

The Causes Responsible for Materialist tendencies in the West (2 of 4)

Causes Responsible for Materialist tendencies in the West (2 of 4)



Murtadha Mutahhari

**Translated by
Mujahid Husayn**

Al-Islam.org

Al-Tawhid Vol.12, Vol.13

Authors(s):

[Murtadha Mutahhari](#) [1]

Publisher(s):

[al-Tawhid Islamic Journal](#) [2]

Translator(s):

[Mujahid Husayn](#) [3]

What is materialism? Is man materialistic by nature? Materialism in history, in Islam, and in Christianity.

[Get PDF](#) [4] [Get EPUB](#) [5] [Get MOBI](#) [6]

Topic Tags:

[Materialism](#) [7]

[Human](#) [8]

[History](#) [9]

[Islam](#) [10]

[Christianity](#) [11]

The Causes Responsible for Materialist tendencies in the West Part 2 of 4

Translated from the Persian by Mujahid Husayn

Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari

The Inadequacy of Philosophical Ideas

The second reason of importance in the large-scale inclination towards materialism in the West lies in the inadequacy of its philosophical ideas. In fact, that which is called 'divine philosophy' (hikmat al-ilahi) is in a very backward state in the West, though perhaps some people may not concede that the West has not reached the level of the divine philosophy of the East, especially Islamic philosophy.

Many philosophical ideas which raise a hue and cry in Europe are among the elementary issues of Islamic philosophy. In translations of Western philosophical works we come across certain ridiculous

observations cited from major European philosophers.

We also find some statements which show that these philosophers were confronted with certain insuperable difficulties while dealing with theological issues. That is, their philosophical criteria were not satisfactory. It is obvious that these inadequacies created an intellectual climate conducive to materialism.

The Problem of the First Cause

One of the things that may appropriately be mentioned for the sake of example is the story of the 'First Cause' in Western philosophy. Although it is somewhat a difficult issue, we hope that our readers will show some patience.

Hegel is one of the great and famous philosophers of the world whose greatness is certainly undeniable. There is much that is true in his works. We will first quote a statement of this great philosopher concerning one of the most important issues of metaphysics and then compare it with what Islamic philosophy has to say in this regard. This statement is about the 'First Cause,' i.e. about the Necessary Being, from the standpoint of its being the first cause of existents.

Hegel observes:

In solving the puzzle of the world of creation we should not go after the efficient cause ('illat al-fa'ili), because, on the one hand, the mind is not satisfied with infinite regress (tasalsul) and continues to look for the first cause. On the other hand, when we consider the first cause, the puzzle is not solved and the mind is not satisfied; the problem remains as to why the first cause became the first cause.

For solving the puzzle, we should find the end or the purpose and reason for being, because if we know for what it has come into existence, or in other words, when it is known that it is something rational, our nature is satisfied and does not seek another cause. It is obvious that everything requires a justification by reason while reason itself does not require any justification.

The commentators of his works have been unable to explain his intent, but perhaps a close examination might reveal what troubled this man.

If we wish to express this matter in our own philosophical idiom, in a manner that would accord with Hegel's viewpoint, or at least would come near it, we might say, [the conception of] God should be accepted in a form which is directly acceptable to the mind and not as something which the mind is constrained to accept under some compulsion. There is a difference between a notion whose teleology (limmiyat) the mind directly apprehends—and this apprehension is a natural one—and a notion which is only accepted because there is a proof which negates its contradictory and compels its acceptance.

In fact, the basis of its acceptance is that one is left without an answer to the proof negating its contradictory. On the other hand, when the contradictory of a particular proposition is negated and

proved to be false, naturally and necessarily that proposition has to be accepted because it is not possible for both contradictories to be false and one of them has to be necessarily accepted, considering that the falsity of one of the two contradictories is proof of the correctness of the other.

Accepting a notion due to the falsity of its contradictory compels and constrains the mind, without really convincing it, and there is a difference between compelling and constraining the mind and convincing and satisfying it. Often one is silenced by a proof while in the depth of one's consciousness there lingers a kind of doubt and hesitation with respect to the matter proved.

