lower and popular level of the masses. Both the illiterate villager and the erudite philosopher think about this topic in some form.

It is because of this that the issue of justice is situated so strategically and has special importance. This also could be a possible explanation as to why Islamic scholars (the Shia and Mu'tazilah, not the Ash'arites) have placed justice alongside the "principles of religion" and have counted it as the second root or principle out of the five principles of religion. In any case, "justice" is also one of the Divine attributes; but if the Divine attributes were to be among the principles of religion, then it would be necessary to include other attributes such as knowledge, power, will.... But the real reason why the Shia have counted justice as one of the principles of religion is something else. To explain, the Shia and Sunni do not differ on most of the Divine attributes. And even if they do differ, it is not something that has received much consideration. But with regards to justice, there are serious differences and these differences have received considerable attention and airing. To the extent that, they have become the criteria and distinguishing marks of the various schools of thought. It is by use of these criteria that we can tell a Shia from a Sunni and within the Sunnis, a Mu'tazili from an Ash'ari. The doctrine of justice by itself was the sign of not being an Ash'ari. Justice along with Imamate were considered as the marks of the Shia. This is why it was said that the principles of religion or pillars of faith in Islam are three in number and the principles of the Shia sect are those three with the addition of the principle of justice and the principle of Imamate.

Justice and Wisdom

As we have seen previously, among the Divine attributes, there are two which bear a resemblance to each other when the doubts and objections with regard to them are considered: justice and wisdom.

By God's justice what is meant is that He does not leave the merits and capacities of any existent unattended to and hanging in the air, as it were. On the contrary he gives to every thing its due. By God's wisdom what is meant is that God's creation and design is the best possible. Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī[8] writes in verse:

Other than the judgement of truth which is the judgement,
There is no judgement which outstrips the judgement of the Truth.
Whatever there is, must be so;
That which must not be so, is not.

Divine wisdom and providence imply the existence of a purpose and meaning for the world. Whatever exists is either itself good or is a means to goodness. Wisdom is an aspect of both knowledge and will. It is the reality that throws light on the final cause of the world. Justice, on the other hand, is not directly connected with the attributes of knowledge and willpower. Justice in the meaning that was given for it, pertains to God's efficiency and role as agent. In other words, it is an attribute of act and not an attribute of essence.

The objection common to both Divine justice and Divine wisdom is the problem of evil. The issue of evil can be raised as an objection under the heading of "injustice" when it comes to justice, and under the heading of "purposeless or meaningless creations" in the case of wisdom; it is due to this that this issue is counted as one of the reasons for the inclination towards materialism. For instance, when the natural defence mechanisms of living creatures are given as an example of God's order, design, and wisdom, the question is immediately posed that why must there be dangers in the first place for there then to be a need for defence mechanisms? Why do harmful

viruses even exist so that there should be a need for white blood cells to fight them? Why were sharp toothed predators created for animals of prey to require legs to escape from them or antlers to defend themselves against them? In the animal kingdom, the weaker animals of prey have been given instincts of flight from danger and fear, while the stronger predators have been given fearless voracity. For man the question arises that why do ferocity and attack instincts exist in the first place for there then to be a necessity for clever defence mechanisms?

These questions and objections, whose solutions and answers call for detailed and thorough analysis, are like a tremendous vortex that has swept up destroyed many groups and schools of thought in its path. We must agree with the poet who said:

In this vortex a thousand ships have gone under,
Such that not even a single plank was cast ashore.

Materialist and dualist philosophies, as well as pessimistic or nihilist schools of thought usually took form in such vortexes.

Dualism

From time immemorial man, especially the Arian race, has divided worldly phenomena along the lines of two poles, good and evil. Light, rain, sun, earth, and many other things have been counted as among the good, and darkness, drought, floods, earthquakes, disease, savagery, and aggression—to name a few—have been called bad and identified with the pole of evil. Of course, man has made himself the criterion of division and has known those things which are useful to him as "good," and those things which harm him to be "bad".

For men of former times the following thought occurred: Is the creator of the evil and bad things the same as the creator of the good and beneficial? Or are good things produced by one source and bad things by another? Is the creator of good and evil one and the same, or does the world have two sources and two creators?

A group from among them figured that the creator himself can either be good or he can be bad. If he is good, then he doesn't create evil or bad things. If he is bad, then he doesn't make good things. From this they reached the conclusion that the world has two sources or two creators. This belief became known as "dualism."

The belief of ancient Iranians in a god of good and a god of evil—which were later called by the names Ormazd and Ahriman—took form in a similar way.

According to historical records, after the Arian race inhabited the land of Iran it began to worship natural objects, albeit good ones, such as fire, sun, rain, earth, and air. The historians report that Iranians did not worship bad things but that there did exist a non-Arian people who worshiped bad and evil objects with the aim of placating evil spirits. What existed in the Iran of antiquity was the belief in two origins, sources, or creators, and not a two-faced type of worship. That is to say, Iranians held that there were associates and partners in the act of creation, but did not hold that they should worship things other than god.

It was later on that the prophet Zoroaster made his appearance. Historically speaking, it is not clear whether the Zoroastrian religion was originally monotheistic or dualistic. The extant Avesta does not resolve this ambiguity as parts of this book are drastically different from one another. One part, the Vendidad, is explicitly dualistic, whereas the Gathas do not really put forward the dualist argument and, according to the claims of some researchers, they champions monotheism. It is these great discrepancies that have led researchers to believe that the present Avesta is not the work of one man, but of more than one individual.

Historical researches in this field are not definitive, but according to our Islamic beliefs we can maintain that the Zoroastrian religion was originally a monotheistic creed. This is because the majority of Islamic scholars hold the belief that the Zoroastrians belong to the category of "the People of the Book." Specialists in history also bear this out as they say that

the entry of dualist thinking into the Zoroastrian religion was due to the dualism of the Arian race before its advent.

Having said this we must add that it is only on the basis of religious authority that we can call Zoroastrianism a monotheistic religion. This is because from the historical perspective—the one that we obtain by a purview of works attributed to Zoroaster—and even if we take into account only the Gathas, we cannot accept Zoroastrianism to be a monotheistic creed. Basing themselves on the Gathas, the best that the researchers and experts have said with regard to the monotheism of Zoroaster is that he believed in the essential unity of the Divine. That is, he believed that there was only one being that was self-existent and uncreated, namely Ahura Mazda, and that all other existents—including Ahriman—were creations of Ahura Mazda. In other words, Zoroaster was of the opinion that the tree of being had only one root. But based on the saying of some other researchers we can hold that Zoroaster believed in the unity of worship. That is, he believed that only one entity should be the object of worship. But for any religion to be monotheistic, over and beyond a belief in the unity of the Divine essence and the unity of worship, a belief in the unity of creation is necessary. On this latter count the Zoroastrian religion, according to historical records, was totally dualistic. It appears that these documents teach that the opposite pole of Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit) is Spenta Mainyu (Bounteous Spirit). Spenta Mainyu is the source of good things—that is, those things that are good and must be created. On the contrary, Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman) is the source of bad and evil things—that is, those things that should not be created and Spenta Mainyu or Ahura Mazda are not responsible for there creation. According to these ideas, even though being does not have two "roots," it certainly does have two "branches." That is to say the existence that begins with Ahura Mazda forks off into two branches: the branch of goodness or Spenta Mainyu and his good works, and the branch of evil or Angra Mainyu and all his bad creations. If we make the Gathas—the most original, authoritative, and monotheistic scripts that have been left by Zoroaster—the criterion for judging Zoroaster then we are still left

with a problem. For where there is talk of six goods and five evils, or the fact that the existing order is not the best and does not embody wisdom, we must on this account set Zoroaster aside from the other prophets of God.

Due to this ingrained problem, the Zoroastrian religion could not hold out against the doctrine of dualism and in consequence this doctrine was once again revived after the death of Zoroaster among the Iranian people. Hence the Zoroastrians of the Sasanian period, the Manichaeans and the Mazdakites, who are considered to be offshoots of Zoroastrianism in Iran, were extremely dualistic.

In reality it must be said that the Zoroastrian religion was unable to remove the roots of dualism and pantheism from the hearts of Iranians in practice, and from the teachings of the Gathas in theory. It eventually gave in to these heretical beliefs and itself became a heterodoxy.

Islam alone was able to purge this thousand year old heresy from the Iranian mind. This is just one of Islam's shows of strength—where it was able to deeply affect the Iranian spirit and in consequence bring them salvation. This is no small feat given the fact that dualism had become the flesh and blood of the Iranians—to such an extent that some orientalists are of the opinion that it forms the basis of the Iranian psyche. Iranians were so caught up with this doctrine that they even allowed their religion to be affected by it. Hence, it was Islam that made monotheists out of these diehard Iranian dualists. Once the Iranian people acquired the truth of:

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ اَلَّذِی خَلَقَ اَلسَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ
اَلظُّلُمٰتِ وَالنُّوْرَ

All praise belongs to God who created the heavens and the earth and made the darknesses and the light.[1]

And once they came to also believe in this verse:

[1] Qur'ān 6:1

ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلَقَهُۥ

who perfected everything that He created,[i]

And then when they had understood this meaning:

رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.[ii]

When all this took place, Iranians were so overwhelmed by God, creation, the world, and being, that every fibre in their bodies burned with love and they were then able to praise the design in being in the following way:

My pleasance with the world is, 'cause the world
is His Pleasance.
I am in love with the whole world, 'cause the
whole world is His.
I drink with pleasure the bitter cup of poison,
'cause perhaps the cup-bearer is He.
I forbear with affection the pains, 'cause the cure
is also from Him.[iii]

After the advent of Islam, the Iranians stopped believing in a source or force of evil. They went on from there and with a mystical outlook they obliterated evil from the total universal order. They said: "Fundamentally evil does not exist," or alternatively, "Evil is that which is not." Ghazali[9] (who was an Iranian) says:

لَيْسَ فِي الإمكانِ أبدَعُ مِمَّا كانَ

There isn't in the realm of possibility anything more marvellous than what exists.

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[i] Qur'ān 32:7
[ii] Qur'ān 20:50
[iii] Shaykh Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Sa'dī.

It is such men, trained and nurtured by Islam, who are able to foster such sublime thoughts. They realize that calamities, pains, and sufferings are ugly and unwanted from one perspective, and that from a higher perspective and with a deeper insight, they are all graces and beauties. Ḥāfiẓ,[10] who was appropriately given the title "the Expounder of the Unseen," eloquently explained many deep philosophical and mystical concepts by way of allegories, metaphors, and parables. In one poem he explains the difference between the two perspectives—the superficial, limited, and common perspective, and the deeper, comprehensive point of view from above, as it were, which he calls the opinion of the *pīr* or *shaykh* meaning the perfect man or mystic. He does this by using puns and a play on words.

پیر ما گفت خطا بر قلم صنع نرفت

آفرین بر نظر پاک خطا پوشش باد

Said our Pir: "On the Creator's pen, passed no error:"

On his pure sight, error-covering, plaudits be![i]

In other words, from the point of view of the *Pīr*—one that is not alloyed or sullied by limitations and superficiality—the world is seen to be a single manifestation of God. All mistakes, lapses, and unseemly things, which appear to people of limited vision, are obliterated for him. The world is the shadow of God. God in His essence is absolute perfection and absolute beauty. The shadow of beauty cannot be but beautiful. In the case of a beautiful body, if we look at a single part or limb by itself and without taking into consideration the fact that that limb has a certain place in the body and that along with the other parts it makes up one single body, we will not perceive the body's correctness and perfection. We might even end up thinking that if it was some other shape, it would have been better. But as soon as we look at it comprehensively and as a part among parts of a beautiful whole, our perspective will

[i] Henry Wilberforce Clarke, trans., *Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi, In Persian with English Translation*, Ghazal 105.

change, and that which we previously thought to be incorrect and unseemly will have entirely disappeared.

In another couplet, as is generally and usually his habit in every ghazal, Ḥāfiẓ explains the reasons and methods behind his use of metaphors, allegories, parables, and various plays on words.[11]

Of the number of mirror-holders of [the Beloved's] line and mole, my eye became:
Of the number of the kiss-snatchers of [the Beloved's] bosom and back, my lip be.[i]

In the first line of this couplet, he speaks of the station of "the essence of certainty" *('ayn al-yaqīn)*, where seeing everything as good in itself, he sees in the world reflections of His eyebrow, mole, and eye. In the second line he hopes to attain the station of "the reality of certainty" *(ḥaqq al-yaqīn)*.

Other ghazals of Ḥāfiẓ repeatedly refer to this truth that after having arrived at the station of Reality, the mystic does not see anything other than perfection, beauty, and grace. For instance he says:[12]

By its grace, Thy beautiful face explained to us a verse of the Koran:
For that reason, in our explanation, is naught save grace and beauty.[ii]
To the world's work, never was attention mine;
In my sight, Thy face its happy adorner thus is.[iii]

Ḥāfiẓ was a man whose world view was essentially mystical. He put unity in place of the multiplicity of the philosophers; manifestation and emanation in place of their causality; and love and beauty in place of their reason and necessity. He saw the world to be the "the unique manifestation of absolute beauty." How could such a man think along the same lines as say Khayyām[13] or Abū al-'Alā'[14]? Ḥāfiẓ takes the three elements which compose his mystical vision of the world—unity, manifestation, and beauty—and puts them to verse in the most poignant and eloquent manner:[15]

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[i] Clarke, Ghazal 105.
[ii] Clarke, Ghazal 10.
[iii] Clarke, Ghasal 22.

When, into the mirror of the cup, the reflection of
Thy face fell,
From the laughter of wine, into the crude desire of
the cup, the Arif fell.
With that splendour that in the mirror, the beauty
of Thy face made,
All this picture into the mirror of fancy fell.
All this reflection of wine and varied picture that
have appeared
Is a splendour of the face of the Said that, into cup
fell.[1]

The use of the word "error-covering" in the first verse of Ḥāfiẓ quoted has misled some people into making a mistake. They have not taken into consideration that the devices of equivocality, ambiguity, and plays on words are often used by mystical poets. They sometimes use a sentence or word that has two senses, or even use a word in the opposite meaning from its apparent one—these being some of the beauties of rhetoric. Other verses and poems of Ḥāfiẓ provide contextual support for understanding the real meaning of this couplet. Moreover, assuming we accept the fact that he had complaints against creation, is it possible that he would discredit the Pīr given all the respect that he has for this term and bearing? For in this case his purport would be that the Pīr's claim that no error passed on the Creator's pen is either a lie or that the Pīr is a simpleton who does not know what he is saying.

In some of his other couplets, Ḥāfiẓ has expounded the real story behind evil—in that it does not imply the division of creation—in the best of manners. We will recount this matter in the appropriate place. Hence, the supposition that Ḥāfiẓ, in the verse under question, was finding fault with creation and was disparaging the Pīr is a layman's supposition.

Satan

It can be argued that Zoroastrianism has the dualist conception of Ormazd and Ahriman, and that Islam for its part has the

[1] Clarke, Ghazal 111.

beliefs of God and Satan as two opposing poles. What is the difference between the Ahriman of Zoroastrianism and the Shayṭān or Satan of Islam?

There is a world of difference between the conception of Ahriman in the Zoroastrian or Mazdakite creeds and the idea of Satan in Islam. This calls for some explanation.

According to the teachings of the Avesta, there is an entity known as Angra Mainyu or Ahriman who is responsible for the creation of all evils, calamities, and bad or harmful things; things such as disease, ferocious beasts, stinging and biting animals, snakes, scorpions, and even barren lands, droughts, and the like. These things are not attributed to the great god Ahura Mazda, or to Spenta Mainyu, the arch rival of Angra Mainyu.

From some segments of the Avesta it appears that Ahriman is an ancient and eternal being like Ahura Mazda himself and is not created by him. Ahura Mazda discovered Ahriman but did not create him. But from other parts of the Avesta, especially the Gathas which are the most authoritative part of the Avesta, it comes to light that Ahura Mazda created two beings: Spenta Mainyu or "Holy Wisdom" and Angra Mainyu or "Unholy Wisdom" (Ahriman).

In any case, what is apparent from the Avesta and has been, and is, the belief of the Zoroastrians is that created things in the world are divided into two groups of good and bad. The good are those that exist and must exist and it is good that they exist—their existence being necessary for the world order. The bad are those things that exist, yes, but should not exist—their existence being the cause of the imperfection of the world. These latter things, the bad or evil things, are by no means the creation of Ahura Mazda. They are rather the creation of Ahriman, irregardless of whether Ahriman himself is the creation of Ahura Mazda or not.

Hence no matter how you look at it, Ahriman is the maker and creator of a great many of the things in the world. A whole section of the created order is his realm and he is an eternal entity—an Ancient. He is either Ahura Mazda's counterpart or

associate on the level of essence, or is Ahura Mazda's creation but his associate and partner on the level of creation.

In the Islamic world view though, the world or created things are not fundamentally divided into two groups or categories—good and bad. There is in this perspective no created thing that "should not have been created" or "was created badly." On the contrary, all things are created beautiful—every thing being in its right place. In addition, all things are the creation of God in His essence.

In Islam, the realm of Satan is the legislative level (of human volition and act) and not the ontological level. That is to say, Satan can only affect human existence and cannot influence anything outside the human realm. Even within the human realm, Satan's range and free scope is limited to influencing human thought, not the body. In affecting human thinking, Satan is limited to temptation, suggestion, and the portrayal of false ideas in the imagination or fantasies of men. The Qur'ān speaks of these Satanic devices by using terms such as *waswasah* (whispering or temptation), *taswīl* (seduction or enticement), and *tazayyun* (to make to seem beautiful and a part of decorum). Satan has these methods, but he can not create anything, nor can he have any type of existential control over man. That is to say, he can not be an irresistible force which overpowers man and makes him do bad things. Satan's authority and control over man is limited to the situation where man himself desires to give himself over to him.

إِنَّهُۥ لَيْسَ لَهُۥ سُلْطَٰنٌ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ
يَتَوَكَّلُونَ إِنَّمَا سُلْطَٰنُهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُۥ

Indeed he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord. His authority is only over those who befriend him...[1]

[1] Qur'ān 16:99-100

In reply to those people who hold Satan responsible for their misguidance, the Qur'ān quotes Satan on Resurrection Day saying:

وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيْكُم مِّن سُلْطَٰنٍ إِلَّآ أَن دَعَوْتُكُمْ
فَٱسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِى ۖ فَلَا تَلُومُونِى وَلُومُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُم ۖ

I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves.[i]

The philosophy and wisdom behind even this amount of dominion that Satan has over man can be found in man's free will. Man's ontic level dictates that he be free. A free being must always be at a proverbial fork in the road and in the position to choose between two options for his freedom to be fully realized and actualized.[16]

From the World are coming two cries in opposition to each other; (bethink thyself) for which (of them) thou art adapted.
Its one cry is the (means of) quickening the devout with (spiritual) life; and its other cry is the (means of) cajoling the graceless.[ii]

In the Islamic world view, no existent has any independent role in the creative act. The Qur'ān does not attribute independence to any existent whatsoever. All existents play only mediating roles and act as the instruments through which the Divine will and Providence act. The Qur'ān gives credence to the intervention of angels in the application of God's will on earth, but it does not allow even this for Satan. Hence by all the more reason, it repudiates the existence of independent creative powers for him—setting him apart from the Avestan Ahriman who possessed such powers alongside Ahura Mazda.

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[i] Qur'ān 14:22
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 362, vr. 1622.

From this we can conclude that the translation of the word "Satan" or *Shayṭān* [in Persian literature] as "Ahriman" or *"dīv"*, is totally wrong and a great mistake. The word "Satan" or *Shayṭān* does not have an equivalent in Persian and hence it must not be translated and must be kept as is in any translated text.

According to the Qur'ān, Satan is not by any means a "pole" that is contrasted with and antipodal to the Divine pole. He is not even a pole or antipode to the angels who are, by Divine sanction, the intermediaries of creation and the executors of the Divine will in its creative aspect.

Generally speaking, the notion of jinn that our people have is different from the picture that the Qur'ān presents. In the Qur'ān, jinn are like men in that they are morally responsible and answerable for their actions, but unlike men, they are "unseen" and "spirits". Lay people think them to be of the rank of angels, but the Qur'ān puts them alongside mankind. The Qur'ān explicitly states that Satan is of jinn. According to the Islamic world view, angels have executive powers in the existential world order; as opposed to jinn who have no such powers. Putting jinn and angels on the same footing, as is done in [Persian] Islamic literature, is due to a historical mistake that was made by Muslims and is attributable to the cultural baggage and ideas of the Zoroastrian tradition.

Now, to return to the discussion at hand, it must be said that in opposition to the Zoroastrian, the Manichaean, and the Mazdakite world views which can be said to be bipolar, the Islamic perspective is unipolar. In the perspective of the Qur'ān, Satan is the embodiment of:

ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلَقَهُۥ

who perfected everything that He created,[1]

And he is also the example of:

[1] Qur'ān 32:7

رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.[i]

Satan's existence, as well as his evil and misguidance, are all based on and according to wisdom and expediency. It is due to this very wisdom and expedience that Satan is a relative evil and not a real or absolute evil.

What is even more amazing is that according to the Qur'ānic logic, God Himself gave Satan his position and post as the "misguider." God addresses Satan in the Qur'ān and orders him:

وَٱسْتَفْزِزْ مَنِ ٱسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُم بِصَوْتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ
عَلَيْهِم بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ
وَٱلْأَوْلَٰدِ وَعِدْهُمْ ۚ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا

Instigate whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, and share with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them!' But Satan promises them nothing but delusion.[ii]

It appears as if Satan was ready to accept his post of misguidance, for we find him saying:

فَبِمَآ أَغْوَيْتَنِى لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَٰطَكَ ٱلْمُسْتَقِيمَ ثُمَّ
لَءَاتِيَنَّهُم مِّنۢ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَٰنِهِمْ
وَعَن شَمَآئِلِهِمْ ۖ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَٰكِرِينَ

[i] Qur'ān 20:50
[ii] Qur'ān 17:64

As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful.[i]

For certain, the meaning of "misguidance" and the scope of Satan's influence and authority in his position is just as we have already mentioned. That is to say, there is no obligation or coercion in the works. All that there is, is *waswasah* (whispering or temptation), *taswīl* (seduction or enticement), *da'wah* (invitation), and *tazayyun* (to make to seem beautiful and a part of decorum).

A word of caution and necessary reminder is in order here. In saying that Satan does not have recourse to the existential and ontological level of the world, we do not mean that he has no role whatsoever on this plane. For is it even possible for there to be an existent existing on this plane and not having any effects or role in it?! What we do mean though, is that Satan is not an independent creator of any part of creation; he is not an antipode to God; he does not have any part to play in the vertical hierarchy of existence like the angels who have been given executive and managerial duties with respect to created beings; and finally, his authority and command over man is not of such a level and extent that he could force or coerce him to do his bidding. The Qur'ān believes in an existential role for Satan and jinn, but generally not any greater than the role of man.

The real intention behind this discussion is to show that the Qur'ān has approached the question and issue of Satan[17] in such a manner that it does not harm its basic principles in the least bit. For instance the principle of the unity of the Divine Essence, as exemplified in the verse:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

[i] Qur'ān 7:16-17

Nothing is like Him.[i]

Or the principle of the unity of Divine creation, as in the verses:

أَلَا لَهُ ٱلْخَلْقُ وَٱلْأَمْرُ

Look! All creation and command belong to Him.[ii]

قُلِ ٱللَّهُ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ

Say, 'God is the creator of all things,[iii]

وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ شَرِيكٌ فِى ٱلْمُلْكِ

nor has He any partner in sovereignty[iv]

Philosophical Pessimism

Another consequence of the issue of evil is the philosophy of pessimism. Pessimistic philosophers usually come from a materialist background. That there is a causal link between materialism and the philosophy of pessimism can not be denied. Why? Clearly, it is because materialism is impotent and helpless when it comes to the problem of evil.

According to the perspective of transcendental philosophy, existence is equal to the good and evil is relative. From this point of view, underlying every apparent evil is a good. For the materialist school, there is no such thing.

A pessimistic outlook on the world brings with it distress and suffering. It is a source of sorrow that a man should think that the world is without feeling, sentiment, and purpose. Once

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[i] Qur'ān 42:11
[ii] Qur'ān 7:54
[iii] Qur'ān 13:16
[iv] Qur'ān 17:111

a man, who sees himself as a small insignificant issue and child of the world and has a goal in life, understands that the very world which created him and his thoughts and which taught him to have a goal, itself doesn't have a purpose, he is shaken to core. Moreover, if a man, who thinks that there is no justice in the world and that discrimination and oppression exist in nature, were to be given all the blessings and treasures that the world has to offer, he would still be pessimistic and unhappy.

The efforts of such a person for his personal happiness and for the prosperity of mankind are marred by a sense of hopelessness and heavy heartedness. For, if the world itself is based on injustice and oppression, man's struggles for justice become meaningless. And when the cosmos is without purpose, our having a goal and purpose is both inconsequential and idiotic.