This difference is observable between 'a direct proof' and *reductio ad absurdum* (*burhan al-khulf*). At times, the mind travels naturally and consciously from the premise and the middle term to the conclusion. The conclusion is the direct product of the middle term, as in a deductive argument (*burhan al-limmi*). In this type of proofs the mind spontaneously deduces the conclusion from the premises, and the conclusion, to the mind, is like a child born naturally from its parents.

But in *reductio ad absurdum*—or even in *burhan al-inni* for that matter—this is not the case. In *reductio ad absurdum*, the mind accepts the conclusion as a compulsion. The state of the mind here is similar to that of a person encountering a coercive force before which he is helpless. He accepts it because he cannot reject it.

In these types of proofs, as one of the two possibilities is invalidated by proof, the mind is forced into accepting the other. The other alternative that is accepted by the mind is accepted only because its contradictory has been rejected, and one from among a pair of contradictories has to be necessarily accepted, for it is impossible for both contradictories to be false. Hence it accepts the other possibility under constraint and compulsion. This acceptance of one side is due to compulsion and not spontaneous.

Hegel wants to say that our going after the first cause and our acceptance of it belongs to the latter category. The mind does not directly apprehend the first cause, but accepts it to avoid infinite regress. On the other hand, it sees that although it cannot refrain from accepting the impossibility of infinite regress, it also cannot understand the difference between the first cause and the other causes that makes these causes require a cause while the first cause can do without it.

In his own words, one cannot understand why the first cause became the first cause. But if we seek the teleology and end [of being] we arrive at an end and purpose whose being an end is essential to it and does not require any other end and purpose.

Statements similar to Hegel's with respect to the first cause have been made by Kant and Spencer as well. Spencer says, "The problem is that, on the one hand, human reason seeks a cause for every thing; on the other, it rejects both the vicious circle and the infinite regress. Neither does it find an uncaused cause nor is capable of understanding such a thing. Thus when a priest tells a child that God created the world, the child responds by asking, 'Who created God?'"

Similar, or even more baseless, are Jean–Paul Sartre's remarks in this regard. He, as quoted by Paul Foulquie, says –concerning the first cause: It is self–contradictory that a being be the cause of its own existence. [1](#)

Paul Foulquie, while explaining Sartre's statement, says, “The above argument which Sartre has not elaborated is usually presented in this manner: If we contend that we have originated our own existence, we have to believe that we existed before our existence. This is the obvious contradiction which unravels itself.”[2](#)

Let us now look at the true picture of the theory of the first cause from the philosophical point of view. Is it as what Sartre and others say—a thing bringing itself into existence and laying the foundations of its own being, so as to imply that a thing is its own cause and its own effect?

Or is the meaning of the first cause what Kant, Hegel and Spencer have imagined, i.e. a being whose case involves an exception to the law of causation? That is, although every thing requires a cause and it is impossible for it to be without a cause, the first cause, an exception, is not such?

And is it the case that the impossibility of infinite regress, which makes us accept the first cause, actually compels us to accept a thing's being its own cause? Is it the case that our mind, in the process of avoiding one impossible, is forced into accepting another? Why? If the basis is that the mind should not accept what is impossible, then it should not accept any impossible whatsoever. Why should there be any exception?!

In accordance with the picture presented by Sartre, the first cause, like all other things, is in need of a cause, except that it itself fulfils its own need. According to the conception of Kant, Hegel and Spencer, we are compelled for the sake of avoiding infinite regress to allow an exception among things which are logically similar, and say that all things require a cause except one, the first cause.

As to the difference between the first cause and other causes that makes all other existents depend upon a cause while this one is an exception, the answer is that there is no logical difference. It is only for the sake of avoiding the impossibility of infinite regress that we are forced to assume one of them as not being in need of a cause.

In this interpretation, the first cause is not assumed to require a cause and to meet its own need (as in Sartre's interpretation); rather, it is assumed that the first cause does not require a cause to bring it into existence. That is, the first cause is an exception to the law of causality. But as to why it does not require a cause, and why is it an exception, this interpretation gives no answer.

The first interpretation is very childish. No philosopher, or even an half–philosopher or laymen, would conceive God in this manner. Therefore, we will discuss briefly only the second interpretation and present the correct picture while doing so.

In our view, the doubt of the likes of Kant, Hegel and Spencer concerning the first cause derives from two basic philosophical issues, both of which have remained unsolved in Western philosophy. Of these, the first is the issue of fundamentality of existence (asalat al-wujud), and the second that of the criterion for requiring a cause (manat al-ihtiyaj bi 'illat). It is not appropriate here to discuss and explain the issue of fundamentality of existence, or the contrary doctrine of the fundamentality of essence (asalat al-mahiyyah).

However, we shall confine ourselves to giving a brief explanation. On the basis of the notion of fundamentality of essence—to give a very elementary and superficial picture of it, that is, one based on the assumption that God also, like all other existents, has an essence and an existence (which is an invalid idea even from the viewpoint of the proponents of the theory of fundamentality of essence, because they too consider God as pure existence)—the question arises as to why everything requires a cause while God doesn't. Why is one being Necessary and others contingent? Is it not that all beings are essences which come into existence?

But on the basis of the theory fundamentality of existence—whose principal architect in regard to its philosophical demonstration and providing the proofs is Sadr al-Muta'allihin Shirazi—the pattern of thinking changes radically.

On the basis of the former theory (fundamentality of essence) our conception of things will be that their essence is something which is intrinsically different from existence. Existence should be given to it by another being.

We name this other being 'cause.' But in accordance with the theory of fundamentality of existence, the real being of things is what they partake of existence. Existence is not an essence to which another being may bestow existence. Hence if it be necessary that an external cause bestow something, that thing would be the very being of things, which happens to be existence itself, not something accidental and additional to the essence of things.

There is another question which arises at this point. Is it necessary that existence as such—that is, regardless of its form, manifestation and plane—requires to be bestowed by another being, implying that existence qua existence is identical with being a gift and emanation [of something else with dependence, relation, being an effect, and being posterior [to that which gives it existence]], and hence is necessarily finite? Or is there some other perspective?

The answer is that the reality of existence, despite its various planes and manifestations, is no more than a single reality. It does not necessarily entail need and dependence upon another thing. That is because the meaning of dependence and need with respect to existence (in contrast to the dependence and need which were assumed earlier in relation to essences) is that existence should itself be needy and dependent.

And if the reality of existence were need and dependence, it implies that it will be related to and

dependent upon something other than itself, while no 'other' is conceivable for existence, because something other than existence is either non-existence or essence, which, as presumed, is derivative (i'tibari) and a sibling of non-existence.

Hence the reality of existence qua reality of existence necessitates independence, self-sufficiency, and absence of need for and relation with something other than itself. It is also necessarily absolute, unconditioned, and unlimited. That is, it entails the impossibility of non-existence and negation finding a way into it.

Need, want, and dependence, and similarly finitude and mingling with non-existence, derive from another consideration, which is different from the consideration of pure existence: these derive from posteriority and being an effect (ma'luiyyat).

That is, existence qua existence and regardless of all other considerations necessitates self-sufficiency and independence from cause. As to the need for a cause—or in other words, that a being at a particular plane and stage should require a cause—that derives from its not being the reality of existence and its reliance upon God for coming into existence through emanation. And the logical consequence of being an emanation is posteriority and need, or rather, it is nothing except these.

From here we come to understand that according to the theory of fundamentality of existence, when we focus our intellect upon the reality of existence, we find there self-sufficiency, priority, and the absence of need. In other words, the reality of existence is equivalent to essential necessity (wujub al-dhati), and to use an expression of Hegel's liking, the rational dimension of the reality of existence is absence of need for a cause.

Dependence upon a cause derives from a consideration (itibar) other than the reality of existence, and this consideration is posteriority and finitude. In other words, the need for a cause is the same as existence at a plane posterior to the reality of existence, and, in Hegelian terminology, the need for a cause is not the rational dimension of existence.