The fact that believers and people of faith have calm demeanours and peace of mind is due to their perception of the world as an ordered and purposeful whole based on wisdom and knowledge. They do not see it as being senseless, chaotic, and without purpose. They firmly believe in its justice—that it supports the cause of truth and the people of the truth; they don't see it as being intrinsically unjust and either supporting the oppressors or remaining neutral on the issue. With regard to evil and the bad things that take place in the world, the monotheists know that nothing is by accident and chance and that there is a rhyme and reason to everything. They believe that these bad things are either just punishments or purposeful tests that lead to rewards.

What about those that don't have faith? What placates them? They turn to suicide [as their final placebo]. As one of them put it, they "embrace death with ultimate bravery."

The World Health Organization recently published some statistics on suicide and found that its incidence was on the rise among intellectuals. According to their report, the suicide rate has reached high proportions in eight European countries. One of these eight countries happens to be Switzerland—a nation that we think to be the example of prosperity. The report goes on to say that suicide has become the third most important factor of death—meaning that its casualties outnumber the victims

of cancer—and that its incidence among the educated class is greater than in the uneducated.

The same report states that the suicide rate is greater in developing nations [than the underdeveloped]—the very nations that are currently going through a crisis of faith. In West Germany, twelve thousand people lose their lives annually due to suicide, while sixty thousand are saved while attempting it.

This is the state of affairs of those who have lost their faith in God, the all-knowing Lord of the worlds.

Many factors or causes for the phenomena of suicide have been mentioned: attracting attention, breakup of lovers, defeat in financial rivalries, losing social standing or competitions, poverty, drug addiction, feeling smothered, and nihilistic attitudes. These have been mentioned as causes, but the cause of these causes is just one thing: lack of faith. William James in the second chapter of his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience—A Study in Human Nature*,[i] has this to say about a materialist author, Marcus Aurelius, and also about Schopenhauer and Nietzsche:

> ...melancholy, according to our ordinary use of language, forfeits all title to be called religious when, in Marcus Aurelius's racy words, the sufferer simply lies kicking and screaming after the fashion of a sacrificed pig. The mood of a Schopenhauer or a Nietzsche...though often an ennobling sadness, is almost as often only peevishness running away with the bit between its teeth. The sallies of the two German authors remind one, half the time, of the sick shriekings of two dying rats. They lack the purgatorial note which religious sadness gives forth.[ii]

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[i] This book is the text of Willam James' lectures which he gave at the prestigious Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion at the University of Edinburgh at the turn of the twentieth century and was translated into Farsi under the title, *Dīn wa Rawān*.

[ii] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience—A Study in Human Nature*, Lecture 2.

Nietzsche,[18] whom William James counts among the philosophers of pessimism, was famous for his philosophy based on might—or the "will to power". He is known for claiming the following:

> Kindness and tender-heartedness must be put aside. Kindness is from weakness. Humility and obedience is debasement. Patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and sufferance is due to a lack of ambition and laziness... killing the [carnal] self, for what? The self must be encouraged. What is worshiping others for? One must will the self and must worship the self. The weak and feeble must be left to die ...[i]

By adhering to such ideas, Nietzsche had effectively turned the world into a jailhouse for himself. In the latter part of his life he saw these sentiments bear their just fruits. In a letter that he wrote to his sister during his final days, he says:

> Every day that passes bears heavily on me. Though I have been ill for many years and have experienced the extreme limits of depression and affliction, I have never been so desolate and hopeless as I am now. What has happened? Exactly what should have happened. The differences that I had with all and sundry has made me lose their trust. Now we both sides see that we were in error. God how lonely I am! There is nobody with whom I can have a laugh and a cup of tea. There is no one who will admit to be my friend.[ii]

Schopenhauer[19], whom William James also mentions, believed:

> The principle motif of human life is suffering and vulnerability. Pleasure and happiness, and indeed the avoidance of pain, are not positive but rather

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[i] Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī, *Sayr e Ḥikmat dar Urūpā (The Story of Philosophy in Europe)*(Tehran: Kitābfurūshī e Zawwār Publications, 1966), vol. 3, ch. 5, p. 201-202.
[ii] Furūghī. vol. 3, ch. 5, p. 205.

> negative realities. The higher a living existent is in the hierarchy of life, the more it suffers. This is due to its greater sensitivity and the fact that it remembers the pains of yesterday and better predicts the sufferings of tomorrow... momentary pleasures are followed by a life of sorrows. If you don't marry you suffer, if you do you have a thousand woes. One of the biggest tribulations is falling in love. People think that procuring a wife is one of the greatest delights, whereas in reality it is source of many miseries. If you socialize you are beset with troubles, if you remain aloof from people you come to loath life. No longer any need to worship, no divinities in the works. In short, while there remains any life in the body, there is no release from suffering and difficulties. Life is through and through just dying. Rather, life is just a death that is being postponed moment to moment. In the end death occurs while life is seen to have been of no use whatsoever.[i]

The Islamic world also had, and has, figures that saw the world as gloomy. Their reactions vis-à-vis nature and natural phenomena were characterized by sullenness, gloom, and even anger—or in the words of William James by "peevishness." The famous Arab philosopher and poet Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, as well as the poet Khayyām belonged to this group. We say, "the poet Khayyām" here because scholars do not believe that the pessimistic poems could have been written by Khayyām the philosopher and mathematician. This is because the reasons for complaining and crying that Khayyām the poet espouses, are matters that Khayyām the philosopher would have already solved and put behind him.[20]

In our time and following in the footsteps of the West (and for other reasons not appropriate to mention here) a group of pessimistic writers has appeared that is poisoning the youth and making them apathetic and indifferent to life, and some-

[i] Furūghī, vol. 3, ch. 1, pt. 4, p. 85.

times even leading them towards suicide. This group is being encouraged and ushered on by overt and covert powers. Their numbers are increasing daily. Ṣādiq Hidāyat belongs to this group. His writings bear resemblance to—as in the words of William James—the "kicking and screaming...a sacrificed pig", or the "sick shriekings of ... dying rats." In stark contrast to figures such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Abū al-'Alā', and Khayyām, are the "optimistic" philosophers and sages. The sages of the Divinities are usually from this latter group. The great mystic Mawlānā Rūmī is the representative, par excellence, of this group. All of his utterances give evidence to an incredible love, rapture, and spiritual presence. According to this mystic, man is the thriving centre of pleasure and felicity in this world, but with this condition that he consciously takes advantage of this centre. For, there is no sorrow in the world that cannot be converted into a beatitude or pleasure. Rūmī disparages those who seek to derive pleasure exclusively from wine, women, and song. He addresses man in these terms:[21]

> The wine that is bubbling invisibly in the jar bubbles thus from longing for thy face.
> O thou who art the whole sea, what wilt thou do with dew?
> And O thou who art the whole of existence, why art thou seeking non-existence?
> Thou art lovely and beautiful and the mine (source) of every loveliness: why indeed shouldst thou lay thyself under obligations to wine?
> The tiara of *We have honoured (the sons of Adam)* is on the crown of thy head; the collar of *We have given thee* hangs on thy breast.
> Thou seekest knowledge from books—oh, ridiculous! Thou seekest pleasure from *Halwa* (sweetmeats)—oh, ridiculous!
> What is wine or music or sexual intercourse that thou shouldst seek delight and profit therefrom?

('Tis as though) the sun sought to borrow (light)
from a mote, (or) a Zuhra begged for a cup (of
wine) from a small jar.[i]

Rūmī also says:[22]

I am exceedingly enamoured of His violence and
his gentleness
'tis marvellous (that) I (am) in love with both these
contraries.[ii]

The other mystical poets such as Sa'dī and Ḥāfiẓ also take this route. It is true that words with double meanings are found in the poems of Ḥāfiẓ and others, but those who are familiar with their parlance and idioms know full well that there is nothing other than goodness in their ideas.

Now all this is not limited to mysticism *('irfān)* and Sufism. This way of seeing things is a feature of faith in general. Disbelief and faithlessness is a type of deficiency which in its own turn brings about an imbalance. It is this imbalance that creates suffering. Faith on the other hand, has this ability to transform sorrows and suffering into pleasure and happiness.

When those who have been nurtured by Islam come across a difficulty or a calamity, they pay attention to the following truth:

ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَـٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ

those who, when an affliction visits them, say, 'Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return.'[iii]

As a real life example of what such nurturing can do, we will quote an incident that took place to a Muslim couple—Abū Ṭalḥah and his wife Umm Salīm—who were companions of the Prophet (ṣ).[23]

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[i] Nicholson, vol. 5, p. 214, vrs. 3570-1, 3573-74, 3578,3580-1.
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 1, p. 86, vr. 1570.
[iii] Qur'ān 2:156

Abū Ṭalḥah loved his son very much. His son fell ill. When the child's death was imminent, Umm Salīm feared that Abū Ṭalḥah would be greatly troubled and anguished [by the death of their son], so she sent him off to the Prophet (ṣ). When Abū Ṭalḥah had left the house, the child died and Umm Salīm shrouded him with a cloth and put him away in some corner of the house. She then approached the house members and told them to not tell Abū Ṭalḥah anything [of what took place]. Then she prepared a meal and put on some perfume. Just then Abū Ṭalḥah returned from his visit to the Prophet (ṣ). He asked, "What's my son doing?" She replied, "He's resting." He said, "Do we have something to eat?" She got up and brought the food for him. Then, [a while later] she made advances to him and he lay with her. Once he was assuaged, she said to him, "Abū Ṭalḥah, would you be angry if we had somebody's belonging with us for safekeeping and we returned it to him?" He said, "Glory be to God, no, not at all." She said, "Your son was a trust with us that God has taken back." Abū Ṭalḥah said, "I have a greater obligation to be patient than you." He got up from his place, performed his *ghusl* (ritual bath), prayed two cycles *(raka')*, and then went off to see the Prophet (ṣ). He informed him of what she did. The Prophet (ṣ) said to him, "May God bless you both in your [fruitful] coition." Then the Prophet (ṣ) said, "Praise be to God who has placed in my nation a person like Ṣābira of the Sons of Israel."...[i]

These then are the workings of faith and religion in the smoothing of difficulties and hardships, and even in transforming them into pleasures and felicities.

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[i] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 79, p. 151.

William James, in the book that was previously mentioned, writes about the different sects and groups of religion and pure morality in the following way:

> At bottom the whole concern of both morality and religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe. Do we accept it only in part and grudgingly, or heartily and altogether? ... Morality pure and simple accepts the law of the whole which it finds reigning, so far as to acknowledge and obey it, but it may obey it with the heaviest and coldest heart, and never cease to feel it as a yoke. But for religion, in its strong and fully developed manifestations, the service of the highest never is felt as a yoke. Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which may fill any place on the scale between cheerful serenity and enthusiastic gladness, has taken its place. ... The *anima mundi*, to whose disposal of his own personal destiny the Stoic consents, is there to be respected and submitted to, but the Christian God is there to be loved; and the difference of emotional atmosphere is like that between an arctic climate and the tropics, though the outcome in the way of accepting actual conditions uncomplainingly may seem in abstract terms to be much the same.[1]

Coyness or Objection?

Discussions on the problem of evil, and sometimes objections to the very existence of evil, take up an important part of our literature. Poets in particular, whether in jest or in all seriousness, frequently apply themselves to this subject. But of course that which has been said on this topic must be taken with a pinch of salt—as it is not all a serious objection and complaint against creation, and there is usually a tongue in

[1] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience—A Study in Human Nature*, Lecture 2.

cheek attitude at play. Some poems contain what may be called the "dissimulation of mystics." Many quatrains attributed to Khayyām are of this type. To repeat, it is not known for certain whether these poems are the work of Khayyām the philosopher. All that which has been brought under questioning and objected to in the poems of Khayyām the poet, are things that Khayyām the philosopher would have already solved and put behind him. Hence these poems are either not from the pen of Khayyām the philosopher, or they are and must be considered as either tongue in cheek and satirical jabs at exoteric religious puritans, or as the dissimulations and "coquetry" known to exist among the mystics. In any case, Khayyām says in the quatrains attributed to him:[24]

The stars, who dwell on heaven's exalted stage,
Baffle the wise Diviners of our age;
Take heed, hold fast the rope of mother wit.
These augurs all distrust their own presage.[i]

Heaven multiplies our sorrows day by day,
And grants no joys it does not take away;
If those unborn could know the ills we bear,
What think you, would they rather come or stay? [ii]

Since all man's business in this world of woe
Is sorrow's pangs to feel, and grief to know,
Happy are they that never come at all,
And they that, having come, the soonest go![iii]

Ah! wheel of heaven to tyranny inclined,
'Twas e'er your wont to show yourself unkind;
And, cruel earth, if they should cleave your
breast,
What store of buried jewels they would find![iv]

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[i] Edward Henry Whinfield, trans., *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam. The Persian Text with an English Verse Translation* (London: The Octagon Press, 1980), first published 1883, quatrain 214.
[ii] *ibid*, quatrain 240.
[iii] *ibid*, quatrain 387.
[iv] *ibid*, quatrain 25.

This objection to and censure of the heavens that be, is in fact a criticism of something higher. This is because the astrological heavens are not anything in themselves for them to be possibly accused of wickedness or delinquency. This is perhaps why it is said in a tradition:

قال رسول الله ص لا تسبوا الدهر فإن الدهر هو الله

Do not curse Time, for surely Time is God Himself.[i] [25]

Khayyām also says:[26]

The Master did himself these vessels frame,
Why should he cast them out to scorn and shame?
If he has made them well, why should he break them?
Yea, though he marred them, they are not to blame.[ii]

Behold these cups! Can He who deigned to make them,
In wanton freak let ruin overtake them,
So many shapely feet and hands and heads -
What love drives Him to make, what wrath to break them?[iii]

There is a chalice made with wit profound,
With tokens of the Maker's favor crowned;
Yet the world's Potter takes his masterpiece,
And dashes it to pieces on the ground![iv]

Nāṣir Khusraw[27] is a poet who should in reality be called a philosopher. He was on one hand, intellectually meticulous and philosophically beyond such diatribes, and on the other hand,

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[i] Tāj al-Dīn Sha'īrī, *Jāmi' al-Akhbār* (Qum: Rāḍī Publications, 1984), p. 161.
[ii] Whinfield, quatrain 126.
[iii] *ibid*, quatrain 42.
[iv] *ibid*, quatrain 290.

his strong religious convictions did not allow him to complain about Providence. This said, we do find couplets in his *Dīwān* which are of this type. We can put this down to either tongue and cheek humour, or to the dissimulation current among mystics. As examples of this we can quote some verses:[28]

O God, if by your Divine mandate you made the substance of man beautiful all,
What then in the Roman countenance and African face, is the reason for beauty and ugliness?
Why the Indian appearance and the Turkish countenance—one [dark as] the depths of hell and the other, the face of heaven?
Why is one felicitous, the other a wretch—one an ascetic, the other a priest enrobed?
Why these contrasts in creation—for You were the mother and embellisher of all?
Accepted them, due the world's disloyalty, a group you exalted, and another made abject,
Why still, are the affluent given loads and loads,
And the poor have nothing but troubles and troubles?

Nāṣir Khusraw has a lengthy and famous poem which starts with the following couplet:

الهی طول و عرض عالمت را توانی در دل موری کشیدن

In this poem he says:[29]

All my pains are from the Bulgarian [beauties], what endless longing must be endured.
It is not the fault of the Bulgarians, I will tell all, if you could only listen.
O God, to tell the truth, sedition is from You, but I speak not out of fear.
The elegant lips and teeth of the Turks of upper China, You should not have made so fine;
Because upon [seeing] their hands, lips, and teeth—one bites [his] teeth, hands, and lips [in astonishment].

By clamour you put the deer to flight; while the
hound you strike [and incite] to [take up the]
chase.

Some experts in the field have claimed that this poem has been changed, and that it is not the work of Nāṣir Khusraw.

About forty years ago, a poet from Shiraz wrote a ballad on this subject. In response to this ballad, Sarhang Akhgar wrote an open letter in *Akhgar* magazine, inviting the literati to give their opinions on the poem. Many people—clergymen, lay people, men, and women—from all parts of the country wrote back with their replies. Some of these replies were in verse and some in prose; some of them were in support of the Shirazi balladeer and some against. All of these letters were collected and published in a book with the title, *Asrār e Khilqat (Secrets of Creation).*

As to the worth and importance of these replies—this is a topic which I don't want to get into at present. It must be noted though that some scholars made noteworthy points in their letters.

Problem Solved

Islamic Philosophy

The issue of the best world order, or order from design, as well as the problem of evil, are some of the most important philosophical questions extant. As was shown in the previous section, this issue led to the appearance of such ideologies as dualism, materialism, and pessimism in both the east and the west. Few indeed are those who have not made comments on this issue and given it their due attention. Philosophers of both the east and west have considered the problem of evil but, to the extent of my knowledge, western philosophers have not found a conclusive solution to this problem. The philosophers and sages of Islam, on the other hand, have analyzed this issue in detail and have met the challenge that it poses in an admirable fashion—unravelling an important enigma in the process.

It would not be out of place if at this point, and by way of appreciation, we said some words on the transcendental philosophy of the east. This sacred wisdom, hailing from eastern lands, is a great blessing and boon that has blossomed by virtue of the advent of Islam and has been give to humanity as a precious gift. But unfortunately, only a handful fully and deeply understands this rich body of knowledge and it is for the most part promulgated by those ignorant of it and by its avowed enemies. A group of those who lack sufficient understanding of traditional philosophy and who do not know much more than the theory of the "nine heavenly spheres," and the "ten intellects," judge texts of Islamic philosophy by this grossly imperfect measure. Upon glancing through such a text, if they do not understand anything in it, they conclude that Islamic philosophy is not anything in excess of the nine spheres or ten intellects and because this cosmology has been "proven" wrong today, they have the right to hold their head high and consider themselves to be higher than Fārābī,[30] Ibn Sīnā, or Mullā Ṣadrā. This group imagines that Islamic philosophy is just the same thing as Hellenic philosophy and does not have anything extra

to offer. Moreover, they add that this Greek tradition was illegitimately brought into Islam.

Knowingly or unknowingly, this group has done a great disservice to Islam and Islamic teachings. Islamic philosophy differs from Greek philosophy to the same degree that the physics of Einstein differs from the physics of Antiquity. There is evidence to support the argument that even the theology of Ibn Sīnā has not been fully transferred to the west and that westerners are still uninformed with regards to it. The following is an example of this assertion.

In the footnotes of the second volume of *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* we mention the fact that the Cartesian[31] maxim, "I think, therefore I am," which is taken to be a brilliant innovation and valuable contribution to philosophy in the west, is an insubstantial and senseless idea that Ibn Sīnā explicitly and formally invalidated in the third section of his *Ishārāt*. If the Avicennian corpus had been correctly translated and transferred to Europe, this saying of Descartes would not have been heralded as an "innovation" and "new idea" and would not have gone on to become the basis for a new philosophy. But what are we to do in a world where, for now, everything that is labelled as European or western is warmly received, even if it be an old and worn out idea which we have left behind many years ago?!

Now we will turn our attention to the questions that were posed in the preceding section. We will answer those questions under four different headings: Discrimination, Annihilation and Non-existence, Imperfection and Defectiveness. From these four, the first one will be discussed in the following section on Discrimination. The remaining three will be addressed in the section on Evil. We feel that it is necessary to briefly go over the various methodologies and approaches that have been used to answer the questions and objections at hand.

Methods and Approaches

There are various methods and approaches to Divine justice. Believers who have faith in God and religion usually satisfy

their conscience in this regard by giving a general answer to the problem. They think like this: Definitive proofs have been given for the existence of a wise and all-knowing God, hence there is no reason for such a wise and omniscient God to do injustice. Why should He? Does He have any enmity with anyone that He should, out of animosity, want to deprive him of his rights? Or does He have need of something, so that he would want to deny someone of their rights and take them for Himself? The inclination to oppress is either due to a psychological complex, or it is due to certain needs and wants. As such an inclination does not exist in the case of God, oppression or injustice has no meaning for Him. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-wise—He knows the best possible order and design for the world and has the ability to create it. So, there is no reason for God to make the world other than with the best order and design. Surely, those things which are called bad or evil—as they are opposed to this best order—would not be created. Even if this group sees things which they can not explain away, they put it down as some type of wisdom and expediency—something which is hidden from them and which only God knows the secret of. In other words, they see it as a part of the secret of destiny [and the mystery of creation].

No doubt this type of thinking and deduction is in itself a type of proof, and a correct one at that. The people who think like this can argue that even if some evils are unexplainable, it is due to the weakness of the human mind in understanding the secrets of the universe. When man sees himself in a world full of mysteries and hidden reasons, he must not doubt the basic facts, even if he cannot decipher a particular incident and see the wisdom behind it.

Let's assume that a person reads a book that throughout shows the mental acumen and meticulousness of the writer. If he comes across a couple of passages in this book that are ambiguous or inexplicable, he naturally thinks that, "I don't understand what the writer meant in these few cases." He in no way thinks that, "Just because I could not understand the meanings in these cases, the author is careless and lacks a proper intellect and that all those places which made sense came about acciden-

tally." It would be a very selfish and ignorant thing to do if somebody were to say that because of a few ambiguous parts of a book, that otherwise is stock full of evidence of the erudition of its author, the writer is ignorant or that the wisdom that the book contains is entirely fortuitous.

Whenever the average believer comes across such issues, he solves them for himself in the manner suggested above.

As was previously seen, the Traditionalists are exoteric pietists who choose to remain silent in the face of such questions and refrain from giving their opinions. But in reality their [personal] way of solving these issues is the way of the average believer and majority. The Ash'arite theologians have taken a route that avoids the question altogether—meaning that the question doesn't even arise for them. But as for the rest of the theologians, and also for those who favour an empirical approach to theology, the resolution to the problems involved in the doctrine of Divine justice lies in researching the secrets, uses, and expedients of existents.

The philosophers approach the problem in a *limmī* way—that is to say they proceed from the cause to its effect—attempting to formalize the above mentioned solution of the average believer. They argue that the world is an effect of God. It is effectively a "shadow" of God who is all-beauty. The shadow of the beautiful must naturally also be beautiful. They also argue that evil, in its essence, is non-existing and is accidental. They go on to speak of the necessity of evil and the fact that it can never be separated from good—or in other words, the fact that creation can not be divided and partitioned off into segments. Finally, they discuss the effects and uses of evil.

We will not examine in detail the philosophical proof (from causes to effects) here as it is beyond the level and scope of this present study, but we will discuss some other pertinent areas.

As we have previously stated, the questions and objections surrounding the subject at hand will be covered under two general headings: Discrimination and Evil. We will first turn our attention to the discussion on Discrimination and then will go on to analyze the subject of Evil in a separate section.

Discrimination

The objection of discrimination was that if created beings have an equal relationship to the Divine Essence, why then have they been created with differences and distinction? Why is one black and another white? One ugly and the other beautiful? One perfect and the other defective? Why is one an angel, another a human, a third an animal, a fourth a plant and a fifth inanimate? Why was it not the other way around? Why did the animal not become an angel and the angel an animal? Why among the created beings was only man created as man with the capacity for accepting responsibility, reward and punishment but other creatures were not? If it is good, then why aren't all created like this? And if it is bad then why have only humans been created thus?

The answer to this question is possible on two levels: brief and detailed. The brief response is what was pointed out earlier in the discussion on schools of theology. We said there that usually believers satisfy themselves with a brief explanation. Their argument is: These questions are only posing some unknown issues, not presenting fundamental contradictions. The most we can say in these cases is that we don't know the answer.

We have recognised God with attributes like Omniscient, All-Wise, Independent, Perfect, Just, Generous; and since we have known Him with these attributes we are certain that whatever happens is according to some 'wisdom' and 'purpose', though we many not be able to comprehend all those wisdoms and higher purposes. We are not privy to the so called 'secret of destiny'. It would be very selfish and boastful for man whose collective efforts for several millennia has not yet enabled him to fully understand all the secrets of his own physical body, to now aspire to understand the 'mystery of creation' and the 'secret of destiny'. When man witnesses all this mind-boggling wisdom and design in creation he ought to confess that his failure to appreciate the wisdom of one issue is based, not on some

defect in creation, but rather, on his own shortcoming and inability.

This group never engages itself in such questions and reasoning; instead of spending time on such issues they would rather spend it in research on issues which they can understand and which have some practical implications.

There is no doubt that this response is correct; believers are not required to delve into the depths of these issues; the laity does not even have the capacity to engage in these discussions; in fact, they have been prohibited from engaging in such discussions. In fact, this argument is a type of reasoning whereby we are convinced of an effect's perfection through the perfection of its cause.