This is the meaning of the statement that 'The Truthful, when they contemplate the reality of existence and observe it sans every condition and relation (idafah), the first thing which they discover is the Necessary Being and the First Cause. From the Necessary Being they infer Its effects which are not pure existence, being finite beings bearing non-being within.' This is what is meant when it is said that in this logic there is no middle term for proving the existence of God; the Divine Being is the witness of Its existence.

“God bears witness, and those possessing knowledge and upholding justice, and the angles, that there is no God but He.” (3: 18)

The proof of the sun is the sun (himself): if you require the proof, do not avert thy face from him!

If the shadow gives an indication of him, the sun (himself) gives spiritual life every moment.

This discloses the baselessness of the statements of those who say that the notion of the first cause involves a contradiction because it implies that a thing is the originator of its own existence and hence exists before coming into being.

Similarly baseless is the statement of those who say: 'Supposing that we prove that every thing has been brought into existence by the first cause, the question remains as to what has brought the first cause into existence; hence the first cause remains an unjustifiable exception.

Explaining the Universe by Means of Reason and not Cause

Hegel believed that explanation of the universe on the basis of the first cause, irrespective of whether we consider it to be mind, matter, or God, is impossible because the concept of the first cause itself is inexplicable. Therefore, a different way should be found for an explanation of the universe. First we should see what is meant by 'explanation,' he said.

Now an isolated fact is usually said to be explained when its cause has been discovered. And if its cause cannot be ascertained, it is said to be an unexplained fact. But we cannot explain the universe in this way. If the universe could be said to have a cause, then either that cause is the effect of a prior cause, or it is not.

Either the chain of causes extends back in an infinite series, or there is somewhere a 'first cause' which is not the effect of any prior cause. [If the series is infinite, then no final and ultimate explanation is to be found. If there is a first cause, then this first cause itself is an unexplained fact To explain the universe by something which is itself an ultimate mystery is surely no explanation. [3](#)

Later on Hegel observes that the concept of causality not only cannot provide an explanation of the universe but is also incapable of explaining particular things, because explaining involves the description of the logical relationship between a thing and something else. Whenever a thing is logically 'inferred' from something else it is said to have been explained.

For example, when we know that angle A is equal to angle B and that angle B is equal to angle C, we arrive at the logical conclusion that angles A and C are equal. The mind necessarily concludes that it has to be so and it cannot be otherwise, that it is logically impossible. Here the equality of angles A and C has been explained with the help of two premises. These two premises are the reason or ground for the equality of angles A and C, not its cause.

But causality does not explain a thing. Causality simply states an existential proposition (qadiyyah wujdiyyah) and not a necessary proposition (qadiyyah daruriyyah). This is because the concept of causality is arrived at by experience and not through logical inference. For example, we find by

experimenting that water turns into steam due to heat and freezes due to cold. Consequently we say that heat is the cause of vaporization and cold the cause of freezing of water.

But our mind does not make a judgment that it should be so necessarily and logically. Supposedly, if we arrived at the opposite conclusion by experiment, finding that water freezes due to heat and turns into steam on being exposed to cold, this would make no difference to the mind. Hence this assumption is not something logically impossible, whereas in contrast the assumption of inequality of angles A and C in the earlier example is a logical impossibility.

Causality does not explain that an effect should be an effect logically, and that which is a cause should logically be a cause. Therefore, the universe should be explained through reason and not by resorting to causes. The difference between reason and cause is that a cause is something isolated; that is, it has an existence separate from that of its effect, whereas a reason is not isolated and separate existence from what it explains.

For example, the equality of angles A and B, and similarly of B and C, is the reason for the equality of angles A and C. But these reasons do not have an existence isolated and separate from what they prove, as in the case of causes which have an existence independent of their effects.