But there is another issue here. The majority of people recognize God through His effects, i.e. through the design in the Universe. Such a comprehension will turn out to be a defective comprehension. Obviously when they come across unknowns in their basis of comprehension they will be more or less uneasy, and there is no way to solve their problem except by responding to the objection. They have not recognized God independently of the world and created order, such that their belief in God as the absolute, all-perfect, independent, and infinitely beautiful being or cause would imply the most beautiful creation as an effect. They have only one means of access to the universe, this being the ordinary one through the physical senses. They see God as reflected in the image of the universe; obviously any defect visible in the mirror would affect their view of the image; if they had the capacity to view the universe as a reflection of God, or in other words, if they could view the universe from above, then all the defects and ugliness seen below would disappear, as it would be clear that all of it is due to a faulty perception. This type of view is the one which we said has been termed by Ḥāfiẓ as "*naẓar e pīr tarīqat.*"[32]

Said our Pir: "On the Creator's pen, passed no error:"

On his pure sight, error-covering, plaudits be![1]

Those people whose basis of perception is confined to the world and created order, know God and His being All-Wise, Omniscient, All-Just, Independent and Perfect, through the image they see reflected only in that world; hence any unknowns or ambiguities they come across in the universe will show up as defects in this image, preventing the perception of a proper image and honest reflection.

On the other hand, in our times, such objections and questions are frequently posed, particularly in the discussions and writings of those inclined toward materialism. I frequently encounter people who pose such questions. Such people are either those who basically do not believe in God at all, or those who have not been given arguments strong enough to satisfy them of that there is a greater wisdom and higher purpose at play. Hence it is essential that we discuss some issues pertaining to the root of this question in order to solve this problem.

Another issue is that there is an important objection regarding the argument from wisdom and purpose which is seldom raised, and if it is not addressed, then even the aforementioned brief explanation will loose its value. The response to this objection depends on us laying down the foundations of a fundamental principle—which will also prove to be the basis of the future detailed response and which most Divine sages and philosophers use in answering the question at hand. It is based on this principle alone that we will be able to give value both to the brief response and the future detailed response. The objection is this:

Can the concept of 'wisdom' and 'higher purpose' essentially have any relevant meaning in God's case? Can one say that God has done so and so work for so and so higher purpose or that the wisdom behind a given Divine act is so and so? Is it not that such concepts about God stem from the comparison of God to His creation?

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[1] Henry Wilberforce Clarke, trans., *Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi, In Persian with English Translation*, Ghazal 105.

Someone can possibly claim that essentially 'higher purpose' and 'wisdom' has no relevance and meaningful application to God, and all this has come from comparing the Creator to His creation. This is because the meaning of 'a higher purpose dictates so and so' is that in order to reach a particular goal one ought to use a particular means. This implies that the selection of a particular means is expedient since it enables one to reach the goal, and that the selection of means other than the particular one is not expedient since it will keep one from the goal. For instance, we say expedience dictates that there should be pain and suffering so that pleasure becomes meaningful and relevant; or wisdom requires that a mother ought to have breasts so that a newborn can have access to readymade food; wisdom and expedience dictates that a particular animal ought to have horns in order to defend itself from a predator's attack.

Cannot one say that all these are simply comparing God to man and other imperfect creatures?

Wisdom and expedience has relevance and meaning for man and every other imperfect creature, since man or any other imperfect creature is located in a system which is, after all, a system comprised of a series of causes and effects. That creature, in order to achieve an effect, has no option but to seek the help of a cause. When such a creature aspires to reach a goal, if it selects as a means the same thing which is actually a cause for that goal in the creative realm, then it has performed an act according to wisdom and expediency. Otherwise it has acted contrary to wisdom and expediency.

Wisdom and expediency then, apply to a creature who is part of the existing order and whose abilities are limited, and has no option but to recognize and work within the limits of the world around it. Hence, the limitation in power and ability forms an integral part of the idea of wisdom and expediency.

But a Being who is above this order and who is the Creator of the order—what relevance or application can the concepts of wisdom and expediency possibly have for Him? What need does He have to seek the help of specific causes in order to reach a particular goal, such that we may designate a particular act of His as corresponding to wisdom and another act of His as

devoid of wisdom? Hence, it is incorrect to say that God, for instance, created pain and suffering so that pleasure assumes relevance and meaning; that He created mother's breasts so that a child should not remain without nutrition. God has the power to satiate the child without it ever having the need for breast milk. Likewise, the All-mighty has the ability to allow man the perception of pleasure without ever exposing him to pain and suffering.

Causality is of great consequence to us, but for God it is nothing more than a formality. Thus we qualify to become wise, not God; our acts can be described as wise when they conform to the contingencies of the existent order, but not God's acts which are the very order itself. The order has not been created to conform to some other order. God is the Creator of the order which, after the fact of its creation and at a lower level, acts as a criterion for wisdom—depending on whether a created being acts in conformity with it or not.

If it is argued that God has decreed the world to be organised according to causes and effects, means and ends, so as to display His knowledge and wisdom to His creatures, whereby they could gain knowledge about Him (since if the world were to have no design and order, that is, if it were to be haphazard and accidental such that any cause could produce any effect, then there would have been no way of knowing God); the response is that this matter itself—i.e. the creatures' knowledge being dependent on the study of the orderly design of the universe—implies that a definite and necessary order governs the universe. Whereas based on the aforementioned principle, to seek help of causes to reach one's goals is the predicament of creatures not the Creator; for God, it is possible to create some knowledge for His creatures without employing these means.

Based on the above explanation, an objection can be possibly raised against the argument of one who explains discrimination and evil based on Divine wisdom and expediency. The objection is: discrimination and evil cannot be justified based on Divine wisdom and expediency, since God could have created all the benefits and advantages which discrimination and

evil have without seeking recourse to such discomforting means.

This is the great objection which must be addressed beforehand so that we can then discuss the issue of wisdom and expediency in response to the objection.

Is the Order in the Universe Inherent?

Now we will address the main answer. The main task is to understand the order of the universe. Is the universe's order an artificial one or is it essential? What is the meaning of creation from this perspective? Does it mean that God creates a set of things and events such that there is no real inherent relationship between them, then He arranges them in a particular order and from this arrangement there emerges an order and pattern, means and ends, cause and effect? Or does it mean that the relationships between causes and effects, and the connection between means and ends, and the interdependence between preliminaries and their results is such that the placement of every effect and consequence after its specific cause and reason, the entailment of every end through its specific means and the appearance of every result after its specific preliminary is its actual existence; in philosophical terms: "the level and state of every existence in the vertical and horizontal hierarchy of being is inherent to the essence of that existence". This is similar to the levels and states of numbers. For instance:

In numbers we see number one is before number two, and number two is before number three, and after number one; likewise, every number other than number one is after the preceding number and before the succeeding number. Every number occupies a specific grade or level, and in that level it has specific effects and rules. The totality of numbers, which are unlimited by any limit, create a system or order.

What is the existential status of numbers? Is the existence and quiddity of a number distinct from its level and station, meaning that every number has a distinct existence and essence of its own independent of its level and station of existence, and hence has the potential for occupying any other level and sta-

tion. For instance, the number five is number five in all cases and it makes no difference whether it occurs between number four and number six or between number six and number eight—meaning that which occurs between number four and number six is the number seven. Is it like this? Is it possible for any number to occur in any level or position whatsoever and still maintain its essence and quiddity? Just like humans in society who occupy posts and those social positions have no effect on their true identity and essence; their identity and essence is also unrelated to their social status; or is the reality contrary to this? Is it not the case that number five has an essence of being five, and being five for five is contiguous with its level and position, i.e. inseparable from its being between four and six? This would mean that the number five is not two (realities) and that the supposition of number five occurring between six and eight is equivalent to five not being five, but rather seven. That is, the supposed and imagined five is not really five, rather it is actually the number seven which occupies its own position and we, by an error in supposition, named it five. In other words, the supposition of number five to occur in the position of number seven is merely a nonsensical meaningless and illogical imagination—being no more than a figment of our imagination.

Now let's turn to the sequence of causes and effects, means and ends, preliminaries and results. Have they been created beforehand and then, in the next phase, designated to specific levels and positions? Or is their very existence contiguous with the very level and position they occupy? For instance, Sa'dī occupies a specific level and position (in existence) as far as his temporal and spatial conditions are concerned. Clearly he is temporally precedent to us. The question is, was Sa'dī created then placed in those specific conditions? Or is it that Sa'dī's creation is inseparable from the specific level of existence—with all its accompanying conditions of space, time, level, position, etc—and that the relationships which Sa'dī developed with things around him are a part and parcel of Sa'dī's existence? To answer, Sa'dī's existence means the existence of the totality of all those specificities. Thus to separate Sa'dī from his own time and place is to separate Sa'dī from himself; that is

Sa'dī should not be Sa'dī, rather we have assumed someone else, e.g. Jāmī who lived after Sa'dī, to be Sa'dī and have mistakenly named him as Sa'dī.

[illegible] order in the universe is an intriguing dis[illegible] some surmise that if we hold the created order to be [illegible] and fixed, so that every effect occupies its specific position out of necessity, that this would be tantamount to somehow limiting God's unlimited Power. They do not realise that the issue is not the existence of something else in the universe other than existents themselves, (for such a thing must exist and it is nothing other than the order and hierarchy of being); the issue is that this order and hierarchy is inseparable from the essence of the existents, and has emanated from the absolute Being; it is the Will of the Almighty to bestow them with this order but not in the sense that with one will He creates them and with another will assigns them into a particular order, such that one could assume that if this order were to be lifted the will of their original creation would still remain intact. Since the existence of creatures is inseparable from their position in existence, the will to create them is also the will to bestow them an order, and the will to grant them order is the same as the will to grant them existence.

From this perspective, the Divine will to create anything takes shape only through the will to create the cause, and it is impossible otherwise; and the will to create the cause is through the will to create the cause of the cause, and it is impossible for it to be otherwise. In the vertical hierarchy, existents end up at an ultimate cause which is the direct result of the Divine will to create. Hence the Divine will to create any particular existent, is the very will to create everything and order.

وَمَآ أَمْرُنَآ إِلَّا وَٰحِدَةٌ

and Our command is but a single [word] [1]

[1] Qur'ān 54:50

Thus, wisdom and expediency can apply in a meaningful way to God, the Exalted One, even though His power and Will is unlimited, and even though He is not subject to the system that He creates. The meaning of God's wisdom is that He enables creatures and everything to reach their goals and existential perfection. But in the case of human acts, wisdom means to perform an act to enable oneself reach a given goal and perfection.

As we saw, the existence of a cause and its connection and relationship to its effect is one and the same and not two entities. A duality and separation cannot be postulated into it. Thus, God's willing it means willing the specific relationship between it and its specific cause. This causal chain can be followed until it reaches a cause whereby willing that cause is equal to the relationship with the Absolute Being, and God's willing it—i.e. the proximate cause—is equal to willing of everything and all relationships and all order.

A Pleasant and Lasting Memory

I recall when I was studying in Qum, I took time one day to sit and assess myself, my studies and the path that I had chosen in life. I thought to myself that instead of these studies, would it not have been better if I had taken up one of the modern disciplines? Obviously with the mentality that I had and the value I placed on faith and spiritual teachings, the first thing that came to my mind was what in that case would have happened to my spiritual and intellectual state? I thought that now I believe in the principle of Unity, Prophethood, Resurrection, Imamate, etc and I am extremely attached to them, but if I had taken up a career in natural sciences or maths or a literary field, what would have been my state?

The answer I came up with was that the belief in these principles and basically to be a true spiritual person is not dependent on one studying the classical studies. There are many who are deprived of these studies but in practice are pious and God-fearing and sometimes even defenders and propagators of Islam and have more or less done some reading on Islamic subjects

on the side. I thought that perhaps if I had studied what they had specialized in, I would have attained a firmer and more scholarly grounding in matters relating to my faith and that I would be better off than I am at present.

Those days I had just gotten familiar with Islamic philosophy and I used to study from a teacher who unlike most other claimants and teachers of this discipline was not merely well-informed but had actually experienced Islam divinities and had reached the depths of the most profound teachings of Islam and also taught it in the most eloquent and sweet manner. Some of the unforgettable memories I have of those days is the joy I experienced especially from the beautiful, profound and subtle explanations of the teacher.

In those days I had just learnt this issue with its complete preliminaries; I had comprehended the famous law of *al-wāḥid lā yaṣduru minhu illā al-wāḥid,*[33] the way a true philosopher comprehends it, or so I thought. I was seeing the definite inexorable order of the universe with the eye of the intellect, and was observing all my questions and objections being melted away? I could understand there was no contradiction between this definite law that placed everything in a definite order and between the principle of *lā mu'aththir fī al-wujūd illā Allāh,*[34] and how I could place both side by side; I could comprehend the meaning of the statement *al-fi'l fi'lu Allāh wa huwa fi'lunā,*[35] and I would see no contradiction between the two parts of this statement. Moreover, the issue of *amrun bayn al-amrayn*[36] was completely solved, and I was immensely influenced and ecstatic by the special explanation offered by Mullā Ṣadrā about the nature of the relationship between effect and cause and especially using this principle to prove the law of *al-wāḥid lā yaṣduru minhu illā al-wāḥid.* In short, a fundamental paradigm was set up in my mind which became the basis to solve many issues in an ever-expanding worldview; it was the consequence of comprehending this matter and similar issues of this nature that I was convinced of the authenticity of the lofty teachings of Islam. I reached new heights with regards to the sublime teachings on Divine unity of the Qur'ān, Nahj al-Balāgha, and cer-

tain narrations and supplications of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and holy Infallibles of Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

At that moment I thought that if I had not been in
and had not had the opportunity to enjoy the presence
great teacher, all my other things both materially and
cally would have been perhaps better than what they are now.
would have had all the things I have now or at least something similar to them, and perhaps even better. However, the only thing really missing would have been this paradigm of thought with the fruits and conclusions that it has produced; and even now I am of the same view.

The present discussion on Divine justice, which was originally supposed to be presented in a simpler manner, has dragged on and we have touched on some of the higher philosophical issues that pertain to it. If we wish to travel further we must be prepared to ascend even higher peaks, but I do not think that we have that readiness. It is better if we analyse the matter in a simpler language and at a lower level. The readers who I think will be reading this book would be better able to understand the issues with a simpler explanation.

The brief response to the objection of discrimination and evil is based on the argument that there exist a series of higher purposes for "evils" and because advantages, benefits, and profits accrue from them, their existence is not pure evil, it is rather evil mixed with goodness. Now since the goodness is greater than the evil, it is judged overall to be good, not evil. This argument is based on the principle that the causal chain is a definite and essentially necessary order, not an artificial or conventional system. To acknowledge this matter prepares the ground for the next discussion; namely, that that which actually exists is 'differences' not 'discrimination' and 'bias.'

Differentiation not Discrimination

What exists in creation is 'difference' not 'discrimination'. 'Discrimination' occurs when given equal conditions and similar potentials, a distinction is made between things. But 'differentiation is when conditions are unequal a distinction is made

between things. In other words, discrimination is in the province of the agent making it while differentiation fundamentally resides within the objects being distinguished.

The matter can be illustrated with a simple example: if we place two containers, each with a ten litre capacity, under a tap and fill one with ten litres and the other with five litres of water, here we have discrimination taking place. But if we had two containers, one with a ten litre capacity and the other with a five litre capacity, and to fill them we immerse both in the ocean, again a distinction occurs, but the source of distinction is the difference in the capacities and potentials of the containers themselves and not in the ocean or the pressure of water.

Another example: If a teacher awards different grades to pupils who are all in the same class and have performed the same work, this would be discrimination; but if the teacher were to look at all pupils equally, teach all in the same manner, examine them in the same way, then some pupils due to their poor mental ability and intellectual deficiency or due to lack of hard work fail in the exams or perform poorly whereas some other pupils due to their greater potentials, and hard work, respond to the exam questions correctly and the teacher awards all according to their responses in the exams, which will necessarily be different grades, here there would not be discrimination, rather differentiation. Justice does not mean that the teacher should total all marks and divide equally among the pupils; justice means that every one is awarded what he deserves. In such cases, to differentiate is true justice and fairness, and not to differentiate is injustice and discrimination.

If an objection is made to the effect that we cannot compare God to a teacher, as God is the Creator of all beings, and every distinction that exists emanates from Him; but a teacher is not the creator of the pupil. If one is clever and another dumb, that is not related to the teacher; if one is full of potential and worked hard whereas another lacks potential or failed to put in the necessary hard work, this has nothing to do with the teacher. In the case of God and creation we must admit that all the differences and distinctions are actually in the hands of God. God works on two levels. On one level, He has created

beings with differing potentials, and on the second level, has dealt differently with the beings of differing potentials, giving everyone according to his potential. In reality, the objection is directed at the first level, and asks why didn't He create everyone equal right from the outset? We must see what is the secret of these differences?

The Secret of Differences

The secret of differences is one statement:

"The differences between beings are innate and essential and a necessity of the system of causes and effects"

It is a profound statement, but there is no option, it must be explained. Here we are compelled to repeat with a different explanation what we had said earlier, and somehow reduce the complexity of the discussion; and in the hope of reaching a lofty and interesting conclusion we must carry on our previous discussion and out of necessity we must become a little philosophical.

As was pointed out earlier, in Divine philosophy, this discussion is posed under the title "the manner in which beings emanate from the Absolute Being". The subject of discussion is this: Does God's will engage the creation of beings separately? For instance, He wills and creates X; and then with a separate act of the will He creates Y, and with a third will say, creates thing Z. In this manner, He creates everything by a separate will specific for that being? Is it like this, or does He create everything with one single and simple will?

A group of theologians who think superficially in matters of divinity and theology support the first interpretation. But it is the second interpretation which is proved by solid logical proofs, firm philosophical reasoning, and supported by evidence from the Qur'ān. According to this interpretation, the whole universe from its beginning till the end, has been created by a single act of Divine will. That is, infinite things come into existence, all created by the Divine will, but not by separate

wills for every being, rather through one single act of will, that is also a simple will. The holy Qur'ān states,

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ وَمَآ أَمْرُنَآ إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ
كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ

Indeed We have created everything in a measure, and Our command is but a single [word], like the twinkling of an eye.[i]

According to this view there is a specific order, hierarchy and law for creation and that God's will for the existence of individual beings is exactly His will for the total order. This is where the chain of causation, or the sequence of preliminaries and results emanates from. The sequence of causes and effects means that every effect has a specific cause and every cause has a specific effect; neither can a particular effect result and come into existence from just any cause and without any intermediary, nor can a particular cause bring into existence any effect without any intermediary. In reality, everything in the sequence of causes and effects has a specific station and known position; i.e. the effect is an effect of a specific thing and a cause of a specific thing; and this is the profound meaning of "Indeed We have created everything in a measure". In order to clarify this matter we will discuss the order of the universe in two parts: the vertical order and the horizontal order.

The Vertical Order

The meaning of the vertical order or hierarchy of cause and effect is the hierarchy in the creation and existence of things. In philosophical terms, there is a hierarchy in the activity of God in relation to creation and the emanation of things from Him. The exaltedness and purity of the Divine Essence dictates that the beings are related to Him in a hierarchical way one af-

[i] Qur'ān 54:49-50

ter another; a first emanation, a second emanation, a third emanation, and likewise, one existent after another is created such that each one is the effect of the previous one. Of course, it should be realised that we do not mean first, second, third in time since time does not apply to that realm of existence, in fact, time itself is one of the created entities.

What has been mentioned in the religious language in terms of angels, Divine hosts, messengers (working in the creative realm not the legislative realm), distributors of affairs, executor of affairs, and concepts like Throne, Seat, Tablet, Pen, which refer to a series of immaterial and Divine entities related to God, are actually all a description of this same reality that God the Almighty, has willed and runs creation with a specific order and a particular hierarchy. This matter has been explained by the Divine philosophers in their specialist language and has been mentioned in the sublime teachings of Islam in a different language. We will choose the Islamic language since it is sweeter and more eloquent:

In this order and hierarchy of being, God is situated at the apex. The next level pertains to the angels who are executors of His orders. Among the angels themselves there also exists a hierarchy: some are heads and commanders while others are helpers and workers. Mīkā'īl is the angel in-charge of provisions, 'Izrā'īl is the angel of death entrusted with the task of separating souls from bodies, and each of the two have myriads of supporters and helpers, each angel occupying a specific position:

وَمَا مِنَّآ إِلَّا لَهُۥ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

There is none among us but has a known place.[1]

We should not forget that the relationship of God with creation and the created order is that of genesis, creation, and origination. We should not imagine His order and organisation to be like the social systems and artificial human organisations

[1] Qur'ân 37:164

prevalent in human societies. The system of command and obedience in the Divine scheme between God and the angels is creative and real not conventional and virtual. God's command is not a literal word, it is creation—the very act. The appropriate response of the angels to such a command is utter obedience. When we say He ordered the angels to do something, it means that He has created them such that they should be the cause and creative agent for the particular effect and act. Hence the meaning of the angels' obedience is this same creative causality and efficiency. This afore-mentioned order is a creative and ontic order.

It is thus that the holy Qur'ān sometimes attributes administration of creation to God and sometime to angels; in one instance it states:

يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمْرَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ

He directs the command from the heaven to the earth [i]

In another instance it asserts:

فَٱلْمُدَبِّرَٰتِ أَمْرًا

by those [angels] who direct the affairs [of creatures][ii]

Sometimes it attributes to the angels the separation of the human souls at the time of death, sometimes to the chief angel of death, and at other times to God, the almighty.

Sometimes it attributes revelation to one angel:

نَزَلَ بِهِ ٱلرُّوحُ ٱلْأَمِينُ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ

[i] Qur'ān 32:5
[ii] Qur'ān 79:5

brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon your heart [i]

and sometimes it attributes the same function to God:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنزِيلًا

Indeed We have sent down to you the Qur'ān in a gradual descent [ii]

The secret to understanding all this is to know that God's act has an order and hierarchy and that God's will to create and govern the world is the same one which gives it that order and hierarchy.

In the scenario of the absence of any specific order between created beings many outcomes are entailed. Such a scenario entails the outcome that every being can create everything, and also entails the possibility of everything being created from everything. For instance, it should be possible for a great explosion, which requires a great amount of energy, to result from a small amount of energy. Or the opposite scenario, whereby a great amount of energy produces a disproportionately small burst. It should be possible that a flame from a small match should equal in illumination the whole sun. It should be possible for an effect to take the position of its cause and for a cause to take the position of its own effect; and based on this reasoning, it should be possible for God to be like a created being and a created being to be God.

The necessity of the Necessary being and the possibility of the possible being is inherent and essential to them. It is not such that the possible being could be a Necessary being and the Necessary being could be a possible being. This can never take place, either accidentally or through an external cause. The possible being is possible by necessity and the Necessary being is necessary by necessity.

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[i] Qur'ān 26:193-4
[ii] Qur'ān 76:23

The situation is similar in the case of the hierarchy between possible beings. Every state of being and level of existence that these contingent existents occupy has the same rule. For instance when one considers the being in-charge of delivering provisions to creation, or the one in-charge of returning and receiving the created beings, one comes to the conclusion that the position which has been entrusted to them is a necessary consequence of the nature and ontic level of the existence which has been bestowed on them. It is not such that, for instance, a mosquito by one decree could take up the position of Mīkā'īl and an ant through another decree could become 'Izrā'īl, and a human become Jibrā'īl.

All these errors, that a perfect being can occupy the position of an imperfect or an imperfect can occupy the position of a perfect, stem from people who do not realise the necessity, essentiality, and inherency of relationships existing among created beings. They assume that the hierarchy between beings in creation is similar to the conventional and unreal hierarchy of human societies. All these errors spring from comparison of God to man and comparison of the inherent hierarchy of the universe to the artificial hierarchy in human society. Such people think to themselves that if there is no objection to some ruler possibly becoming ruled or a ruled one becoming a ruler, then why cannot a sheep become human or a human become sheep? Why did He make that a sheep and this a human?

They do not realise that such a thing is impossible, because the causality of a specific cause for a particular effect, and the efficiency of a specific effect related to a particular cause, is not conventional and unreal. If 'a' is a cause for 'b', it is due to a characteristic existing in the essence of 'a' which qualifies it to become a cause for 'b'; and if 'b' is an effect of 'a' it is because of a characteristic existing in it which makes it dependent on 'a'. And this characteristic is nothing but their nature of existence and modality of being; and it is for this very reason, that the characteristic is a real existent entity, not something unreal, conventional, and hence transferable. Thus, the relationship of every effect to its cause and the relationship of every cause to its effect originates from the essence and nature of the cause

and essence of the effect. An effect, by the totality of its essence, is dependent on the cause and the cause also, by the totality of its essence, is the source of the effect.

Based on this, as was pointed out earlier, it becomes clear that the level of every existent is inseparable from its essence and inexorable. Just like the order of numbers. In a bus queue one can move individuals forward or backward, but the position of numbers cannot be moved above or below; number five whose position is after number four, cannot possibly be positioned before it. Before number four nothing but number three can be positioned, even though we may name it number five, we would have only changed the name but it is impossible to change its reality.

Such a necessary and profound system operates between created beings. This statement of the holy Qur'ān about the angels wherein it asserts:

وَمَا مِنَّآ إِلَّا لَهُۥ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

. There is none among us but has a known place [i]

is actually applicable to every created being. Everything has a specific position, and to transpose it to a position elsewhere other than its own is tantamount to having it abandon its own essence, which is a contradiction.[ii]

The Horizontal Order

In addition to the vertical system which allocates the hierarchy of beings according to creativity and activity, there is another order which governs especially the material world and which specifies the material and preliminary conditions for the existence of a phenomenon. This order is termed as the horizontal order; and it is based on this system that world history acquires a definite and specific pattern. Every event transpires

[i] Qur'ān 37:164

[ii] For details refer to the book *Uṣūl e Falsafeh wa rawish e Reālīsm.*

in a specific time and space; and every particular time and space becomes the receptacle of a specific event.

Normally when we enquire or investigate an event we focus our attention on that event alone, we do not take into account what status or position that event occupies in the created order. Whereas in fact every event, whether good or bad, is an effect of a series of specific causes and connected to particular conditions. A fire never starts without a previous and particular relationship to other factors and events. The prevention of the fire also rests on a series of other causes and factors, material or immaterial. There is no event in the universe which is 'unique' and totally 'independent' of other events; all parts of the universe are interconnected and interrelated. This connectivity and interrelation pervades all parts of the universe, and brings about a comprehensive all-encompassing unity. The principle of interrelatedness of things to each other, or in other words, the principle of true unity in the universe, "organic unity" as it were, is a principle frequently invoked by Divine philosophers. The principle of interrelatedness of things assumes a profound meaning in Divine philosophy and that is the principle of indivisibility of the universe. We will elaborate further on this principle later.

It is stated in philosophy that:

كُلُّ حادِثٍ مَسبُوقٌ بِمادَّةٍ و مُدَّةٍ

i.e. every event occurs in a framework a of specific time and a specific place. Every event has a specific time and specific place. It is impossible for all times and all places to be indifferent for an event.

Our physical observations also support this fact. When a fire burns somewhere in the world, it does so in a specific time, particular place, and through a specific material. The fire is dependent on conditions which specify its time and place. The conditions themselves in turn have a specific time and place and are dependent on particular causes and factors. If we continue tracing the origins we would reach the conclusion that the series of events is interconnected like the rings in a chain; every

event is connected to an event preceding it and an event succeeding it, or in other words, every thing is connected to its past and future. And this connectivity creates an eternal and endless chain of events.

More interesting is the fact that emerges on an even deeper study. We discover there is interrelatedness even between events which are parallel and contemporaneous to each other.

A carpet worker weaves a carpet and a surgeon operates on a patient. On a superficial plane there seems to be no apparent connection between these two events. But if upon taking a deeper look we found for instance that a fire had caused the burning of both the carpet and the patient, we would be convinced that both the carpet-weaver and the surgeon's work originate from a single source; a single event, which if it had not occurred, neither of these two would have become busy in their work.

The works of all humans who originated from one forefather are connected to the existence of that forefather in his own specific time and place, and as a result the works of all human beings are interconnected.

The event of the separation of the proto-planet that became the earth from the sun, is the common point of all actions and movements which occur on the face of the earth. The occurrence of that event is the cause of all subsequent events.

In philosophy there is a term named 'relative necessity' and another called 'possibility-in-relation to something'. These terms are used to describe an event in comparison to another event. If by assuming the existence of the first event the existence of the second event becomes necessary then we describe the second event to be 'relatively necessary' to the first event. But if by assuming the first event the existence or non-existence of the second event is both equally possible then we describe the second event to be connected to the first by 'relative possibility'.

By a superficial glance at some events one may get the impression of a 'relative necessity' between them and in other cases where there seems to be less of a connection between them, one would think that a 'relative possibility' is what pre-

sides. But on deeper study we discover that between every two events there is in fact the connection of 'relative necessity', and relative possibility has no real external existence. So because all events ultimately share one 'primary cause', and because there is a relation of necessity between every cause and its effect, we reach the conclusion that an all-pervasive necessity governs all events.

The principles based on which this necessary and universal interconnectivity can be established are as follows:

1. The principle of universal causation.
2. Necessity of cause and effect [in particular].
3. Correspondence between cause and effect [in their modalities].
4. Ultimate termination [of the causal chain] of all created beings at the Cause of all causes and the Prime Mover.

The first principle is the fundamental and axiomatic law which forms the basis of all sciences and its denial entails denial of everything and plunging into the abyss of scepticism.

The second law enunciates the fact that every effect can only come into existence when, not only its cause is existent, but also only when it attains necessity from its cause. So long as an effect does not attain necessity from its specific cause it is impossible for that effect to come into existence; and vice versa. If the complete and sufficient cause of a thing materialises, it necessitates the existence of the effect, in which case the non-existence of the effect becomes impossible.

The third principle, guarantees the specific relationship between the cause and effect, and hence no cause can create an effect other than its own specific effect; and no effect can possibly emanate from a cause other than its own specific cause.

From these three principles we can conclude that the universe has a definite unalterable order and in association with the fourth principle which is the principle of 'Unity of Origination', we can conclude the definite and universal interrelatedness and interconnectivity of all events.

In the third section under the subject of 'differences in potentials' we will give further elaboration on this issue.

Divine Precedent or Way

What is known in philosophy as 'order or design of the universe' or 'causation', is termed in religious language as the "Divine precedent". The holy Qur'ān states in several places:

وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ ٱللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا

you will never find any change in God's precedent [i]

i.e. God's acts have a particular style and fixed patern which is unalterable. In sūra Fāṭir this theme has been repeatedly emphasised:

فَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ ٱللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ۖ وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ ٱللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا

you will never find any change in God's precedent, and you will never find any revision in God's precedent [ii]

(i.e. "Change": God's ways do not change to other ways, like a law being abrogated and replaced by another law. "Revision": like a clause being added to a man-made law, or part of it is abrogated, or changed without the original law being changed)

It is an amazing statement from an amazing book! How great is the Qur'ān! Guide to scholars, companion to the pious. The philosophers thinks and meditates for years to discover the universal law of causality and order of the universe; he wants to boast and take pride in this great achievement that he has managed to discover such a great secret, and recognise such a great law when he suddenly sees the holy Qur'ān in front of him stating the same secret in simple but eloquent language: **you will never find any change in God's precedent.**

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[i] Qur'ān 33:62, 48:23
[ii] Qur'ān 35:43

Who can speak more clearly? Which statement could be more firm and eloquent than this? **you will never find any change in God's precedent**

The holy Qur'ān does not only generally expound on creation having a system and law but also in some cases specifies some of those laws.

Regarding the prosperity or misfortune of a community it states:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا۟ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls [i]

This holy verse explains the secret of progress or backwardness of a community. No people can reach prosperity from misfortune but through repelling from themselves the factors which cause misfortune, and vice-versa, a prosperous community will not be rendered backward by God except if they themselves cause their own degradation.

We complain how can God allow a group of Jews, the police of America, to dominate seven hundred million Muslims in different military, cultural, economic, and intellectual ways? Why did one hundred million Arabs face defeat in the 5th June War? Why does God not grant Muslims honour? Why doesn't He turn the natural laws in favour of the Muslims? We get angry, lose nights of sleep out of grief, we suffer pain and complain, beseech and supplicate to God, but our prayers are not answered. The response the holy Qur'ān gives is one statement:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا۟ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls [ii]

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[i] Qur'ān 13:11
[ii] Qur'ān 13:11

God will not change His laws. We must change ourselves. We are immersed in ignorance, swimming in moral decadence, have no unity or co-operation, but still hope God should help and support us! We will make a thousand rumours for a small incident, lying and dishonesty is our working style, we have distanced ourselves from every virtue yet expect to enjoy presiding and ruling over the world! This can never be.

According to the sacred scriptures of the past the Jewish people—who because of their sinfulness and impurity, had more prophets sent to reform them than other peoples—will undergo two social movements, two revolutions and upheavals. Both of these have occurred and the holy Qur'ān mentions both the prediction and the upheavals which took place in Jewish history. The prediction mentions that they will do corruption on earth twice and God will punish them for it.

Then the Qur'ān enunciates a general law. That law is that every corruption is a prelude to defeat and affliction; and every revival and traditional reform renews God's mercy. Now consider the text of the verses:

وَقَضَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِى
ٱلْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعْدُ
أُولَىٰهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَّنَآ أُو۟لِى بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ
فَجَاسُوا۟ خِلَٰلَ ٱلدِّيَارِ ۚ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا ثُمَّ
رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ ٱلْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَٰكُم بِأَمْوَٰلٍ
وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَٰكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا إِنْ أَحْسَنتُمْ أَحْسَنتُمْ
لِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا ۚ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعْدُ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ
لِيَسُۥٓـُٔوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ

أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبِّرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيرًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن
يَرْحَمَكُمْ ۚ وَإِنْ عُدتُّمْ عُدْنَا ۘ وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ
حَصِيرًا

We revealed to the Children of Israel in the Book: 'Twice you will cause corruption on the earth, and you will perpetrate great tyranny.' So when the first occasion of the two [prophecies] came, We aroused against you Our servants possessing great might, and they ransacked [your] habitations, and the promise was bound to be fulfilled. Then We gave you back the turn [to prevail] over them, and We aided you with children and wealth, and made you greater in number, [saying,] 'If you do good, you will do good to your [own] souls, and if you do evil, it will be [evil] for them'. So when the occasion for the other [prophecy] comes, they will make your faces wretched, and enter the Temple just as they entered it the first time, and utterly destroy whatever they come upon. Maybe your Lord will have mercy on you, but if you revert, We [too] will revert, and We have made hell a prison for the faithless. [i]

In fact these verses are an expansion of that same overall formula:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا۟ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls [ii]

[i] Qur'ān 17:4-8
[ii] Qur'ān 13:11

What is the Law?

From the discussion so far we have come to know that events in the universe are governed by a series of fixed and unalterable Divine laws. In other words, God has some fixed and unchanging ways of operating.

Now let us consider what is the law? What does "fixed way" mean? Is the Divine law and way similar to man-made laws, like social contracts, agreements and commitments? Or is it a special creation made by God? Or none of these two statements are correct about Divine law and practice? And in any case, is it possible for God not to create or design a law? Why is alteration in Divine law impossible?

In response we say: Law and practice is not something which has to be created separately and designed distinctly. Law is a general concept and a mental construct and in the external world does not exist with its universality and as Law. What exists in the external world is the causal order and the multiple states and levels of being. These then are made abstract in the mind, intellectualised, and represented as the concept or idea of law. Existence has levels and every level has a fixed and defined position. It is inconceivable that a cause should transfer its own specific position to another, or that an effect should transfer from its specific position. This reality is expressed in these terms: the universe has a law.

Hence, the law of creation is not an artificial virtual entity, since it is derived from the very nature of the existence of things, and for this reason there is no change or alteration possible in it.

Exceptions

Are the laws of creation subject to exceptions? Are miracles and supra-natural acts a violation of the Divine law?

The answer in both cases is negative. Neither are the laws of creation subject to exceptions nor are miracles and supra-natural acts an exception in the Divine law.

If there are alterations witnessed in the laws of creation then those alterations are actually the result of changes in conditions.

For it is but obvious that any law is applicable in specific conditions and with a change in conditions another law springs into operation, and that the original law always remains applicable in its own specific conditions. Hence, an apparent alteration in Divine law and practice is actually within the law and according to established practice, but not in the sense that an older law is abrogated by another newer one, rather, in the sense that the conditions of a law change and new conditions come in its place. And in those new conditions a new law operates. In the universe, there is nothing but the unalterable Divine laws, precedents, and rules. If dead are brought back to life miraculously, that has its own set of laws and rules. If a son is born, like Jesus son of Mary, without a father, it is not contrary to Divine law and practice in creation.

The fact is that man does not know all the laws of the universe, and when he sees something contrary to the laws and rules that he is familiar with, he feels that this "anomaly" is absolutely contrary to (Divine) law and practice and a violation of the principle of causality. Of course, in many cases what he considers as law is actually just the appearance of law but not the actual law. For instance, we think that the law of creation for life is that a living being always results from the marriage between a father and mother, but this is only an apparent law, not the real law. The birth of Jesus son of Mary has violated only the apparent law not the real law. That the laws of creation are unalterable is one matter, and whether the laws we have recognised are the actual laws or just the apparent laws is another matter altogether.

The meaning of a miracle is not that it is without a law or it is above the law. The materialists fell prone to the error that those natural laws of the universe discovered by science were the only real laws and hence miracles were a violation of the laws. We say that whatever has been explained by science is applicable only under specific and limited conditions but when a Prophet or saint wills to perform a super-natural act, conditions change, since in such a case a powerful and pure soul has found recourse to the Unlimited Power of the Almighty, and this changes all the conditions. In other words, a specific factor

and new player has entered the scene. Obviously in new circumstances created by the presence of the new actor i.e. the powerful and pure will of a saint, another set of laws become operational.

In the case of the effects of supplications and charity in warding off afflictions and the like, the same process applies. There is a narration that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) was asked that if every event that occurs in the universe is according to the predetermination and unalterable will of God what effect can a supplication or medicine have? He replied: supplication also is part of God's predetermination and plan.[i]

In another tradition it is narrated that Imam 'Alī ('a) was seated near a wall. He noticed that the wall was broken and it could possibly fall. He immediately stood up and distanced himself from there. Someone objected that, "Do you flee from Divine decree?" Meaning that if it is decreed you should die it would make no difference whether you avoid the wall or not, death will catch up with you; and if it is decreed that you suffer no affliction, then again you will be protected. Hence, what does it mean to distance yourself from the wall which is about to fall? In response, Imam explained:

أفر من قضاء الله إلى قدر الله عز و جل

I flee from God's decree to His plan.[ii]

The meaning of this statement is that every event that occurs in the universe is subject to God's decree and plan. If a person exposes himself to danger and suffers injuries, it is Divine law and decree, and if he escapes danger and is saved, that too is God's decree and plan. If a man enters an environment full of microbes and gets infected, it is (Divine) law, and if he takes drugs and gets cured from the infection, that too is (Divine) decree. Thus if a person stands up from a beneath a wall about to fall, he has not done anything contrary to Divine decree and plan. In such circumstances the Divine law is that he is pro-

[i] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 78.
[ii] Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 369.

tected from death; and if continues sitting under a wall about to fall and perishes under the crushing wall, that too is a law of creation.

The holy Qur'ān explains this reality in an interesting manner. In sūrah al-Ṭalāq (65:2-3) we read:

وَمَن يَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُۥ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا
يَحْتَسِبُ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بَٰلِغُ
أَمْرِهِۦ ۚ قَدْ جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدْرًا

And whoever is wary of God, He shall make a way out for him, and provide for him from whence he does not reckon. And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him. Indeed God carries through His command. Certainly God has set a measure for everything [1]

In this verse apparently the law which is above all laws and governs all of them is mentioned, and that is the law of God-consciousness and reliance.

From this verse, one can derive the fact that, with reliance, God's special grace is definite and confirmed; whosoever truly relies on God will certainly attract special Divine grace, and Divine support and grace which itself has a special process, is a Divine law which involves a series of causes and effects, reaching one's goals becomes inevitable. This is a law which overrides all other laws. At the same time, so as not to forget that God's act has an order and laws, the verse states "Certainly God has set a measure for everything," and also states, "And whoever is wary of God, He shall make a way out for him." That is to say, His acts are not without rules or means, even though those means may be of a nature which are not accessible and knowable but rather "from whence he does not reckon".

[1] Qur'ān 65:2-3

Divine Decree and the Issue of Compulsion

If we keep in mind that Divine decree and predestination implies that the universe works in accordance with definite laws and precedents, the objection of compulsion in relation to Divine decree and predestination is also solved. In our book *Man and His Destiny* we have discussed this matter in detail and those wanting details can refer to that book. Here we will only briefly touch on the topic:

This objection arises from the fact that a group believes the meaning of Divine decree is that God wills every event directly and outside the framework of the law of creation.

It has been attributed to Khayyām:[37]

True I drink wine, like every man of sense,
For I know Allah will not take offense;
Before time was, He know that I should drink,
And who am I to thwart His prescience?[i]

The composer of this poem thinks man's will regarding any act is pitted against and contrary to the Divine will and hence assumes if man decides not to drink wine, it is impossible, since God's will was that he ought to drink wine, and since the Divine will and knowledge is inviolable, man has no choice but to drink it.

This is a very weak argument and is based on sheer ignorance, and hence it is difficult to believe it was composed by Khayyām the philosopher. Every philosopher and pseudo-philosopher knows at least this much that God neither directly wills the wine-drinking of someone nor does any act in the universe happen outside the framework of the Divine order and law. In as much as no natural event can occur without its natural cause, so also voluntary human acts cannot occur without man's will and choice. God's law regarding human actions is that man should possess freewill, ability and choice; he should select either good or evil acts himself. Freedom to choose is an inseparable part of the human essence. A man without freedom is impossible; that is, the supposition that there is a human without choice is just a supposition not a reality and implies in

[i] Whinfield, quatrain 197.

actuality a non-man. So, if there is no-man, then he is not duty-bound; like the case of a cow or a donkey putting its head into a vessel of wine and drinking some of it. Thus the Divine decree and predestination which has willed the human has also willed his freedom of choice. Hence, drinking wine by a man without his choice and freedom but just on Divine compulsion is contrary to eternal Divine knowledge and if man were to drink wine by compulsion that would mean God's knowledge is ignorance.

Experts today doubt whether Khayyām the poet is the same as Khayyām the philosopher. There is a possibility, in fact they have proof, that there may have been two or more people and history has confused between them. Anyhow, whether it was two different people with the same name, or one person with two differing personalities, this argument that Divine knowledge and decree is the cause of committing sins such that it robs man of his responsibility and freedom of choice is false and in response it has been aptly put:[38]

To pose Divine knowledge the cause of sins;
Is to the wise ultimate ignorance.

Summary

From the lengthy perhaps tiring discussion which we had in this section, the response to the argument of discrimination and differentiation can be summarised as below:

1. The world of creation is governed by a series of essential unalterable laws and order, according to which every being and every event has a specific position, level and state; no alteration or change is possible therein.
2. The corollary of the world having an order is the existence of multiple states and varying levels in being, and this is the basis of the appearance of differences and variations, and the appearance of defects and non-existences.
3. Difference and variation is not created, rather it is the inherent necessity of created beings, and it is an errone-

ous assumption that someone presumes the Creator has discriminated between his creatures.

4. What would be contradictory and an invalidation of justice or wisdom is discrimination not differentiation and what exists in the universe is differentiation not discrimination.

Evils

Three Aspects of the Discussion

What we have discussed so far has been about disparities and discriminations. As we mentioned previously, the objections and problems related to "Divine Justice" are of several types: discriminations, annihilations and non-existences, faults and defects, and afflictions.

Earlier we promised that out of these four types of objections, we would discuss the first under the heading "Discriminations" and the remaining three under the heading "Evils." Now that we have completed the discussion about discriminations, we will begin the discussion of evils.

The answer that philosophers have given to the issue of evils includes three parts:

A. What is the essence of evils? Are evils real, existential things, or are they non-existential *('adamī)* and relative?

B. Whether evils be existential or non-existential, are good and evil separable or inseparable? In the second case—that they are inseparable—is the entirety of the universe, with all its goodnesses and evils, good or bad? That is, do goodnesses predominate over evils, or do the evils of the world predominate over its goodnesses? Or does neither predominate over the other, with them being equal.

C. Whether evils be existential or non-existential, and whether they be separable from goodnesses or not, is that which is evil actually evil, without there being any aspect of goodness in it; that is, without it being a preliminary or basis for one or several goodnesses? Or is there one or rather several goodnesses hidden in every evil, every evil producing one or several goodnesses?

In the first part, an answer will be given to the dualists, who maintain two types or sources of existence. And with the addition of the second part, an answer will be given to the objection of the materialists, who consider evils to be an objection to Divine wisdom, and also the objection of those who, by mentioning the problem of evil, find fault with Divine justice. The

third part of the discussion reveals the beautiful and unique order of the world of existence, and it can be considered an independent answer—albeit sufficient—or a useful complement to the first answer.

Our Method

Using the same material that Islamic philosophers have mentioned in this discussion, we have engaged in answering the problem of evils in a new fashion. The answer we present in this book contains the same elements that are mentioned in books of Islamic philosophy—especially the books of Mullā Ṣadrā—and both answers are essentially the same. The difference between our answer and theirs is in the particular method we have followed, and this is because we are studying the issue of evils from the perspective of "Divine Justice," while the custom of Islamic philosophers was to cover it in the discussion of Divine Unity while refuting the objection of the dualists, or in the issue of "Divine providence and knowledge" and how Divine decree *(qaḍā)* relates to evils. And since they have studied it from that particular perspective, their answer pertains directly to refuting the question of the "duality of origin" or the manner of relation of Divine decree *(qaḍā)* to evils, and can only be used indirectly in the discussion of "Divine Justice."

The Issue of the Duality of Existence

The basis of the objection of the dualists and their supporters—as have also indicated previously—is that if existing things in their essence are of two types—good and evil—they must necessarily originate from two types of sources, so that both goodnesses and evils relate to a separate creator. In reality, the dualists wished to exonerate God of evil, and ended up charging Him with having an associate. In the view of the dualists, who have divided the world into two divisions, good and evil, and consider the existence of evils to be extraneous, or rather detrimental, and naturally consider them to be from not God but rather a power in opposition to God, God is like a well-intentioned but weak human being who is tormented by

existing conditions and is not pleased with them, but is faced with a wicked and ill-intentioned rival who, in opposition to His desire, creates evils and vices.

The dualists have been unable to harmonize belief in the unlimited power and unchallenged will of God and His uncontested decree with belief in His Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness. But Islam, at the same time as it considers God to be the origin of all existence and possessor of unending mercy and supreme wisdom, it doesn't find fault with His supreme will and uncontestable power; it relates everything to Him, even Satan and his leading astray.

In Islam's view, the issue of evils is solved in a different way, which is that Islam says that while in one reckoning the affairs of the world are divided into the two categories of good and evil, in another reckoning, there is no evil in the order of creation; what exists is good, and the existing order is the best order. Nothing more beautiful than what exists is possible.

Intellectually, such an answer to the issue of evils relies on a particular philosophy in which the issues of existence and non-existence are studied in depth. The answer this philosophy gives to the dualists is that "evils" are not real and actual existent things for them to have need of a creator and an origin. This point can be elucidated in two ways: that evil is non-existential, and that evil is relative. By explaining this point, the objection of the duality of existence is eliminated in its entirety.

Evil is Non-existential

A simple analysis shows that the essence of "evils" is non-existence. That is, all evils are of the form of non-existence and non-being. This point has a long precedent. The roots of this idea go back to ancient Greece. In books of philosophy, this idea is attributed to the ancient Greeks and specifically to Plato. But later philosophers have analyzed it better and to a greater extent; and since we consider this point to be correct and fundamental, we mention it here to the extent appropriate to this book. As an introduction, while asking our readers' par-

don on account of the difficulty of the material, we request them to persevere and try to understand the intent. We think the matter is important enough to be given attention, and of course we will try to explain the matter as simply as possible.

The intent of those who say "Evil is non-existential" is not that that which is known as "evil" does not exist, for it to be said that this is obviously false; we see clearly and with our senses that blindness, deafness, sickness, oppression, injustice, ignorance, inability, death, earthquakes, and so on exist. Neither can we deny the existence of these things, nor their being evil. And [their intent] is also not that since evil is non-existential, therefore evil does not exist; and since evil does not exist, human beings have no obligation, since the obligation of man is to combat evils and evil people and acquire virtues and support good people. And since every condition is good and not evil, one must always be satisfied with the current situation, and must rather consider it the best possible condition.

Don't be quick to judge; neither do we want to deny the existence of blindness, deafness, injustice, poverty, sickness, and so on; nor do we wish to deny their evilness; nor do we wish to deny the obligation of human beings and ignore the role of man in changing the world and perfecting society. The overall ascent of the world-and especially humanity-and the mission of humanity in managing that which has been placed on its shoulders is a part of the beautiful order of the world. So it is not these things that we are talking about; what we are talking about is that all of these are forms of "non-existential things" and "imperfections," and their existence is of the form of the existence of "deficiencies" and "vacuums," and they are evil because they are themselves non-being, deficiency, and emptiness, or are the source of non-being, deficiency, and emptiness; the role of humanity in the necessary ascending order of the world is to compensate for deficiencies, fill up the vacuums, and eliminate the sources of these vacuums and deficiencies.

If this analysis is accepted, it is the first step and the first level; its effect is that it drives from one's mind the question, who created evils? Why are some beings good and some evil? It makes clear that that which is evil is not of the form of being,

but of the form of emptiness and non-being, and it eliminates the background for dualist thought, which claims that existence has two branches, or rather two sources.

As for the aspect of Divine justice and infinite Divine wisdom, there are still other levels which we have to pass after this one.

Good and evil things in the world are not two separate and differentiated types from one another in the sense that, for example, inanimate objects or minerals are separate from plants and plants are separate from animals and create particular groups. It is a mistake to assume that evil things are a specific group of things whose essence consists of evil and in which there is no good; and good things in their turn are another category separate and differentiated from bad things. Good and evil are mixed together; they are inseparable. In nature, where there is evil there is also good, and where there is good there is also evil. In nature, good and evil are bound and mixed together in such a way that it is as if they have been compounded together, not a chemical compound, but a deeper and more subtle compounding, of the type of the compounding of being and non-being.

Being and non-being do not comprise two separate groups in the external world. Non-being is nothing and emptiness and cannot occupy a particular place side by side with being. But in the natural world, which is the world of potentiality and actuality, movement and evolution, and contradiction and opposition, wherever there are forms of being, forms of non-being also apply. When we speak of "blindness" we should not think that "blindness" is a specific thing and a tangible reality that exists in the eye of a blind person. Instead, "blindness" is nothing but the lack of "sight" and it itself has no reality.

Good and evil, too, are like being and non-being; in fact, fundamentally good is the same as being and evil is the same as non-being. Wherever we speak of evil, there is definitely a non-being and lack [of something] involved. "Evil" is either itself of the form of non-being, or it is a being that necessitates a form of non-being; that is, it is a being that, inasmuch as it is itself, is good, and it is evil inasmuch as it necessitates a non-

being; and it is only evil because it necessitates a non-being, not for any other reason. We consider ignorance, poverty, and death to be evil. These by their essence are non-being. We consider poisonous and dangerous animals, bacteria, and afflictions to be evil. These are not non-being by their essence, but they are beings that necessitate non-being.

"Ignorance" is the lack and non-existence of knowledge. Knowledge is a reality and an actual perfection, but ignorance is not a reality. When we say, "An ignorant person lacks knowledge," it doesn't mean that he possesses a particular quality called "lack of knowledge," and knowledgeable people don't possess that quality. Knowledgeable people, before they acquire knowledge, are ignorant; when they acquire knowledge, they don't lose anything; they only acquire something. If ignorance were an actual reality, acquiring knowledge—since it would be alongside a loss of ignorance—would simply be the changing of one attribute for another, just as a body loses one form and quality and acquires a different form and quality.

"Poverty" too is non-possession, not possession and being. One who is poor lacks something called wealth; it is not the case that he in turn possesses something called poverty and, like a wealthy person, has a type of possession, except that a wealthy person possesses wealth and a poor person possesses poverty.

"Death" too is the loss of something, not the acquiring of something. This is why a body that loses the attribute of life and turns into an inanimate object has descended, not ascended.

As for poisonous and dangerous animals, bacteria, floods, earthquakes, and afflictions, they are evil because they cause death or the loss of an organ or ability, or prevent abilities from reaching perfection. If poisonous animals did not cause death and sickness, they would not be evil; if plant afflictions did not cause the annihilation of trees or their fruits, they would not be evil; if floods and earthquakes did not result in human and material losses they would not be evil. Evil is in those casualties and losses. If we call a beast of prey evil, it is not because its peculiar essence is the essence of evil, but because it is a cause of death and loss for something else. In reality, what is evil by

essence is that loss of life itself. If a beast of prey were to exist but not to prey [on other things], that is, if it were not to cause loss of life for anything, it would not be evil, and if it exists and loss of life takes place, it is evil.

In terms of the relation between cause and effect, usually those very actual deficiencies, meaning poverty and ignorance, become causes of things like bacteria, floods, earthquakes, war, and so on, which are evils of the second type, meaning that they are beings that are evil inasmuch as they are a source of deficiencies and non-being.

In order to combat these type of evils, we must first combat the first type of evils and fill vacuums like ignorance, inability, and poverty, so that evils of the second type don't come about.

The same applies with regard to moral actions and ugly qualities. Injustice is bad because it destroys the "right" of the oppressed. A "right" is something which a being deserves and which one must receive. For example, knowledge is a perfection for a human being which the innate human capacity demands and moves toward, and, for this reason, deserves. If someone is denied the right to learn and is prevented from gaining knowledge, that is oppression and evil, since it prevents a perfection and causes a deficiency. Similarly, oppression is evil for the oppressor as well since it contradicts his higher potentials; if the oppressor possessed no higher power and potential than that of anger, oppression would not be bad for him, or rather it wouldn't have any meaning with respect to him.

Now that it has been established that evils are all of the form of non-being, the answer to dualists becomes clear. The objection of the dualists was that since there are two types of beings in the universe, the universe must necessarily have two types of origins and creators.

The answer is that there is no more than one type of being in the universe, and that is the existence of good things; evils are all of the form of non-being, and non-being is not a created thing. Non-being is from a "not creating," not from a "creating." One cannot say that the universe has two creators: one is the creator of beings and the other is the creator of non-beings. The example of being and non-being is like that of the sun and

shadow. When a pole is put up in the sun, the area that remains dark because of the pole and doesn't become lighted by sunlight is called a "shadow." What is a shadow? A "shadow" is darkness, and darkness is nothing but the non-being of light. When we say that light emanates from the originating centre, one cannot ask where the shadow has emanated from and what the centre of darkness is. Shadow and darkness have not emanated from anything and have no independent source and centre of their own.

This is the meaning of the words of the philosophers when they say that "evils" are not created in themselves, but are created subordinately and figuratively.

Evil is relative

Attributes by which things are described are of two types: real and relative. If an attribute applies to a certain thing in all conditions and irrespective of everything else, it is called a "real" attribute. A real attribute is one for which it is sufficient to posit a thing and that attribute in order for it to be possible for that thing to be described by that attribute. In contrast, a relative attribute is one in which supposing [the existence of] a thing and an attribute is not sufficient in order for that thing to be described by that attribute, unless some third thing is supposed that can serve as a basis for comparison and relation. Thus, whenever the affirmation of an attribute with respect to a thing depends on the keeping in mind of some third thing and comparing this with that, such an attribute is called "relative."

For example, life is a real matter. A being, irrespective of whether it is compared to something else, either possesses life or doesn't possess it. Similarly, whiteness and blackness (assuming that colours are actual things) are real attributes. A thing that is white is white without it having to be compared to anything else, and a thing that is black is black in itself, and it doesn't need to be compared to something else for it to be black. And many other attributes are the same way, such as quantity and dimension.

But smallness and largeness are relative attributes. When we say that a body is small, we have to see in comparison to what thing or relative to what thing we call it small. Every thing can be both small and large; it depends what thing we make our base and standard [of comparison].

For example, we say that an apple or a pair is small, and another apple or pair is big. Here, the standard is the size of other apples and pairs; that is, the apple or pair in question is either smaller or larger in size compared to other apples and pairs that we are familiar with. We also call a particular watermelon small. This too is in comparison to other watermelons.

This same watermelon which we view and call very small is bigger than that big apple, but since we compare it to watermelons and not apples, we call it small.

Consider the size of a large ant which is so large that you put your finger to your lip in wonder and the size of a very small camel whose small size you wonder at. You will see that the small camel is many millions of times the size of that very large ant. How can "very small" be bigger than "very big"? Is this a contradiction? No, it is not a contradiction. That "very small" was very small for a camel, and is very small compared to the standard and mould the mind has created in accordance with its familiarity with camels; and that "very big" was very big for ants, and is very big compared to the standard and mould the mind has created in accordance with its familiarity with ants.

This is the meaning of our statement: "Largeness and smallness are relative concepts"; but quantity itself—meaning number and dimension—are real things, as was indicated. If we have a number of apples, for example one hundred, this "one-hundredness" is a real attribute, not a comparative one; the same is true of their size, for example if it is half a cubic meter.

Number and dimension are of the category of quantity, and smallness and bigness are of the category of relation. Being one, two, three, four, and so on are real things; but being first, second, third, fourth, and so on are relative things.

For a societal law to be good or bad depends on it keeping in view both the individual's interest and society's interest to-

gether, giving precedence to collective rights over individual rights, and ensuring individual rights to the extent possible. But to ensure all individual freedoms one hundred percent is impossible, and thus whether a law is good from this perspective—that of ensuring freedoms—is relative, since only some of them can be ensured. A good law is one that ensures the maximum number of freedoms possible, even though it may necessitate the denial of some freedoms. Thus the goodness of a law with respect to ensuring freedoms is relative to other supposable laws which are less able to protect and ensure freedoms than it is.

Here it is necessary to mention a point to prevent a misunderstanding, which is that, as was noted, the intent of the statement "Evil is relative" is relative as opposed to being real; "It is relative" means it is comparative. Sometimes relativity is used in opposition to absoluteness; in this case it means that the actuality of a thing depends on a series of conditions; and absoluteness means freedom from a series of conditions. If we take relativity in this sense, all natural and material things, inasmuch as they are contingent and dependent on a series of limited temporal and spatial conditions and only possess their particular reality under those conditions, are relative. Only nonmaterial beings have absolute being. Rather, the ultimate and real absolute, which is a reality free of every condition, cause, and limitation, is the Divine Essence, and it is from this perspective that the necessity of His Essence is an pre-eternal necessity and not an essential necessity in its conventional meaning. The point is that here, where our discussion is about the relativity of the evilness of beings from which essential evils—meaning non-beings—originate, the intent is relativity as opposed to reality and actuality, not relativity as opposed to absoluteness, in which sense many good things are also relative.

Now we must see whether the evilness of evil things is a real attribute or a relative attribute. Previously we said that evil things are of two types: evils that are themselves non-existential, and evils that are existential things but are evil because they become causes of a series of non-existential things. Evils that are themselves non-existential, such as ignorance,

inability, and poverty, are real (non-relative) attributes, though [they are] non-existential; as for evils that are existential but are evil because they are a source of non-existential things, such as floods, poisonous animals, beasts of prey, and sickness-causing bacteria, without doubt their evilness is relative. In such cases, what is evil is evil with respect to one or several specific things. Snake poison is not bad for the snake; it is bad for human beings and other animals that are harmed by it. A wolf is bad for a sheep, but not for itself or for a plant [for example]; just as a sheep, with respect to a plant that it eats and destroys, is bad, but with respect to itself, human beings, or a wolf [for example], it is not bad.

Rūmī says,[39]

Snake-poison is life to the snake,
(But) it is death in relation to man.
Hence there is no absolute evil in the world;
Evil is relative,[i] know this (truth) also.[ii]

On the other hand, real existence—anything which is created and originated and has actual existence—exists for itself, not for other things. The existence of every thing for another thing or things is a suppositional and non-real existence and is not subject to being created and originated.

In other words, every thing possesses an innate existence and an extrinsic existence (i.e. an existence for some other existence), and more precisely, the existence of every thing has two aspects: "in-itself" or innate, and "for-other" or extrinsic. Things, inasmuch as they exist for themselves, are real, and in

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[i] In this verse, Rūmī has confused two issues. One is that evil (meaning evil of the second type) is in the relational and comparative being of things, not in their real and in-itself being. That is, everything in itself is good for itself; if it is evil, it is evil for something else, just like snake poison is good for the snake and bad for other things. Here, it must be said that the evilness of snake poison is in its for-other being, not in its in-itself being.

The other issue is that something whose being is good with respect to all things is called "absolute good," like the being of the Necessarily Existent; and if something is postulated whose being is evil with respect to all other things, it would be called "absolute evil." Relative good and evil, as opposed to absolute, mean that something is is good or evil with respect to some—not all—things, like most things in the world. What Rūmī mentions in this verse is a combination of the two issues; the first verse mentions the first issue, and the second verse the second one.

[ii] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 276, vr. 68 and 65.

this sense are not evil. Every thing is good for itself; if it is evil, it is evil for something else. Can it be said that a scorpion is evil for itself? A wolf is evil for itself? No, without doubt the being of a scorpion or wolf is good for itself, they are for themselves just as we are for ourselves. Thus the evilness of a thing is not in its innate being; it is in its relational being. But without doubt that which is real and actual is the innate and essential existence of every thing; relative existences are and suppositional and conventional things, and since they are relative and suppositional, they are not real, meaning that they do not actually have a place in the order of existence or possess actual being for it to be debated why this existence—meaning relative existence—has been given to them. In other words, things have not come into being twice or been given two beings, one in-themselves and the other in-relation.

Suppose that you explain a point for some students. Then you repeat it once, and again for a third and fourth time. Each time, you explained the same point without adding or subtracting anything. That is, your explanation which came into being through you is the same in all four instances, but each of those instances has an attribute peculiar to itself. One is "first," another "second," another "third," and the last is "fourth." In each instance, did you do two things: one, explaining your point; and two, giving your explanation the attribute of "first," "second," "third," or "fourth"? Or are these attributes a series of relational attributes—that are at the same time suppositional and derivational—that come about through your repeated action, which took place in all four instances in the same form, and through a comparison of those four instances with one another? It is obvious that the second case is correct. These types of attributes, which are suppositional and derivational attributes, are at the same time necessary and inseparable corollaries of their objects, which are real and actual things.

Thus, such things cannot be discussed as independent things. The question cannot be asked in the form, "Why did the Creator and Originator create these relational and suppositional beings?" since in the first place, these beings are not real for their creation to be discussed, and in the second place these

suppositional and derivational beings are corollaries of actual beings and cannot be discussed independently; and if they are discussed non-independently, it will be in the form of why actual beings were created of which these are the inseparable suppositional and derivational corollaries. And this is the issue that will be broached and answered in the next section.

Incidentally, let us also point out that what we said about firstness, secondness, and so on being suppositional and derivational things and not possessing actual being, and thus not being subject to creation, should not be confused with another issue, which is the issue of precedence, meaning that a person or other free and self-conscious agent choose one of two things or actions over the other and place it first. This is another issue, and we will discuss it later. Paying attention to the example above will clarify the matter.

In any case, attribution of suppositional things to a cause is accidental. This is why philosophers have said that evils are not created by essence; in their essence they are not effects or created. Their being effects or being created is accidental. As we said previously, it is precisely as if we were to say, "The sun is the cause of the existence of shadow." Of course, without the sun, there would be no shadow as well, but the causality of the sun with respect to shadow is different from its causality with respect to light. The sun actually and really emanates light, but it doesn't really create shadow. Shadow is not a thing for it to be originated. Shadow comes about from the limitation of light; rather it is the limitation of light itself. With respect to evils, whether of the first or the second type, the same is the case. Evils are suppositional and non-existential. Blindness in a blind person is not an independent reality for it to be said that one source created the blind person and another source created his blindness. Blindness is non-being, and every evil is non-being. Non-being has no origin or creator.

Evils from the Aspect of the Principle of Justice

In this way, the objection of the dualists and the fallacious idea of the duality and dual origin of being is eliminated, since

it was demonstrated that being is not of two types for there to be a need of two origins.

But as we indicated earlier, the issue of the non-existentiality of evils alone is not sufficient to solve the problem of "Divine Justice"; it is [only] the first level and step. The conclusion that can be reached from this discussion is only that being is not of two types: one type those beings that, inasmuch as they are existent, are good; and the other type those beings that, inasmuch as they are existent, are evil. Instead, being, inasmuch as it is being, is good; and non-being, inasmuch as it is non-being, is evil; beings can be evil inasmuch as they are coupled with non-beings or are the sources of non-beings. Thus, in being itself there is no overruling duality for the idea of two sources of being to take root. And [in turn] non-being, inasmuch as it is non-being, does not require a separate origin and source.

But in terms of Divine Justice, the problem of evil takes a different form. From this aspect, the issue isn't the duality of things; the issue is—whether things are of two types or not—why deficiency, lack, annihilation, and non-being have a place in the order of being to begin with. Why is one person blind, another deaf, and why does a third have a physical deformity? For blindness, deafness, and other defects to be non-existential is not enough to solve this problem, because the question remains as to why being hasn't taken the place of this non-being? Isn't this a form of holding back of Divine bounty and grace? And isn't the holding back of Divine grace a form of injustice? In the world, vacuums and deficiencies exist which are themselves the sorrows of this world. Divine justice requires that these vacuums be filled.

There is also a series of existential things that—as indicated previously—are born of non-beings like ignorance, inability, and poverty, and in their turn are causes of a series of deficiencies, annihilations, and non-beings. Illnesses, storms, fires, and earthquakes are of this type. Divine justice demands that such things not exist so that their effects, which are deficiencies, also not exist.

When we look at the problem from this aspect, we have to look into two issues:

First, is it possible to separate these deficiencies and lacks from the affairs of this world, or not? That is, is this world possible without these deficiencies, or are they inseparable corollaries of this world, with their non-existence being equivalent to the non-existence of the world?

Second, are those things that are called deficiencies and lacks absolute evil with no good hidden in them, or they are not absolute evil, with many benefits and effects following from them, and without which the order of the world will be destroyed and good things won't be able to exist [as well].

These two points comprise the second and third part of our discussion regarding evils, which we indicated earlier. The second part has become clear in the course of the first part and will become clearer in what follows, and the third part requires greater discussion, and we will discuss it in depth in the next section.

Benefits of Evils

Our discussion in the course of the previous section was a philosophical discussion and a rational analysis of the problem of evil. In this section, we look into the issue from another point of view.

Usually people who consider the problem of evil in the world with a view to criticising it do not stop to calculate how the world would be if it were bereft of these evil? They only say, simply and generally, If only the world were filled with enjoyment and felicity, and if only everyone would attain his wishes, and no pain or failure ever existed... The following verses are attributed to Khayyām:[40]

If I had control over the universe as God does,
I would destroy it all together -
And make anew a universe in which,
All would attain their heart's desire with ease.

Now let us see how it is possible to create a world better than the present world, as the poet wished. When we want to start making the "world", "destroying the roof of the universe and putting forth a new design", we must definitely set aside limited thoughts and childish ideas that are appropriate for the limited life of a human individual and contemplate a large and vast design. I don't think this engineering will be an easy task, and we may not be able to make a decision.

In any case, it is best that first, we look into the existing situation and get to know it better; then we can tire our minds thinking about a "better order." Perhaps, after a serious study, we would prefer the current state. To study the present world, it is necessary to discuss the phenomena of tragedy and tribulation from two points of view:

1. What place do evils have in the order of the entire world?
2. What is the value of evils in their own right?

In the first part, the discussion is about whether, in the entire order of the world, evils are dispensable. In other words, is a world without evils possible? Or, contrary to what might first

come to mind, is omitting them from the world impossible, and is the non-existence of calamities equivalent to the destruction of the world? In other words, are the evils of the world inseparable from its good things?

In the second part, the discussion is whether tragedies are solely harmful, and so to speak, have negative value? Or do they also have benefits and positive effects, with their negative effects actually being as nothing next to their beneficial and positive effects.

The Issue of Separation of Good and Evil

From what was said in the discussion of "discrimination" and in the discussion "evil is relative", to a large extent it became clear that evils are inseparable from good things, since evils are of the form of lacks and non-beings. In other words, vacuities like ignorance, inability, and poverty that exist in creation, to the extent that they are related to the ontic order, are absences of potential and limitations of possibility. That is, in the creational order, whatever level of deficiencies exist for every being is due to a deficiency in the capacity of the recipient [of Divine grace], and not due to the holding back of Divine grace, for it to be considered oppression or discrimination. Now in these things, the one thing that doesn't [essentially] pertain to the lack of potential and limitation of possibilities is what lies in the domain of human freewill and responsibility. Man, by virtue of his freewill and role in the formation of both himself and his society, must needs be attend to them—filling the vacuums as it were. This is one of the dimensions of man being God's vicegerent. That humanity has been created in this way and has such a responsibility is a part of the design of the ideal order [of the universe]. And as for evils that are existential and are good in their in-itself being and evil in their for-other being, as mentioned their evil aspect, in that it is relative and relational and one of the inseparable corollaries of their real being, is inseparable from their good aspect.

What we must add here is another point, which is the principle of interdependence and the facts that the parts of the uni-

verse are as a single "body." For we know that, the universe is an indivisible unit.

An important issue in philosophical and intellectual world-views is how the different parts of the world relate and connect to one another. Do they take the form of a series of separate and scattered things? If a portion of the universe were not to exist, or if it were to be supposed that some beings of the universe were to annihilated—what does this mean in terms of the remaining parts of the universe, is this possible [or not]? Or are the parts of the universe somehow all related and connected to one another.

In the fifth volume of *Principles of Philosophy and Method of Realism* we have discussed this issue. Here we suffice it to say that this issue has been the subject of debate from the time of the earliest philosophical inquiries. Aristotle supported the unity and "body-likeness" of the universe. In the Islamic world, this principle has always been affirmed. Mīr Findariskī, the well-known philosopher and gnostic of the Safavid era, says in the language of poetry:[41]

> Truth [God] is the soul of the world, the world like a body. The hosts of angels are as powers of this body; Heavenly spheres, elements, and all that is born are organs; This is *tawḥīd*, all else is trivia.[i]

Hegel[42], the well-known German philosopher, notes this principle in his philosophy. The dialectical materialism of Marx[43] and Engels, which is strongly influenced by the philosophy and logic of Hegel, accepted this principle under the name of "mutual influence."

Right now, we can't enter this issue in detail. Of course, all of those who have spoken of the "body-likeness" and interdependence and relatedness of the parts of the universe have not spoken at the same level.

What we mean by this principle is that the universe is an indivisible unit; that is, the relation between the parts of the universe is not such that it is possible to suppose that some of them

[i] This poem has also been attributed to Bābā Afḍal.

are removable and some retainable. Removing some parts necessitates, or rather equals, removal of all parts, just as retaining some equals retaining them all.

Thus, not only are non-beings inseparable from beings and relational and relative beings inseparable from real beings, real beings themselves are also inseparable from one another. So evils too, in addition to the two above-mentioned aspects and regardless of those two aspects, are inseparable from good things. In the words of Ḥāfiẓ, "the Prophetic lamp" is together with the "Abu Lahabic flame":[44]

> In this parterre, none plucked a rose without a thorn.
> So the lamp of Mustafa and the flames of Abu Lahab is.[1]

And he also points to the indivisibility of the parts of the universe where he says:[45]

> In the workshop of love, infidelity is unavoidable;
> Who will the Fire consume, if not for Abu Lahab?

The Total Order

So far the discussion has been about the relation and connectedness of things in existence and the indivisibility of the universe. Over and beyond this aspect, another point must be kept in mind; namely, in terms of goodness and evilness if things are looked at alone, separate, and independently of other things they have one ruling; and if they are looked at as part of a system and as an organ of a body they have another ruling, which occasionally may be opposite to the first one. It is obvious that if things that are in reality separate are looked at as a system, their actual being will be separate and their organic and body-like being will be suppositional; and in the same way if things that are actually and ontologically parts and organs of a system are looked at separately, their actual being will be organic and body-like, and their separate being will be suppositional. Now, we say:

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[1] Clarke, Ghazal 64.

If we were to be asked whether a straight line or a curved line is better on its own, we might say that a straight line is better than a curved line. But if the line in question is part of a complete system and order, we have to take the balance of the whole system into consideration in our judgement. In a complete and total order, in an absolute sense neither a straight line is desirable nor a curved line; just as in a face, it is good for the eyebrows to be curved and for the nose to be taut and straight; it is good for the teeth to be white and for the pupil of the eye to be black or blue. It is as someone said: "The curved eyebrow, if it were straight, would be off mark."

In a complete system and total order, every part has a particular status in accordance to which a particular quality is appropriate for it:

"For a lion it is good to attack; for a gazelle, to flee."

In a painting, there have to be different types of shading and various colours. Here, it is not right for there to be one colour and no variation. If the entire painting were to be monotonous and undifferentiated, it wouldn't be a painting.

When we look at the universe as a whole, we must accept that in the entire system and to maintain its balance, the existence of lows and highs, valleys and mountains, level and unlevel places, darknesses and lights, pains and pleasures, successes and failures, are all necessary.

The world is like an eye, curve, mole, and eyebrow;

Everything in its place is good.

Fundamentally, if variation and differences did not exist, there would be no such thing as multiplicity and variety; variegated beings would not exist; and there would be no meaning to there being a system or order (neither a beautiful order nor an ugly one). If there were to be no difference and variation in the world, all of being would have to be composed of a [single] simple matter, say carbon. The dignity and beauty of the world is in its vast variety and colourful differences. The Qur'ān counts the existence of differences among the signs of Divine power and wisdom: differences of colour, differences of lan-

guage, difference of night and day, differences of people, and so on.

Ugliness as the Manifester of Beauty

Uglinesses are necessary not only in that they are a part of the complete system of the universe and the total order depends on them, rather their existence is also needed to manifest and bring to light beautiful things. If beauty and ugliness were not compared to one another, neither would the beautiful be beautiful nor the ugly be ugly; that is, if ugliness were not to exist in the world, neither would beauty. If all people were to be beautiful, no one would be beautiful, just as if all were to be ugly, no one would be ugly. If all people were as beautiful as Yūsuf[i] (‘a), beauty would cease to exist; and likewise if everyone was like Jāḥiẓ,[ii] there would be no more ugliness. Similarly, if all people had heroic powers, there would be no more heroes. The expressions of emotion and praise that heroes receive are because they are few in number. In reality, the sensations and perceptions that man has of beautiful things are only possible if ugliness exists alongside beauty. The fact that people are pulled toward and attracted by beautiful people, and in other words attraction and stimulation is the natural response to beauty, is because they see ugly people and are repelled by them. In the same way, if mountain ranges and plateaus did not exist, plains would not exist and water would not fall from high to low.

In reality, the attractiveness of good-looking people is strengthened by the repulsiveness of ugly people. The magic and spell of beauty exists courtesy of the gracelessness of ugliness. The ugly have the greatest of rights over the beautiful. If not for them, the beautiful would not have had the glitter and shine that they do. The meaning of beauty comes from ugliness. If all were the same, there would be no appeal, nor attraction, nor movement, nor love, nor passion, nor pain, nor burning, nor warmth.

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[i] The prophet Joseph, who was the epitome of human beauty.
[ii] A medieval literate known for his ugliness.

It is a simpleminded idea to say that if everything in the universe were the same, the universe would be better. They suppose that the demand of Divine justice and wisdom is for all things to be at the same level. Whereas it is precisely by such a levelling out that all goodnesses, beauties, and all energies and passions, movements and evolutions towards perfection are destroyed. If mountain and valley were the same level, neither would mountain remain nor valley. If there weren't low points, there would be no high points either. If not for Mu'āwiyah, 'Alī ('a) with all his dignity and goodness would not exist. "In the workshop of love, infidelity is unavoidable."

Of course, one shouldn't think that the All-Wise Creator, in order to make the existing order the best [possible] order, and because His eye was to the entirety of the system, randomly made things beautiful or ugly even though it was possible for those beautiful things to be ugly or for those ugly things to be beautiful, choosing each being for its post by lottery or on a whim.

We said earlier that the order of the universe, horizontally and vertically, is a necessary order. God gives every being the very existence and the level of perfection and beauty that it is able to accept; deficiencies come from the essences of those beings themselves, and not from [a shortcoming in] Divine grace.

The meaning of saying that evil has, for example, such-and-such a benefit is not that so-and-so, who could possibly have been made beautiful, was specifically made ugly in order for the value of the beauty of some other person to become clear, for it then to be asked, "Why didn't the opposite happen?" Instead, the meaning is that at the same time that every being has the greatest degree of perfection and beauty possible for it, good effects also exist for this variation, such as beauty gaining value, the coming into being of attraction and motion and so on. The comparison we mention in the following part may make the issue clearer.

Society or Individual?

Scholars have a discussion under the title "Principality of the individual or society" about whether the individual is principle or society? Sometimes the discussion has a philosophical aspect and the point is whether the individual is a real entity and society is a conventional and derivational one, or on the contrary, society is a real entity and the individual is a suppositional and derivational one. Of course, here a third case can also be postulated, which is that both are principle and real; and in our view only this last case is correct. And sometimes the discussion is from the legal aspect and the aspect of "philosophy of law" and the point is whether the goal of law should be the "felicity of the individual" or the "empowerment of society." Supporters of the principality of the individual say that to the extent possible the lawmaker must take in view the ease, welfare, pleasure, and liberty of individuals; the happiness of the individual has first priority. The happiness and felicity of individuals should not be hindered with the pretext of societal interest, except where there is a risk of the destruction and dismemberment of society; only in such a case should the interest of society take precedence over the interest of the individual, since if society comes apart, the individual will naturally be destroyed as well. And in reality, here too it is the condition and interest of the individual that has been observed. As for the supporters of the principality of society, they say that what is most important is the strength and honour of society; lawmakers and politicians must focus their energies on the strength, honour, and pride of society. The pride of the individual, the comfort and happiness of the individual, the felicity of the individual, the freedom of the individual, and everything that relates to the individual should be sacrificed for society; society must stand tall, even if all of its individuals are in a lowly suffering and wretchedness.

To compare these two systems of thought, we take a look at the national budget. If the leaders of a country think in terms of the principality of the individual, they will strive to spend their country's budget in programs that are responsible for the com-

fort of the people of the nation and improvement of the economic standing of the general public, even if the pace of national progress is to slow down. But if they think in terms of the principality of society, they will not attend to the needs of individuals and will strive to put forward programs that ensure the ever greater progress of society in the future and its glory and honour among other societies. The space programs that the powerful countries of the world have originated are in line with this way of thinking. As we know, these programs are given priority over programs of health and public education and training. For the designers of these programs it isn't important that individuals in their country live in hunger, disease, and ignorance; what is important is the honour and glory of their country. The expense of these programs is so great and burdensome that it has weighed down the people of these countries, and in spite of the fact that these governments steal more than fifty percent of the wealth of the world through hook and crook, they still suffer from budget deficits.

The issue is that if the national budget were to be spent in an economic, health, or cultural program designed for the benefit of the general public, it is possible that it could bring about a good amount of welfare, comfort, and liberty for the people of the nation. But if the budget is spent on these programs—though it constricts all the individuals [of the country], it is a cause of pride and honour for that society.

Supporters of the principality of society say that the power and glory of society should be given the greatest degree of importance; and supporters of the principality of the individual say that the interests, comforts, and freedoms of the individuals must be given the greatest degree of attention.

The aim of presenting this topic is to draw attention to the point that the rule of the part is different from the rule of the whole. It is possible that something which is harmful and ugly for the part is beneficial and beautiful for the whole.

Differences of Capacities

With regard to human societies, as we said sometimes there is a conflict between the part and the whole; that is, sometimes for the good of society, it is necessary for an individual to be deprived of his rights. But with respect to the natural order of the world, this is not the case. Here, no part has been oppressed in order for the entirety of the universe to be beautiful.

From what we explained in the second section under the title "the secret of differences" it became clear that the differences and variation that have made the universe similar to a perfect and beautiful painting are essential differences. The positions and levels specified in creation for beings are not like social posts, which are changeable and alterable.

These positions and states, similar to the attributes of geometrical shapes, are essential to the beings. When we say that the peculiar attribute of a triangle is that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles and the peculiar attribute of a square is that the sum of its angles is equal to four right angles, it doesn't mean that the former has been bestowed the attribute of having two right angles or the latter has been bestowed with the attribute of having four right angles. Thus, it is baseless to ask why the triangle has been dealt with unjustly and not given the attribute of having four right angles. No, a triangle can have none but its own specific attribute. No one has made the triangle a triangle; that is, it is not the case that the triangle previously had some other state with differing attributes, and then someone came and turned it into a triangle. Nor is it the case that the triangle, square, and so on in one stage of their existence and actuality lacked all attributes, and then some overruling power came and distributed these attributes among them, and he desired to give the sum of a triangle's angles the attribute of equivalence to two right angles and give the sum of the angles of a square the attribute of equalling four right angles, in which case the question would arise as to why there has been discrimination. Meaning that it would be appropriate for the triangle to wordlessly object to the injustice done to it and demand an attribute like the attribute of a square.

The differences among the creatures of the world is also the same way. The fact that inanimate objects do not have growth and perception, that plants have growth but not perception, and that animals have both growth and perception is essential to the level and state of being of inanimate objects, plants, and animals respectively. It is not that they were initially all equal, and then the Creator gave one, both perception and growth, another, only one of the two, and a third, neither of them. Ibn Sīnā has a well-known statement that expresses this reality; he says,

ما جعل الله المشمشة مشمشة بل أوجدها.

God did not make the apricot an apricot; He merely created it.

The apricot was mentioned as an example; what is meant is all existents. God created things, and they are different in their essence. God created the apricot, the apple, the pomegranate, and so forth; but it is not that they were formerly all equal and God established differences among them after the fact, so to speak.

God created time. Time has a particular characteristic; it incorporates the past, present, and future. How did God create time? Did He initially create time like a ball of thread in the form of a collection with all of its parts being together, and then stretch and open it and make it in its current form? He also created the body. Did He first create the body without dimension and size, and then give it size and dimension? Or is the creation of the body equivalent to creation of dimension, length, size, precedence and antecedence, there being no duality between the creation of the body and the creation of size and dimension?

The Qur'ān has a very subtle and fine expression here; it relates from Prophet Mūsā[i] ('a) that when Pharaoh asks him and his brother Harūn[ii] ('a), "Who is your lord?" Mūsā ('a) replies,

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[ii] Aaron of the bible.

رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.[i]

What is interesting is the use of the expression "its creation," from which we can deduce that every thing has a peculiar creation that is its own; that is, every thing can accept only one particular manner of being and no more; and God bestows it with that particular being. One shouldn't think that things used to be some other way and God changed them to their present form; or at least it was possible for them to be different or have a manner of creation different from what they have, better or worse, and God chose this particular form of creation in spite of those possibilities. The reality is that the universe was possible only in this form in which it presently exists, and for every one of its parts as well only a specific form of creation was possible, and God bestowed it with that very creation.

The Qur'ān expresses this point with a sublime simile. The Qur'ān brings the simile of rainwater which falls from above and gradually creates floods and water in the beds of various rivers and streams; it says:

أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌۢ بِقَدَرِهَا

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of] their capacity...[ii]

That is, the mercy of the Lord does not deprive any able existent, but the potential and capacity of existents also is not equal; potentials and capacities are different; Divine mercy fills every container to the extent of its capacity.

This point is what we expressed in the second section under the title "the Secret of Differences"; it was repeated here because, in addition to the benefit of completing [the discussion],

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[i] Qur'ān 20:50
[ii] Qur'ān 13:17

it would not be fallaciously supposed that in the creation of the universe, the principality of the whole was kept in view, and for the beauty of the whole, some of the parts were dealt with unjustly. Instead, a beautiful whole has come about that owes its beauty to differences and variation [among beings], and at the same time those differences do not take the form of discrimination and injustice, and both the right of the part and the interest of the whole have been observed.

Those who, in responding to the problem of evil, have paid attention solely to the necessity of differences in the entire order, provide an incomplete answer, since the deficient part [of the system] has the right to object and say, "Now that it is necessary that in the whole order, some be perfect and others be deficient, why was I created deficient and another created perfect? Why wasn't it the other way around?" Similarly, it is possible for the "ugly" to object and say, "Now that it is necessary in the total order of creation for both the ugly and the beautiful to exist, why should I be ugly and another be beautiful? Why not the other way around?" When there are two things, one of which must get a lesser share of being and the other a greater share of being, what basis is there to give precedence to, say, A over B?

Thus, simply for us to say that in the total order, the coexistence of ugly and beautiful, perfect and deficient is necessary does not solve the objection. It must also be added that at the same time, every being and every part of the universe has received its right and the share it was possible for it to receive.

In other words, the issues of "benefit," "interest," and "wisdom" that are mentioned with respect to evil things are all subordinate to our understanding of reality—i.e. our understanding the fact that the relation of causes to their effects and the relation of premises to their conclusions is a necessary one, and the Divine pattern or precedent is unchanging.

Calamities, the Source of Felicities

Apart from the fact that evils has an important role in manifesting beauty and bringing about a wonderful whole, there is

also another basic point in the relation of evil and good. Between that which we call calamity and evil and that which we know as perfection and felicity, there is a causal relationship. Evil things are the source of and give birth to things that are good. This is the third beneficial effect of evil.

The first effect was that the existence of evil and ugliness is necessary in bringing about the beautiful whole of the universe. The second effect was that beautiful things as well are manifested by ugly things, and if ugliness and evil didn't exist, beauty and good would have no meaning, in the sense that the beauty of a beautiful thing in [one's] senses is because ugly things exist to which they can be compared.

Here, we discuss the third effect of evil and wretchedness under the title that ugliness is a preliminary for and originator of the existence of beauty. Felicities and happiness are hidden in the belly of afflictions and calamities, just as sometimes tragedies are formed inside of happiness; and this is the formula of this world:

يُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِي ٱلَّيْلِ

He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night...[1]

The well-known parable that says, "At the end of every dark night there is light" expresses the definite mutual link between the bearing of troubles and attaining of felicity. It is as though illumination is born of darkness, just as in instances of deviation whiteness produces blackness.

Hegel, the well-known German philosopher of the nineteenth century, has a statement that is worthy of note in this regard. He says,

"Conflict and evil are not negative things originating in the mind; instead, they are entirely real things, and in the view of wisdom they are stages of good and development. Conflict is the law of progress. Attributes and characteristics are origi-

[1] Qur'ān 22:61, 31:29, 35:13, 57:6

nated and perfected in the battlefield of chaos and turmoil of the world, and one can only reach the peak of elevation through suffering, responsibility, and hardship. And suffering is a comprehensible thing, a sign of life, and a motive for reform. Passions, too, have a place among comprehensible things; no great thing has reached its perfection without passion, and even the ambition and self-centeredness of Napoleon contributed, without his intention, to the progress of [various] nations. Life is not for felicity (ease and the contentment resulting from it). Rather, it is for evolution and development. The history of the world is not a scene of happiness and felicity; periods of felicity comprise its soulless pages, since these periods were periods of agreement, and such a costly contentment and happiness is not appropriate for a man. History was made during periods in which the contradictions of the real world were solved through progress and development."

To explain the mutual link between comforts and hardships, the Qur'ān says:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

Indeed ease accompanies hardship. Indeed ease accompanies hardship.[i]

The Qur'ān doesn't say that after hardship there is ease; the Qur'ānic expression is that with hardship, there is ease. That is, ease is within the confines of and together with hardship; and in the words of Rūmī[46], "One opposite is hidden within its opposite."

Life depends on dying (to self) and on suffering tribulation
The water of Life is the (Land of) Darkness.[ii]

There is a delicate point here, the understanding of which depends on quoting all of the verses of this chapter:

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[i] Qur'ān 94:5-6
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 524, vr. 4830.

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ
وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ وَرَفَعْنَا
لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ فَإِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا
فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَٱنصَبْ وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَٱرْغَب

This chapter is addressing the person of the Prophet (ṣ), and it is peculiar to the Prophet (ṣ):

> In the Name of God, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.
>
> Did We not open your breast for you and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? Did We not exalt your name? Indeed ease accompanies hardship. Indeed ease accompanies hardship. So when you are done with, appoint, and turn eagerly to your Lord.[1]

This chapter, with a tone full of kindness, reassures the mind of the Prophet (ṣ), which was as though it had been troubled by hardships. It speaks of how God lightened his heavy load from his shoulders and changed his difficulty to ease; then, in the manner of experimental sciences, from an event which has occurred and been observed, it draws the conclusion: "Ease accompanies hardship"; that is, from the fact that in the past there was a burden on your shoulders and we lifted it and elevated your name and gave you perseverance and tolerance, you should conclude that "Certainly, with every difficulty is ease."

Then, to strengthen the conclusion and assure that it is definite, the chapter repeats that certainly, "Ease accompanies hardship."

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[1] Qur'ān 94:1-8. The word *"fanṣab"* can mean either "appoint" or "make effort"; in this discussion, the author relies on the latter meaning.

The interesting point is that after concluding this general formula, the chapter also specifies the future path to follow on this basis; it says,

"So when you become free, make effort."

That is, since ease has been placed within fatigue and hardship, whenever you find leisure, make efforts anew and once again put yourself to work.

This peculiarity relates to living beings, especially humanity: hardships and difficulties are a preliminary for perfections and progress. Blows destroy inanimate objects and reduce their power, but they motivate living beings and make them powerful.

"How often abundance is within deficiencies!"

Calamities and hardships are necessary for the development of humanity. If not for hardships and sufferings, humanity would be destroyed. The Qur'ān says,

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

Certainly We created man in travail.[1]

Man must tolerate hardships and suffer difficulties to attain his appropriate level of being. Conflict and turmoil are the whips of development. Living beings traverse their path towards perfection through this whip. This law applies to the world of plants, animals, and especially human beings.

Imam 'Alī ('a), in one of his letters to Uthman ibn Hunayf, his appointed governor of Basrah, made mention of the biological law that living in ease and comfort and avoiding difficulties causes weakness; and conversely, living in difficult and disturbed conditions makes a person strong and fit, strengthening the essence of his being and making it experienced. In this letter, this great leader rebukes his governor for participating in an evening gathering of the nobles and setting foot in an assembly that had room only for the rich and not for the destitute. And in this connection he explains his own simple life and asks his

[1] Qur'ān 90:4

followers and especially the members of his government to follow the example of his conduct.

Then, to close the door of pretexts, he explains that disturbed conditions and simple nutrition do not reduce a person's powers or weaken one's strength. Desert trees that are deprived of the regular observation and care of a gardener have stronger wood and greater durability; conversely, garden trees that are always cared for by a gardener are weaker-skinned and less durable:[i]

ألا وإن الشجرة البرية أصلب عودا، والروائع الخضرة أرق جلودا، والنباتات البدوية أقوى وقودا وأبطأ خمودا.

God says in the Qur'ān:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient.[ii]

That is, calamities and afflictions are beneficial and have good effects for people who combat them and persevere; therefore, if they are steadfast they should be given glad tidings.

God, in order to train and rear the soul of human beings, has two programs: creational and legislative; and in each He has placed difficulties and hardships. In the legislative program, He has mandated acts of worship, and in the creational program, He has placed adversities in humanity's path. Fasting, pilgrimage, holy war, charity, and prayer are hardships that have been placed [on people's shoulders] by making them obligatory, and patience and perseverance in carrying them out are a cause of perfection of the soul and evolution of the lofty

[i] *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 45
[ii] Qur'ān 2:155

human abilities.[i] Hunger, fear, and loss of property and life are hardships that have been placed in creation and naturally have sway over people.

Tribulations for Divine Friends

This is why when God shows special grace to one of His servants, He places him in hardships. The well-known sentence "البلاء للـوَلاء" ("Tribulations are for God's friends") expresses this principle.

In a tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqir ('a), we read,

إن الله عز وجل ليتعاهد المؤمن بالبلاء كما يتعاهد الرجل أهله بالهدية من الغيبة.

"Verily God seeks out the believer with affliction as a man seeks out his near ones with gifts when he is away from them."[ii]

In another tradition from Imam Ja`far Sadiq ('a) we find:

إن الله إذا أحب عبدا غته بالبلاء غتا.

"Verily God, when He loves a servant of His, drowns him in tribulations."[iii]

That is, just like a swimming trainer who puts his young trainee in the water so that he will make an effort, flail his hands and feet, and thus gain practice and learn to swim, so too God places in affliction those whom He loves and wishes to convey to perfection. Even if a person reads for his whole life about swimming, until he goes in the water, he will not become a swimmer; he will learn to swim only when he actually goes in the water, practices struggling against drowning, and occasion-

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[i] This point does not contradict the negation of hardship in religion, which is an established principle, because the meaning of negation of hardship is not that training and duty do not exist in religion. Instead, the meaning is that commands that prevent human advancement and conflict with proper activity do not exist in religion. Religious laws have been written so that they neither encumber nor encourage laziness.

[ii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 15, part one, p. 56, from *al-Kāfī*

[iii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 15, part one, p. 55, from *al-Kāfī*

ally sees himself in danger of drowning if he isn't careful. Man must see hardships in the world in order to learn how to escape from them; he must face difficulties in order to become experienced and complete.

Regarding some birds, they have written that when their young grow wings, in order to teach them how to fly, they take them out of the nest and into the heights of the air, and then let go in the middle of the sky; the young bird, out of necessity, struggles and makes uncoordinated movements, flapping its wings until it gets tired and is about to fall; at this time, its merciful mother grasps it and places it on her own wing until its fatigue goes away, and as soon as it has had a little rest, she once again lets it go in the air and forces it to struggle until it gets tired and she again grasps it. She repeats this until her young one learns to fly.

The Prophet (ṣ) was invited to the house of one of the Muslims. When he entered the house, he saw a hen that had laid an egg on top of a wall, but the egg didn't fall, or fell and didn't break. The Prophet (ṣ) was amazed at this. His host said, "Does this amaze you? By God Who raised you as a prophet, I have never seen affliction." The Prophet (ṣ) stood up and left that man's house, saying, "Someone who has never seen an affliction is not a recipient of God's grace."

It has been narrated from Imam Sadiq ('a) that:

إن أشد الناس بلاء الأنبياء، ثم الذين يلونهم، ثم الأمثل فالأمثل.

"Verily, the most severely tried people are the prophets, then those who follow them [in their level of virtue], and so on in order of [people's level of] virtue."[i]

In books of traditions, a special chapter has been dedicated to the severity of the trial of Imam 'Alī ('a) and the Imams of his progeny.

For the friends of God, adversity is a Divine grace that has the face of wrath, just as blessings and ease for those who are astray and far from God's favour may possibly be punishments

[i] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 15, part one, p. 56, from *al-Kāfī*

with the apparent form of a blessing, and wrath disguised as grace.

Pedagogical Effect of Calamities

Difficulty and hardship are both an instructor for individuals and awakener for nations. Hardship awakens and makes more alert those who were asleep and motivates people's decisions and determination. Like a polish given to iron or steel, the more hardships touch a person's soul, the more determined, active, and sharp they make him, since the peculiarity of life is to combat hardship and, knowingly or unknowingly, become prepared to face it.

Hardship, like alchemy, has the attribute of changing the essence of things; it changes the soul of a person. The elixir of life is two things: love and tribulation. These two create genius, and from depressed and lustreless matter make lustrous and shiny gems.

All his life Sa'dī has faced bitterness,
For his name to be known as sweet-tongued[47]

Peoples who live in the heart of difficulties and hardships become strong and determined. A leisure-seeking and pampered people are condemned and wretched.

It is within nature that disgrace must come
To every nation that becomes used to ease and leisure

How beautifully has Rūmī expressed the story of the imprisonment of Yusuf ('a):[48]

The loving friend came from the ends of the earth
and became the guest of Joseph the truthful,
For they had been well acquainted in childhood,
reclining (together) on the sofa of acquaintance.
He spoke to him (Joseph) of the injustice and envy
of his brethren: Joseph said, "That was (like)
a chain, and I was the lion.
The lion is not disgraced by the chain: I do not
complain of God's destiny.

If the lion had a chain on his neck, (yet) he was
prince over all the chain-makers."
He asked, "How wert thou in regard to the prison
and the well?" "Like the moon," said Joseph,
"in the interlunar period (when she is) on the
wane."
If in that period the new moon is bent double, does
not she at last become the full moon in the
sky?
Though the seed-pearl is pounded in the mortar, it
becomes the light of eye and heart and looks
aloft.
They cast a grain of wheat under earth, then from
its earth they raised up ears of corn;
Once more they crushed it with the mill; its value
increased and it became soul-invigorating
bread;
Again they crushed the bread under their teeth; it
became the mind and spirit and understanding
of one endowed with reason;
Again, when that spirit became lost in Love, it be-
came (as that which) *rejoiceth the sowers* after
the sowing.[i]

In another place, to convey this reality he relates the state of an animal that, however much it is beaten, becomes fatter: [49]

There is an animal whose name is *ushghur* (porcu-
pine): it is (made) stout and big by blows of
the stick.
The more you cudgel it, the more it thrives: it
grows fat on blows of the stick.
Assuredly the true believer's soul is a porcupine,
for it is (made) stout and fat by the blows of
tribulation.
For this reason the tribulation and abasement (laid)
upon the prophets is greater than (that laid
upon) all the (other) creatures in the world,

[i] Nicholson, vol. 1, p. 172, vr. 3157-68.

So that their souls became stouter than (all other)
souls; for no other class of people suffered
that affliction.[i]

Then he compares the effect of tribulation in purifying the soul to the mixtures used to purify skins when tanning them: [50]

The hide is afflicted by the medicine (tan-liquor),
(but) it becomes sweet like Ṭāif leather.
And if he (the tanner) did not rub the bitter and acrid (liquor) into it, it would become fetid, unpleasant, and foul-smelling.
Know that Man is an untanned hide, made noisome and gross by humours.
Give (him) bitter and acrid (discipline) and much rubbing (tribulation), that he may become pure and lovely and exceedingly string;
But if you cannot (mortify yourself), be content, O cunning one, if God give you tribulation without choice (on your part),
For affliction (sent) by the Friend is (the means of) your being purified: His knowledge is above your contrivance.[ii]

Ali ibn Jahm was a poet during the era of the `Abbāsid caliph Mutawakkil; he was an able poet. He fell into imprisonment and has very sublime verses about the benefits of prison, its character-building, its being a matter of pride for people who are free, and finally about what virtues imprisonment represents and fosters. Mas`ūdī relates them in *Murūj al-Dhahab* and we relate them here: [51]

They said, you have been jailed; I said it matters not;

What sharp sword isn't put in its scabbard?

Have you not seen the lion, how it keeps to one side

While the lowly beasts roam about?

And the fire, hidden inside its stones,

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[i] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 277, vrs. 97-101.
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 277, vrs. 102-7.

Not flaming up unless stirred by iron
Prison, if not entered on account of a crime
Is a wonderful abode to be in

Contentment with Divine Decree

It is in view of the valuable benefits of tribulations that the quality of contentment with Divine decree and pleasure at what God brings about is born.

Sa'dī says[52]

Let the shortsighted seek comfort
And the gnostic, affliction; for his ease is in tribulation
Leave all that you have and pass by, for it is nothing
This five days of life behind which is death
All who were killed by the sword of love –
Say grieve not, for their blood-money is the Eternal Kingdom
Whatever you get from the hand of a friend, give thanks
Sa'dī, seek not your own pleasure, for this is His pleasure

In some of the prayers narrated from the Imams, we read:

اللهم إني أسألك صبر الشاكرين لك

"O God, I ask of You the patience of those thankful to You."

The patience of the thankful is not a bitter patience; like honey, it is sweet. Those who know that tribulations are what build the soul of a human being are not only happy to face them and welcome them with open arms, they even occasionally put themselves in the claws of tribulation and create troubles for themselves; they create seas and whirlpools for themselves to swim in and become well-practiced.

Rūmī, after the verses we related, says[53]

The affliction becomes sweet (to the sufferer)
when he sees happiness: the medicine becomes sweet (to the sick man) when he regards health.
He sees victory for himself in the very essence of checkmate; therefore he says, "Kill me, O trusty ones!"[i]

Sa'dī says[54]

They bring precious stones from the mouths of whales
While he who fears for his life avoids the sea

Adversity and Blessings are Relative

We should not be inattentive to the point that tribulations are only a blessing if a person makes use of them and makes his soul reach perfection with patience, perseverance, and by facing the hardships that create tribulations. But if a person chooses to flee and complain in the face of hardships, in such a case afflictions are truly an affliction for him.

The reality is that the blessings of the world, like tribulations, can be a source of ascent and felicity, and they can be a source of wretchedness and helplessness. Neither is poverty absolute wretchedness, nor is wealth absolute good felicity. How often has poverty caused the development and perfection of human beings, and how often has richness been a source of ill-luck and misery! Safety and insecurity are the same way. Some individuals or nations, in times of security and luxury, fall victim to worldliness and gluttony, and as a result fall into abasement. And many other nations, through the whip of hardship and hunger, get into motion and achieve power and honour. Health and sickness, honour and lowliness, and all other natural gifts and trials are also included in this law. Blessings, and likewise trials and tribulations, can be a gift—because each of them can be put to great use—and they can also be considered an affliction and misery—since it is possible for each to become a cause misery and descent. One can reach felicity

[i] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 278, vrs. 108-9.

both through wealth and through poverty; and through both it is also possible for a person to reach wretchedness.

Thus, for a blessing to be a blessing depends on how a person reacts to it, whether he or she is thankful or ungrateful. And similarly, for an adversity to be an adversity depends on how a person reacts to it, whether he or she is patient and forbearing or weak hearted and indecisive. In this way, one thing acquires two varying states with respect to two people; that is, it is a blessing for one and an adversity for another. This is the meaning of the statement, "Blessing and adversity are both relative."

What should be called a calamity is that which is a nonmaterial Divine punishment; that is, the evil consequences of human actions. These are actual afflictions and adversities in that first, they are an effect of the intention and free will of man himself, and second, they are not a preliminary for any type of good or perfection. For example, hardheartedness is an affliction for a person, as has been said in a tradition:

ما ضرب الله عبدا بعقوبة أشد من قسوة القلب.

God has not struck any [of His] servants with a punishment worse than hardheartedness.[1]

In the stories of the prophets, it is related that a man said to Prophet Shu`ayb ('a), "Why is it that I commit all these sins, but God does not punish me?" He replied, "You have been subjected to the worst of punishments without you knowing it." Rūmī explains this story in these words:[55]

In the time of Shu'ayb a certain man was saying,
"God hath seen many a fault from me.
How many sins and trespasses hath He seen me
commit! And (still), God in His kindness
does not punish me."
In answer to him God most High by the mysterious way spoke clearly into the ear of Shu'ayb,

[1] *Irshād al-Qulūb*, al-Daylamī

Saying, "(Tell him), Thou hast said, 'How many sins have I committed! And (still) God in His kindness hath not punished me for my trespasses.'
Thou art saying the opposite and reverse (of the truth), O fool, O thou that hast abandoned the road and taken to the wilderness!
How oft, how oft do I chastise thee, and thou unaware! Thou art lying (bound) in chains from head to foot.
Thy rust, coat on coat, O black pot, hath marred the visage of thy heart.
Layers of rust have collected upon thy heart, so that it hath become blind to (the spiritual) mysteries."[i]

That is, your thinking is backwards. If God had involved you in an apparent punishment, which you would have felt to be a punishment, and if you were worthy of such a requital, it would be possible for that punishment not to actually be a punishment, but a Divine grace and mercy; for it might be a cause for you to wake up and take heed. But the punishment which you are currently involved in and which is a corollary of your actions is one which is entirely a punishment and nothing else.

Actual afflictions are the results and effects of a person's actions, and it is with regard to these very effects and results and punishments that the Qur'ān says,

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَـٰهُمْ وَلَـٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

And We did not wrong them, but they used to wrong themselves.[ii]

Rousseau [56] has a book called *Émile* which is about raising a child. It is an interesting book. Émile is the name of a fictional child whom he places under his care in the book and looks after

[i] Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 396, vrs. 3364-71.
[ii] Qur'ān 16:118

from all aspects, physical and emotional. In all cases, Rousseau's idea is to put Émile in contact with and in the grasp of nature and to raise her in the lap of hardships.

He believes that the most unfortunate children are those whose parents pamper them and don't let them taste the heat and cold of the world or feel its highs and lows. Such children become oversensitive to hardships and are indifferent towards pleasures. Like the narrow trunk of a small tree, they shiver in the face of every breeze, and the smallest bad event upsets them, to the extent that a small incident may make them contemplate suicide. And on the other hand, whatever pleasurable things they are given, they do not get excited or aroused. Such people can never perceive the taste of blessings; they have not tasted hunger for them to appreciate the flavour of food. The best foods are for them of less value and less satisfying than the barley bread that a village boy or girl may eat.

Why did Ṣādiq Hidāyat commit suicide? One of the factors in his suicide was that he was an aristocrat. He had more pocket money than he needed but lacked a proper and methodical way of thinking. He was devoid of the gift of faith. He thought of the world as being pleasure-seeking, pointless, and foolish like himself. The pleasures that he knew and was familiar with were the dirtiest of pleasures; and of those pleasures nothing worthwhile remained for life and existence to have the value of waiting for them. He could no longer derive enjoyment from the world. Many others like him lack systematic thought and are devoid of the gift of faith, but unlike him are not satiated and highborn, and life is still attractive for them, and so they are not pushed to commit suicide.

If the likes of Hidāyat complain about the world and view it as ugly, they have no other choice; their luxurious lives demand as much. They are unable to sense the agreeable taste of Divine gifts. If they had taken Ṣādiq Hidāyat to a village, thrown him behind an ox and plough, and made him taste hunger and nakedness, lashing him with a firm whip when necessary, and then when he was famished with hunger placed a piece of bread in front of him, then he would well understand the meaning of

life; and water, bread, and the other material and nonmaterial conditions of life would have value and meaning for him.

In the first chapter of the *Gulistān*, Sa'dī mentions the story of a man who sat with his servant on a boat. The servant had never seen the sea and was distressed and uneasy, to the extent that his agitation disturbed the other passengers of the boat. There was a wise man aboard; he said that he knew the solution and told them to throw the servant overboard. The servant, seeing himself face-to-face with death in the crashing and merciless waves of the sea, strove hard to reach the boat and save himself from drowning. After some fruitless struggling, and when he was about to drown, the wise man told them to rescue him. After this the servant was calm and said nothing. They asked the wise man about this; he said, "It was necessary for him to fall into the sea to know the value of the boat."

Without doubt, familiarity with sufferings is the condition of benefiting from pleasures. Unless a person goes to the depths of the valley, he doesn't perceive the might of the mountain. The fact that suicide is more common among the leisured class is partly because normally faithlessness is more common among them and partly because the wealthy class doesn't perceive the pleasure and value of life. Too much pleasure and comfort make a person callous and turn him into a numb and foolish being. Such a person commits suicide over insignificant things. The "philosophy of nihilism" in the west is partly a result of the loss of faith, and partly an effect of too much luxury. The west is sitting on the tablecloth of the east and sucking its blood; why shouldn't it speak of nihilism and emptiness?

Those who attribute suicide to sensitivity should know what kind of "sensitivity" this is. Their sensitivity is not of the form of taste and perception; it does not mean that they have a finer understanding and perceive things that others don't. Their sensitivity means they are unfeeling and numb towards the beauty of the world, easily lose heart in the face of difficulties, and are unable to face them. Such people may as well commit suicide, and so much the better that they do. They are a disgrace to humanity, and so much the better that human society be made pure of their unclean existence.

I once had a distant familiarity with someone and used to think he was among the luckiest of people. Every sort of material object was available to him. Money, wealth, position, fame, he had everything. We spoke about having children. He said, "I never wanted, and don't want, to have children." I asked why. He said, "It's enough that I came into this world. Why should I bring about the suffering of another being? For him to suffer as I have?" This surprised me at first, but later as I became more familiar with him, I realized that he was being honest. In all his comfort and luxury, he saw nothing but pain and suffering. Usually people who we think have freed themselves of all suffering are in greater suffering than everyone else.

Yes, adversities and tribulations are great blessings for which one should be grateful; they are blessings in the apparent form of wrath. Similarly, sometimes wrath is manifested in the form of a blessing. One must, in turn, be grateful for these manifestations of wrath. But in any case one must bear in mind that for a blessing to be a blessing or an adversity to be an adversity depends on our reaction to it. We can change every adversity into a blessing, let alone those things that also happen to have the apparent form of a blessing. And we can turn every blessing into an adversity and misfortune, let alone those things that are in the clothing of misfortune and adversity.

Reconciliation of Contradictories and Opposites

From the discussions we have had in this section, we reached the conclusion that the basic formula of the creation of the universe is the formula of opposition, and the world is nothing but a collection of opposites. Being and non-being, life and death, continuance and annihilation, sickness and health, youth and old age, and finally felicity and perdition in this world are together. In the words of Sa'dī,[57]

"Treasure and snake, flower and thorn, grief and happiness are together."

Rūmī says,

Pain is a treasure, for thee are mercies in it: the kernel becomes fresh when you scrape off the rind.
O brother, (to dwell in) a dark and cold place, to endure patiently sorrow and weakness and pain,
Is the Fountain of Life and the cup of (spiritual) intoxication, for those heights are all in lowliness.
That Spring is implied in autumn, and that autumn is (fulfilled) in the Spring: do not flee from it.
Be a fellow-traveller with grief, agree with desolation, seek long (lasting) life in thy death (to self).[1]

The changeability of the matter of the world and the occurrence of development originates from conflict. If not for conflict, there would be no variety and evolution, the world would not play a new role in every instant, and new pictures would not take shape on the pages of the world.

If we wish to give the issue a philosophical color, we should say that the ability of matter to accept various forms, and the mutual conflict of forms with one another, is a factor in both destruction and creation; destruction of the past and creation of the future; removal of the old forms and bringing in new ones. Both destruction and abandonment on one hand and variety and evolution on the other are an effect of conflict, because if a thing were not to be destroyed, there would be no meaning for its parts to be composed anew or evolve. Unless the parts and elements fight and influence each other, a middle composition and new compound will not come into being. So it is correct for us to say, "Conflict is the source of good, and the pillar of the world and the order of the universe are based on it." In the first section of this book, when we spoke of the essence of justice, we related the meaningful words of Mullā Ṣadrā in the second volume of *Asfār* about how two demands exist in matter (*mawādd*) and forms and how those very conflicting demands

[1] Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 396, vrs. 2261-5.

necessitate the continuous change of images. Now we relate another of his statements.

Elsewhere, Mullā Ṣadrā says,

لولا التضاد ما صحّ دوام الفيض عن المبدأ الجواد.

"If not for conflict, the eternal grace of the Benevolent Origin [God] would not exist."[i]

The world of nature is full of links and breaks, cuts and stitches, and this is a corollary of the peculiar make of the universe. The matter of the universe is like capital that circulates, and the profit it generates is due to its circulation. If the universe were fixed and unchanging, it would be like stagnant capital which neither produces profit nor results in loss.

A specific capital that circulates within a market sometimes results in profit and sometimes in loss; but if we look at the total of capital, then no longer is there any loss, and the circulation of capital definitely results in gain and increase.

In the order of the world as well, for all its matter to be put to use, which takes place through the formula of the potentiality of matter and the conflict among forms, is without doubt profitable and conveys the world towards perfection. In dialectic logic, the issue of "conflict" has been given extraordinary importance and became the basis of the dialectic worldview. But much before the appearance of this philosophy, the philosophers and gnostics of Islam paid attention to the principle of conflict and expressed interesting views in this regard; and even from some quotations from Greek philosophy it appears that attention to this principle had precedent in Greece as well.

Ṭanṭāwī relates in *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir* [a commentary on the Qur'ān] from Socrates that he used the "principle of conflict" as a proof of life after death.

Ṭanṭāwī writes: When they wished to put Socrates to death, in the last moments of his life, he reasoned as follows to prove that there is life after death:

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[i] *al-Asfār*, vol. 3, p. 117

"We see that in the world opposites are constantly created from one another: beauty from ugliness, justice from injustice, wakefulness from sleep, sleep from wakefulness, strength from weakness, and so forth... everything comes into being from its opposite. Death and life and non-being and being as well will be within this general law; and for this reason out of death, another life must come into being, or else, the general law of nature will be contradicted."

About the development of opposites within each other, Rūmī says

(When) he came to himself, he said, "O Sea of
bliss, O Thou who has stored (transcendental)
forms of consciousness in unconsciousness.
Thou hast stored a wakefulness in sleep, Thou hast
fastened (attached) a dominion over the heart
to the sate of one who has lost his heart.
Thou dost conceal riches in the lowliness of pov-
erty, Thou dost fasten the neckless of wealth
to the iron collar of poverty."
Contrary is secretly enclosed in contrary: fire is
enclosed in boiling water.
A (delightful) garden is enclosed in Nimrod's fire:
revenues grow from giving and spending;
So that Muṣtafā (Muḥammad), the Kind of pros-
perity, has said, "O possessors of wealth, mu-
nificence is a gainful trade."
Riches were never diminished by alms-giving: in
sooth, acts of charity are an excellent means
of attaching (wealth) to one's self.
The sweet fruit is hidden in boughs and leaves:
the everlasting life is (hidden) under death.[i]

At the bottom of the sea there are pearls (mingled)
with pebbles: glories are (to be found) amidst
shames.[ii]

[i] Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 454, vrs. 3567-73, 3576.
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 3, p. 50, vr. 866.

From the day when thou camest into existence,
thou wert fire or air or earth.
The Transmuter did not leave thee in thy first
(state of) existence: he established a better
(state of) existence in place of that (former
one);
And so on till (He gave thee) a hundred thousand
states of existence, one after the other, the
second (always) better than the beginning.[i]

When you consider, this world is all at strife, mote
with mote, as religion (is in conflict) with in-
fidelity.
One mote is flying to the left, and another to the
right in search.
War of nature, war of action, war of speech—there
is a terrible conflict amongst the parts (of the
universe).
This world is maintained by means of this war:
consider the elements, in order that it (the dif-
ficulty) may be solved.
The four elements are four strong pillars by which
the roof of the present world is (kept) upright.
Each pillar is a destroyer of the other: the pillar
(known as) water is a destroyer of the flames
(of fire).
Hence the edifice of creation is (based) upon con-
traries; consequently we are at war for weal
and woe.
My states (of mind and body) are mutually op-
posed: each one is mutually opposite in its ef-
fect.
Behold the surging armies of my "states," each at
war and strife with another.[ii]

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[i] Nicholson, vol. 5, p. 49, vrs. 789,791-2.
[ii] Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 260, vrs. 36-7,46-51,53.

Ibn Khaldūn, as quoted by 'Alī al-Wardī in the book *al-Mahzala*, says,

إن التنازع عنصر آساسي من عناصر الطبيعة البشرية.

"Conflict is a fundamental element of human nature."

Hegel, the well-known German philosopher, a portion of whose words we quoted earlier, has a particular view about opposites which is known as "Hegelian dialectics" and is excessively relied on by those with claims to philosophy. He says,

"Every condition of thought or of things, and every concept or state in the world is strongly pulled towards its opposite, and then merges with it to form a greater and more complex whole... Every state and every effect necessitates an opposite which evolution must conciliate and convert to unity."[1]

Imam 'Alī ('a) has indicated the law of opposition in numerous places in his sermons. In sermon 184 [of *Nahj al-Balāgha*] he says,

بتشعيره المشاعر عرف أن لا مشعر له، وبمضادته بين الأشياء عرف أن لا ضد له، وبمقارنته بين الأشياء عرف أن لا قرين له. ضاد النور بالظلمة، والوضوح بالبهمة، والجمود بالبلل، والحرور بالصرد، مؤلف بين متعادياتها، مقارن بين متبايناتها، مقرب بين متباعداتها، مفرق بين متدانياتها.

Here, the Imam ('a) makes use, in recognition of God, of the principle "He is like nothing else" and makes a negative comparison between God and the world.

The translation and meaning of the passage is,

> From the fact that God created the sensory organs it becomes known that He has no sensory organs. (In other words, the fact that He has placed a means and a place for perception in His creations is proof that His own perception is not through any means or

[1] Durant

any place.) From the opposition He has placed between existent things it is known that He has no opposite. From the parity He placed between things it becomes known that He has no peer. He placed opposition between light and darkness, clarity and ambiguity, dryness and wetness, hot and cold. He conciliates conflicting natures, brings together things that are separated, brings near things that are far from each other, and separates things that are near each other.

In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, he says of the creation of Adam ('a):

معجونا بطبيعة الألوان المختلفة والأشباه المؤتلفة والأضداد المتعادية والأخلاط المتباينة.

Here, after explaining that God formed Adam's dust from various parts of the earth and then blew a spirit into him, the Imam ('a) describes the created human:

"admixed with various natures, harmonious and similar parts as well as conflicting opposites and separate components."

The Philosophic Basis of Opposition

In a world formed by movement, opposition must necessarily predominate, since as philosophers have said, "Motion is not possible without the existence of obstacles."[1] Motion is effort and struggling, and effort takes place when there is friction and collision.

To explain this in another way, it can be said that no natural motion is possible without force. A body will only move towards its natural place if it is not in its natural place; but when it is in its natural place, it will be inert and motionless. The human being as well rushes towards perfection when he lacks

[1] *Ṭabī'iyyāt al-Shifā'*, section 1, article 4, chapter 9. also *al-Asfār*, "al-Umūr al-'Āmma," level 8, chapter 14

it. Human felicity is always in wanting something, and want occurs when there is lack and deprivation.[i]

Dialectic logic, to the extent that it relies on the principle of opposition and the principle of the interconnection of the parts of nature, is acceptable. These principles were given attention by Divine philosophers from the earliest days. What separates our path from theirs, and in reality is considered the basic kernel of dialectic thought from Hegel onward consists of other issues; among which is that thought, like matter, is under the sway of the law of motion and opposition and so on. The laws of motion, opposition, and mutual influence are correct to the extent that they relate to nature, and they are philosophical principles. But when they wish to make knowledge subordinate to these laws—and it is for this reason that they call it "logic"—it is not acceptable, though this is not the place to discuss this point.[ii]

Summary and General Conclusion

This concludes our discussion of evils from the aspect of Divine justice. We discuss the issue of death in a separate section with a special view. Here, we consider it necessary to summarize and state the general principles that have been mentioned so far in addition to what was said at the end of section four.

1. The attribute of "wisdom," or "being wise," with regard to God and man is true in two different senses. For a human to be wise means that he or she has a reasonable aim in every action, and in every action chooses the highest and most worthy goals and the best tools. But God is the absolutely free of need and seeks no goal; no perfection can be conceived which He lacks, for Him to seek it. For Him to be Wise means that He conveys beings to the perfections appropriate to them, to the

[i] Refer to the article "Aṣl al-Taḍādd dar Falsafe-ye Islāmī" by the author, in the periodical *Maqālāt va Bar-rasīhā*, ed. 1 (found in vol. 1 of the author's book *Maqālāt-e Falsafī*)

[ii] Refer to vol. 1, 2, and 4 of *Usūl-e Falsafe va Ravish-e Ri'ālīzm* and the epistle "The Rising and Revolution of the *Mahdī* ('a) from the Viewpoint of the Philosophy of History" by the author

extent possible for them. His action is to originate—which means to convey things to being, which is a perfection—or to plan and make complete and lead things to their secondary perfections, which is another form of conveying things to their perfections.

Some questions and objections come about because of a false comparison of God's being Wise with a human being's being wise. Usually when it is asked, "Why has such-and-such a thing come into existence?" the questioner has thought to himself, "What aim did God have in doing this?" without realizing that if we consider God to have goals like people do, it means that, like people, God compensates with His actions for His shortcomings and perfects Himself. If one realizes from the beginning that God's being Wise means that His actions have a goal, not His Essence, and the wisdom of every created being is the goal hidden in its creation, and God's Wisdom entails Him leading created beings to their natural goals, the answer will be clear from the start.

2. Divine bounty, meaning the bounty of being that incorporates the entire universe, has a peculiar order; that is, antecedence and posteriority and cause and effect are supreme in it. And this order cannot be controvened; that is, it is not possible for any being to stay back from its own position and occupy another's position. The evolutionary course of beings, and especially the evolutionary path of the human being, does not involve a turning away from one's own position and occupying another's. Instead, it denotes the "existential breadth" of man. The corollary of having levels and degrees is that a form of difference in terms of deficiency and perfection and strength and weakness exists among them, and such differences are not discrimination.

3. The works of God are general, not particular, and necessary, not coincidental.

The other source of mistakes in this area is a comparison of God's actions with human actions in terms of it being thought that it is possible for God's actions, like people's, to be particular and coincidental.

The human being, by virtue of being a creation among God's creatures and a part of the overall order with his intention being a plaything of particular and accidental causes, decides, for example, to make a house in a particular time and place—and of course, under particular conditions. He collects an amount of bricks, cement, iron, sand, and lime, which have no natural connection with each other, and with a series of artificial compounds links them together in a particular form and makes a house.

How about God? Is God's firm work of the form of making an artificial and temporary link between two alien things?

The creation of artificial and temporary links is appropriate for a creature like the human being, who first, is a part of the existing order and is subject to its laws; second, who wishes to make use of the existing powers and properties of things; third, whose intention is a plaything of particular causes (such as protecting oneself from heat and cold by means of a house); and fourth, whose causation is limited to causation of motion, not creative causation. That is, he doesn't create anything, but instead links existing things by means of moving them around. But God is a creative actor; He is the Creator of things with all their powers, strengths, and properties; and those powers and properties act in the same manner in all cases.

For example, God creates fire, water, and electricity, while man, by forging a sort of artificial link, makes use of existing water, fire, and electricity. He creates this artificial link in such a way that he uses it in one moment or instance in which it is useful for him (for example by turning on the electricity), and in an other moment when it is not useful for him he doesn't make use of it (for example, by turning off the electricity). But God is the Creator and Originator of these affairs with all their properties and effects. The corollary of the existence of fire is that it warms or burns. The corollary of electricity is that it gives light or creates motion. God did not create fire or electricity for a specific person, and it is meaningless for Him to have done so, for example for it to warm his cottage but not burn his clothes. God created fire, which has the property of burning. So in terms of the infinite Divine wisdom, fire must

be taken in view in its entirety in the order of being to see whether its being in the entire universe is beneficial and necessary, or extraneous and harmful—not in its particularity, as to whose house it warmed and whose storage area it burned.

In other words, in addition to the fact that goals must be considered the goals of God's action and not His essence, we should know that the goals of God's actions are universal goals, not particular ones, and they are necessary ones, not accidental.

4. For a thing to come into being, it is not enough for God's causality to be complete; the potentiality of the recipient is also necessary. The non-potentiality of the recipient is a cause for beings to remain deprived of certain gifts. Evils that are of the form of non-being, which were indicated earlier, such as inabilities, weaknesses, and ignorance, in terms of their relation to the Divine Essence—that is, in terms of the entirety of the system (not in terms of their relation to human beings, or the particular and accidental aspects of the order)—spring from deficiencies of potentiality.

5. God, just as He is necessarily existent by essence, is necessary from all aspects; thus, He is necessarily bountiful and necessarily existent. It is impossible for a being to have the possibility of existing or of reaching perfection, and for God not to show His bounty and bestow existence. In certain instances when it appears that a being has the potential for a certain perfection but remains devoid of it, that is a possibility in accordance with particular and accidental causes, not a possibility in terms of the universal and necessary causes.

6. Evils are either non-beings or beings that are a source of non-being in other things, and they are evil inasmuch as they are sources of non-being.

7. The evilness of the second type of evils lies in their relational and relative being, not in their in-itself being.

8. That which actually exists, is created, and has a cause is real existence, not relational existence.

9. Evils are all created subordinately and figuratively, and not in actuality.

10. The universe is a single indivisible unit; removing some of its parts and keeping some of them is a false supposition and a game of the thought.

11. Evil and good are not two separate formations; they are mixed together. Non-beings and beings, relational beings and real beings are inseparable from one another.

12. Not only are non-beings inseparable from beings and relational beings from real beings, but real beings themselves are also linked and inseparable by virtue of the principle of the indivisibility of the universe.

13. Beings have one ruling in terms of their individuality and independence, and another ruling in terms of their being a part and member of a body.

14. Wherever the principle of linkage rules, individual and independent being is suppositional and derivational.

15. If not for evil and ugliness, there would be no meaning for good and beauty.

16. Evil and ugliness manifest good and beauty.

17. Evil is a source of good and adversities are a source of felicities.

Death

The Phenomenon of Death

One of the concepts which has always tormented man is the thought of death and termination of life. Man asks himself why have we come to the world and why do we die? What is the purpose of this construction and destruction? Is it not a futile and meaningless exercise?

> The Master did himself these vessels frame,
> Why should he cast them out to scorn and shame?
> If he has made them well, why should he break them?
> Yea, though he marred them, they are not to blame.[i]
>
> Behold these cups! Can He who deigned to make them,
> In wanton freak let ruin overtake them,
> So many shapely feet and hands and heads -
> What love drives Him to make, what wrath to break them?[ii]
>
> There is a chalice made with wit profound,
> With tokens of the Maker's favor crowned;
> Yet the world's Potter takes his masterpiece,
> And dashes it to pieces on the ground![iii]

Anxiety about death is one of the causes for philosophical pessimism. The pessimistic philosophers view life and existence as purposeless and meaningless and devoid of any wisdom. This view has embroiled them in confusion and perplexity, and at times even induced them to suicide; they reason that if we are to die and leave, then we should not have come, but

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[i] Whinfield, quatrain 126.
[ii] *ibid*, quatrain 42.
[iii] *ibid*, quatrain 290.

now that we have arrived without choice we can exercise at least this much choice that we do not allow this futility to continue; terminating this futility is in itself a wise act.

I never would have come, had I been asked,
I would as lief not go, if I were asked,
And, to be short, I would annihilate
All coming, being, going, were I asked![i]

Since all man's business in this world of woe
Is sorrow's pangs to feel, and grief to know,
Happy are they that never come at all,
And they that, having come, the soonest go![ii]

Anxiety of Death

Before we discuss the issue of death and the objection, based on it and, levelled against the laws and order governing the universe, we ought to note the fact that fear and anxiety of death is a distinctly human characteristic. Animals do not think about death. What animals have is an instinct of flight from danger and self-preservation. Of course, the inclination for survival as expressed by the preservation of extant life is a necessary concomitant for life in general, but in humans, in addition to this, there is also an attention to the future and survival in the future. In other words, man also harbours a desire for eternity and perpetual life, and this yearning is specifically human. Desire is dependent on conceptualizing the future, and the desire for eternal life is dependent on conceptualizing eternity; the concept of which is uniquely human. Hence, Man's fear and apprehension of death which has always pre-occupied human thought is distinct from the instinct of flight from danger; the latter being an instantaneous and general reaction to dangers in animals. For, before the desire for eternity develops into a concept, even the human child avoids dangers based on the instinctive flight from danger.

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[i] Whinfield, quatrain 490.
[ii] *ibid*, quatrain 387.

Death anxiety is a product of desire for eternity, and since in the systems governing nature no inherent desire is created which is futile and purposeless, this desire can be taken as proof for man's survival after death. The fact that we are tormented by the thought of extinction is itself evidence that we will not become extinct. If like flowers and plants we were to have a limited and temporary life, the desire for eternity would not have emerged as a fundamental desire within us. The existence of thirst is evidence for the existence of water. Similarly, the existence of every fundamental potential and desire within us is evidence of the concrete existence of that perfection. It is as if every potential and capacity is a preconception and memory of the perfection toward which one ought to strive. The desire and anxiety about eternity and immortality which have always engaged the human mind are manifestations and expressions of the inextinguishable reality and being of man. The appearance of these desires and anxieties for a man are exactly like his dreams, which are the manifestations of human character traits and perceptions in his waking period. What appears in the dream world is the manifestation of things which have entered and sometimes taken root in our soul during our waking period. That which appears in ours souls during the wakeful period in the form of a desire for immortality and eternity—something totally incompatible with the temporary life of this world—is actually the manifestation and appearance of our immortal reality. We will endure. To quote Rūmī:

> There must needs be the elephant, in order that,
> when he sleeps supinely, he may dream of the
> land of Hindustan.
> The ass does not dream of Hindustan at all: The
> ass has never journeyed from Hindustan to a
> foreign country.
> Because of desire the elephant remembers Hindu-
> stan; then by night that remembrance of his
> takes form.[1]

[1] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 441, vr. 3068-9 and 3071.

These conceptions, ideas and desires are a reflection of that reality which was named by the philosophers and mystics as "alienation" (*ghurbat)* and "incommensurability" *('adam e ta-jānus)* of man in this material world.

Death is Relative

The objection against death stems from the fact that they considered death as extinction whereas death is not the extinction of man; rather, it is a transformation and development, a demise in one realm but rising in another. In other words, death is an extinction, but not an absolute extinction, rather a relative extinction, meaning an extinction from one realm but existence in another realm.

Man does not have an absolute death. It is abandoning one state and acquiring another state, and like all other transformations, the annihilation is relative. When soil changes to plant life, it is a death but not an absolute death; soil has abandoned its former form and characteristics and no longer has the appearance and manifestation it had as an inanimate entity; but it has died from one state and condition and acquired life in another state and condition.

> I died to the inorganic state and became endowed
> with growth, and (then) I died to (vegetable)
> growth and attained to the animal.
> I died from animality and became Adam (man);
> why, then, should I fear? When have I be-
> come less by dying?
> At the next remove I shall die to man, that I may
> soar and lift up my had amongst the angels;
> And I must escape even from (the state of) the an-
> gel; *everything is perishing except His Face.*[1]

The World is a Womb for the Soul

Transfer from this world to another world, is not dissimilar to the birth of a baby from the mother's womb. This analogy is

[1] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 218, vr. 3901-4.

complete in one sense but incomplete in another sense. It is incomplete in the sense that the difference between this world and the hereafter is much more profound and essential then the distinction between the womb and extra-uterine life. Both uterine and extra-uterine phases are parts of the material world and physical life, whereas the world here and hereafter are two different realms and worlds with fundamental distinctions. But this similitude is complete from another sense; the sense that reflects differences in conditions. The baby is nourished through the placenta and umbilical cord; but after birth, that route gets blocked, and it is instead nourished via the mouth and digestive tract. In the womb, the lungs are already formed but not functional, but after birth the lungs become functional.

It is amazing that so long as the foetus is in the uterus it makes no use of the respiratory tract and lungs whatsoever, and if ever they were to function for even a moment, it would lead to death; this state continues till its last moment in the uterus, but the moment it steps into this world, the respiratory system immediately begins to function, and thereafter if it were to fail to function even for a moment, death would approach.

In this manner the system of life before birth transforms to another system after birth; the baby before birth lives in one life system and after birth in another life system.

Basically, the respiratory system though formed during uterine life, is not designed to function during that period; rather it is a prefigurement and preparation for extra-uterine life. The visual, auditory, olfactory and gustatory systems with all their complexity and expanse are not designed to function in the uterine phase; they are rather for the next phase of life.

This world in relation to the hereafter is like the womb in which all the bodies and mental systems are formed in preparation for life hereafter. The human psychic potential—its non-composite and immaterial nature, the indivisibility and relative constancy of man's "I", his endless desires, his expansive and infinite thoughts, are all constituents of a much wider, expansive and longer, nay, an eternal, and endless life. These are the very realities which render man "alienated" and "incommensurate" with this temporary and ephemeral life. These are what

have led man to be like the "reed" which has been separated from the "reed bed", from whose "tune both man and woman wail", and is always seeking a "heart which is torn to pieces from the separation", so that it may narrate the "details of the pain of love". These are the very realities which have caused man to view himself from the "lofty perspective of the King seated on the lotus throne", considering the world in relation to himself as the "*kunj mihnat abad*" or view himself as the "sweet celestial bird" and the world as "a snare of incidents".[58]

The glorious Qur'ān declares:

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?

(23:115)

If man furnished with all these systems and capabilities were to have no return back to God, toward a world which is an expansive realm commensurate with this well-equipped entity, it would be exactly like the example of a foetus in the uterine life which had no extra-uterine life ahead, and all foetuses were to become annihilated at the end of their uterine phase of existence; all those elaborate visual, auditory, olfactory, central and peripheral nervous systems, lungs and intestines which are of no function in uterine life, and which are unnecessary for the vegetative life there, would have been created without use and would have been meaningless, futile and destroyed even before any use was ever made of them.

Indeed, death is the termination of one phase of man's life and a beginning for a new phase in it.

Death, in relation to this world, is death, but in relation to the next world, is a birth, in as much as the birth of a newborn

in relation to this world is a birth but in relation to its previous life is a death.

World as a School for Man

This world in relation to the next world is a preparatory, training, and perfecting phase for man. It is very much what a school or university is for youth. In fact we can even say that the entire world is really one big school or training ground.

In the *Nahj al-Balāgha*, under the section of short sayings, it is narrated that a man came to the Leader of the Faithful 'Alī ('a) and started condemning the world, "The world is this and the world is that, the world deceives man, the world corrupts man, the world is criminal and cunning," and other words of this nature. This man had heard religious leaders condemn the world, and mistook this condemnation as being directed at the reality of this world—meaning that the world is inherently evil. He failed to realize that what was actually evil was "love of the world," and that what is evil is to hold a narrow view and limited perspective vis-à-vis being—something that is fundamentally incompatible with man and man's felicity. 'Alī ('a) explained to him:[59]

> You can be deceived by the world, but the world does not deceive anyone; you have committed a crime on the world, but the world has committed no crime against you ... the world is honest with whosoever deals with her honestly, and is a means of equilibrium for whosoever understands her; the world is a place of worship for the friends of God, a place of prayer for the angels of God, the destination for God's revelation, a trading place for the lovers of God.

Shaikh Farīd ud Dīn al 'Aṭṭār has composed a poem about this incident.

Nāṣir Khusraw addressing the world says:[60]

O World, you may not have lasted more than

the usual fourscore and ten for anyone, but still
you are necessary. You may be as wretched as
a thorn on the eye, but essentially you are
as necessary as sight itself. You may have
broken, but you have mended as well.
Like a chameleon you take on the colour
of corruption from the corrupt, but to the pure
you are pure. To those who despise you
sayYou have not known me.
If you are modest and sedate you ll find me
modest and sedate as well. I gave you
righteousness but you sought from me
only ill. If you are wise you will be
saved from me. Why hate that from which
you ve been saved? God has given me
to you as a thoroughfare—why do you
loiter along the way? You are a branch
of the tree God planted for your sake -
if you grow up crooked, you will end up
in the fireplace—grow straight
and you will be saved. Yes, crookedness
will land you in the flames, and no one
will ask if you were almond or pistachio.
You are the arrow of God to His enemies—
why have cut yourself on your own point?[i]

The glorious Qur'ān declares:

ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلْمَوْتَ وَٱلْحَيَوٰةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

He, who created death and life that He may test you
[to see] which of you is best in conduct. (67:2)

[i] Gholam-Reza Aavani and Peter Lambom Wilson, *Fourty Poems from the Divan By Nasir-i Khusraw* (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies).

Meaning that this world, which is a composite of life and death, is a testing ground for the excellence in human conduct.

It should be noted that the Divine "test" is really to actualize potentials and abilities. The actualization of a potential is to develop and perfect it. This test is not designed to discover the secrets of beings, rather, it is to actualize their hidden potentials. So in this case, "disclosure" is an act of creation and the Divine test "reveals" the human traits from the hidden phase of potential and capability to the external and concrete phase of actualization and perfection. The Divine test is not there to assess the weight, rather it is there to increase the mass.

With this elaboration it becomes clear that the above mentioned verse reflects this truth that the world is a place for training and perfecting human potentials.

Basis of the Objection

With the explanation of death we gave above, the groundless nature of the objections is made apparent. In actual fact, these objections stem from a lack of knowledge about man and the universe, or in other words, they issue from an incomplete and sterile view of the world.

Truly if death is the end of life, then the desire and longing for eternity will be extremely painful, and the face of death will become infinitely frightening to the human consciousness which is awake.

That some humans consider life as meaningless is based on the fact that they harbour a longing for immortality but believe it cannot be achieved. If it were not for this desire and longing, they would not have considered life as futile and meaningless, —even if it all ended in utter non-existence. At least, they would have deemed it as a temporary fortune and an ephemeral kingdom. They never would have reckoned that non-existence is better than such an existence, since the presumption is that the defect of such an existence is its transience—its deficiency is that it is followed by non-existence. Thus all defects stem from transience and non-existence, so how would it be better if

non-existence were to replace even that small and limited amount of existence?

Indeed, we observe in ourselves a longing for immortality, and this yearning is dependent on conceptualizing it; that is, we have a notion of eternity and its beauty and appeal, and this appeal creates in us a tremendous desire for immortality, and for enjoying the bounties of life forever.

If a barrage of materialist notions were to overwhelm our mind, making us think that such ideas and desires are all futile and that there is no reality to eternity, then we would have every right to be worried and apprehensive. In this case, an immense sorrow and fear would develop in us and we would wish we had never come and had never faced such anguish and dread. Thus the idea of existence being futile and meaningless is the consequence of the incompatibility between an inborn instinct and an acquired ideology. For, if it were not for that instinct, such an idea would not have developed; and with just as much reason, if the false materialistic ideas had not been propagated to us, we would not have developed such a concept.

Man's innate and inherent constitution is such that it creates the desire for immortality as a means for achieving the perfection whose potential he possesses. And since this constitution and the potentials it implies are beyond the scope of temporal earthly life, the assumption that existence is restricted to this worldly life would mean that all those potentials are futile and meaningless. The person who has no belief in eternal life finds incongruence between the constitution of his being on the one hand and his thoughts and longings on the other. Audibly and ostensibly he is heard to say, "the end of life is non-existence, all paths terminate in annihilation, thus life and existence is futile and meaningless", but existentially and in his heart of hearts he affirms, "there is no non-existence, there is an endless path ahead, if my life were limited I would not have been created with the potential for eternity and the longing for immortality."

Based on this, as mentioned earlier, the glorious Qur'ān equates the denial of resurrection with belief in meaninglessness of creation:

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?

(23:115)

Indeed, one who considers the world to be a school and place for perfection, and believes in life after death, will not raise such objections. He will not say that they should not have brought us into the world. Nor will he argue that now that they have brought us here we ought not to die. To say this, is in a wise to say that either the child should not be sent to school or that if he has been sent to school, he should never leave school!

Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's [61] teacher (or teacher's teacher) was a scholar by the name of Bābā Afḍal Kāshānī. He has expounded the philosophy of death in a profound poem. We can consider his quatrain to be a response to the famous quatrain by Khayyām. Perhaps it was composed for this very reason. The quatrain attributed to Khayyām is as follows:

Behold these cups! Can He who deigned to make them,
In wanton freak let ruin overtake them,
So many shapely feet and hands and heads -
What love drives Him to make, what wrath to break them?[i]

Bābā Afḍal says:

As the pearl (essence) of soul joined the shell of body,
(Nourished by) the Water of Life it took the form of man.

[i] Whinfield, quatrain 42.

When the pearl was finished, when the shell was shattered –
It came to adorn the ear of the King (God).

In this quartet, man's body is equated with a shell which cultivates the precious pearl of a human soul in its centre. The breaking open of the shell, when the pearl is perfected, is necessary so that the precious pearl can be elevated from its lowly position to the lofty position of the human ear. Similarly, the philosophy of human death is to facilitate transfer from the prison of the material world to the free ranges of Paradise—which span both the heavens and the earth—and take up position in the vicinity of the Omnipotent King and Majestic Lord, in whose proximity all perfection can be accomplished. This is the meaning of:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ

'Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return.

(2:156)

The objection 'why do we die?' and its response has been beautifully encapsulated in an anecdote of the *Mathnawī*. Rūmī[62] says:

Moses said, "O Lord of the Reckoning, Thou didst create the form: how didst Thou destroy it again?
Thou hast made the form, male and female, that gives unto the spirit increase (of joy); and then Thou dost ruin it: why?"
God said, "I know that this question of thine is not from disbelief and heedlessness and idle fancy;
Else I should have corrected and chastised thee: I should have afflicted thee on account of this question.

But (I know that) thou wishest to discover in My actions the wisdom and hidden meaning of (phenomenal) duration,
That thou mayst acquaint the vulgar therewith and by this means make every raw (ignorant) person to become cooked.
Then god spake unto him, saying, "O thou who possessest the most excellent (understanding), since thou has asked (the question), come, hear the answer.
O Moses, sow some seed in the earth, that thou thyself mayst render justice to this (question)."
When Moses had sown and the seed-corn was complete (in growth) and its ears had gained beauty and symmetry,
He took the sickle and was cutting that (crop); then a voice from the Unseen reached his ear,
Crying, "Why dost thou sow and tend some seed-corn and (now) art cutting it when it has attained to perfection?"
He replied, "O Lord, I destroy and lay it low because straw is here and (also) grain.
The grain is not suitable (to be stored) in the straw-barn; the straw likewise is bad (for putting) in the corn-barn.
'Tis not wisdom to mix these twain: it (wisdom) makes necessary the separation (of them) in winnowing."
He (God) said, "From whom didst thou gain this knowledge, so that by means of the knowledge thou didst construct a threshing-floor?"
He replied, "Thou, O God, gavest me discernment." He (God) said, "Then how should I not have discernment?"
Amongst the created beings are pure spirits; there are (also) spirits dark and muddy.

These shells are not in one grade: in one (of them)
is the pearl and in another the (worthless)
bead.
It is necessary to make manifest (the difference be-
tween) this good and evil, just as (it is neces-
sary) to make manifest (distinguish) the wheat
from the straw.[1]

Death is an Extension of Life

In the discussion on death, we ought to pay attention to the fact that the phenomenon of life and death creates a sequence in the realm of creation. The death of some always creates the ground for the life others. The carcass of an animal never remains unconsumed; plants and animals are nourished and invigorated by it. The shell breaks open and releases a shining pearl; then again from the same body and matter a new shell begins forming and another precious pearl develops in its core. The breaking of the shell and release of a pearl is a process that repeats over and over again, thereby extending the presence of grace and life through the span of time. If people living a thousand years ago were not to die, the opportunity would not have arisen for us living today; just as if humans alive today were not to die, there would be no possibility of life for those to come. If the flowers of the past year were not plucked, the fresh and new flowers of a new year would not have had the opportunity to blossom. The material realm has a limited capacity to accept life as far as space is concerned, but as far as time is concerned, it has unlimited capacity. It is interesting to note that in as much as the matter of the universe is expansive spatially, so too is it temporally—existence having an unparalleled extension in this dimension too.

Khayyām is one of those who have raised objections against death, (albeit they have been attributed to him). It just so happens that he has answered his own objections in one place:

By suffering tribulations, is man set free;
The drop imprisoned in a shell, a pearl shall be.

[1] Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 437, vr. 3001-6, 3015-27.

If wealth will not last, in its stead life will withstand.
The chalice now emptied, will once again filled be.

We should not be worried about the emptying of the chalice, the provider will refill it again. Khayyām[63] also says:

Lament not fortune's want of constancy,
But up! and seize her favours ere they flee;
If fortune always cleaved to other men,
How could a turn of luck have come to thee?[1]

The poet attributes this to the undependability and lack of constancy of the world. Indeed, if only the person whose turn has come is the measure, then this is betrayal. But if we consider the others who ought to come and also become fortunate then we would call it something else—instead of betrayal we would call it justice, fairness, and equal opportunity.

Here some may possibly interject that God's power is infinite, so what keeps Him from allowing those who are now living to live forever, and making provisions for those yet to come?

They do not realize that whatever can possibly be created, has been created, and is perpetually being granted Divine grace. Moreover, that which does not exist is what cannot possibly exist. Even supposing that there are other places, and assuming that the circumstances are favourable for the existence of other humans there, the objection would still remain [only having been transposed to a different scene] that their continued existence would preclude the possibility of the arrival and survival of future generations.

This last point is the completion of the response mentioned under the section 'Death is Relative.' The net result of both these points is that the matter of the universe, through a natural process and trans-substantial motion *(ḥarakat e jawharī)*, produces the shining pearls of human souls. The immaterial soul leaves its matter and material body and continues a more sublime and powerful life. The divorced matter takes on another

[1] Whinfield, quatrain 366.

project and proceeds to produce another pearl in her lap, so to speak. In such an order, there is nothing but perfection and expansion of life, and this expansion occurs through the process of transfer and transubstantiation.

The objection to the phenomena of death by comparing it to the shattering of a cup by its maker—insinuating whimsical desires in the Originator and Sustainer of creation—is so childish as to not merit any serious discussion. These notions are perhaps a poet's flight of fancy and subtle artistic nuances which may have nothing more to offer than their literary merit. In all probability the composer of these lines, attributed to Khayyām, had such ambitions or was influenced by a constrictive materialistic world-view. But all these objections are answered by the person who holds that, "in the same way as you fall asleep, so you die, and as you awaken from sleep, so also you will be resurrected." Such a person not only has no fear of death, but like 'Alī ('a) longs for it, and considers it as felicity.

Mīr Dāmād,[64] the eminent philosopher, says:

> Do not fear the pain of death, for its pain is in its fear.

Suhrawardī,[65] the Islamic Illuminationist philosopher, says:

> We do not hold a philosopher to be a true philosopher until he is able, at will, to disengage his soul from his body—so that such out-of-body experiences become an easy, ordinary, and habitual affair for him.

A similar quote has been reported from Mīr Dāmād, the eminent philosopher and founder of the School of Isfahan.

This is the logic of those who have recognized the precious jewel which develops inside the body. But those who are imprisoned in restrictive and inadequate materialistic ideologies, suffer from anxiety of death, since death in their view is extinction. A person of this latter group is anguished that why should this body (which in his view encapsulates his whole identity and personality) be destroyed. Hence, the thought of death

leads him to pessimism about the world. Such a person needs to review his vision of the world and must be made to realize that his objections are based on a misunderstanding of the same.

This discussion reminds me about a simple-minded bookseller in the Fayḍiyyah School:

In the years when I was engaged in studies in Qum, there used to be a simple-minded bookseller in the Fayḍiyyah School. This man used to spread out his collection of books and students would buy from him. Sometimes he would perform strange acts and say strange things, which would then be related by word of mouth and spread like a rumour. One of the students narrated an incident that occurred to him when he went to this seller to purchase a book one day: After checking the book, I enquired about its price. The bookseller said, "I won't sell". I asked, "Why not?" He said, "If I sell this then I must purchase another copy to replace it." I laughed at his response thinking, "If a bookseller does not constantly transact, buy and sell, he can't make profit and is not a bookseller."

It seems the bookseller was a follower of the school of the poet Khayyām who said:[66]

While Moon and Venus in the sky shall dwell,
None shall see aught red grape-juice to excel:
O foolish publicans, what can you buy
One half so precious as the goods you sell?[i]

He finds fault with the wine-seller as to why he sells wine? Of course this objection is a poetic artifice, not a serious argument. In fact, its beauty and grace is based exactly on this aspect. But when we evaluate this logic with some measure of seriousness, we recognize how the wine drinker has mistaken the wine-seller's work with his own task. For the drinker, wine is the goal, but for the seller it is a means. The wine-seller's job is to buy and sell, and accrue profit, and repeat this cycle all over again. The person whose job is of this nature, will not be grieved by losing his merchandise, in fact, he will be happy

[i] Whinfield, quatrain 208.

since it is a part of his grand scheme and final goal. Ḥāfiẓ says:[67]

Where's an Aref (mystic) who understandeth the
lily's tongue?
That he may inquire: Why she went; and why she
hath come back.[i]

Creation is like buying and selling. The world as market is a place to produce, sell, and make profit, and then to repeat this cycle all over again. The phenomena of life and death is the exchange process—facilitating the market's advancement and profit. The person who objects to this "exchange" in creation, has failed to recognize the law and goal of the world.

Whatever form your eye beholds, its essence subsists in no-place;
If the form goes, no worry, its archetype is eternally there.

[i] Clarke, ghazal 174.