Identity of Mind and Reality

Hegel then discusses another principle, the principle of the identity of knowing and being, or the identity of mind and reality, or the mental realm and external reality. He is trying to remove the wall of dualism separating the mind from external reality. In Hegel's view, the mind and external reality are not two isolated realities alien to each other. That is, they are not two totally different entities opposing each other. They are identical because they are but two different aspects of a single reality. And the ground for this assertion is that the problem of how knowledge is possible appears to be insoluble if we do not accept it.⁴

Hegel launches his philosophical project on the basis of these two principles. The first is that reason and not cause can provide an explanation of the universe, and the other, the identity of knowing and being. He starts with being which he considers to be the first reason. From being he derives non-being, and from that he arrives at 'becoming' which is a concept denoting motion. In this manner he proceeds with his dialectic.

It is not possible for us to provide here a critique of Hegelian philosophy and to investigate the mainspring of his errors by applying the criteria of Islamic philosophy, which in itself would be a long and interesting account. Here it will suffice to point out that according to the theory of fundamentality of existence (asalat al-wujud) and with attention to the special 'Argument of the Truthful' (burhan al-Siddiqin), Hegel's imagined dichotomy between cause and reason, between the why and wherefore (limm al-thubiti and limm al-ithbati) vanishes.

The first cause in this philosophy is both self-sufficient and without the need of a cause, as well as self-explanatory and requiring no ground. It is the cause as well as the ground of all things, as well as their explainer.

For solving the problem of epistemology, too, there is no need to resort to the identity of knowing and being as conceived by Hegel. The problem of knowledge, which is one of the most difficult and complicated issues of philosophy, has another solution. An elaborate discussion of these two issues has to wait for some other occasion.

We explained that according to the doctrine of fundamentality of existence the question as to why the first cause became the first cause becomes totally meaningless. Now we may observe that this question also does not arise on the basis of the doctrine of fundamentality of essence, because it arises only when we necessarily assume that the Necessary Being possesses an essence like all other existents which is additional to its existence.

But we are not compelled to make such an assumption. Rather we are compelled to assume the contrary; that is, after conceding the impossibility of an infinite regress we have no alternative except accepting the existence of the first cause, the Necessary Being. Similarly, since the Necessary Being cannot be an entity composed of essence and existence, we make the assent that It is pure existence and sheer ipseity (inniyat al-sirf). Naturally there remains no room for our question.

The proof is also valid on the basis of the theory of fundamentality of essence (aalat al-mahiyyah). Philosophers like Ibn Sina have taken the same path. If there remains any question, it relates to another point, that if the reality of the Necessary Being is pure existence, what is the reality of other things? Is essence the reality of other things, existence being something derived (i'tibari) in relation to them, implying that the realm of being is a duality? Or is it that the reality of all things is what they partake of existence?

A correct answer to this question lies in opting for the second alternative, which is the theory of fundamentality of existence.

Certainly the likes of Ibn Sina did not reject the fundamentality of existence. At that time the issue of fundamentality of essence and that of existence had not been posed among philosophers or others. Therefore this question, in the context of Ibn Sina's exposition, is one which had not been raised during that time, and it does not amount to an objection against his exposition. In any case, the objection raised by those like Kant, Hegel and Spencer is not valid even aside from the fundamentality of existence. Now we shall provide an explanation about the criterion for an effect's need for a cause.

The Criterion for a Thing's Need for a Cause

The law of causality and the cause-effect relationship between things form one of the most definite

notions of human knowledge. The link and relation between the effect and its cause is not an apparent and superficial one; it is profound and permeates the very reality of the effect. That is, the effect, with all its being, is so dependent upon the cause that if the cause didn't exist, it would be impossible for the effect to come into being. All the sciences developed by man are founded upon this law.

We have proved in its appropriate place that disregarding this law is tantamount to rejecting the presence of any order in the realm of being as well as negating every scientific, philosophical, logical and mathematical law. Here we do not consider it necessary to discuss this principle any further.

In this regard Islamic philosophers have posed an issue⁵ which in some respects precedes the principle of causality. This issue is: What is the criterion of the need for a cause? On this basis, in every case—for example concerning the causal relationship between A (the cause) and B (A's effect)—two questions come to the mind:

First, why did B come into existence? The answer to this question is that the existence of A required that B come into existence, and had A not existed, B too would not have come into existence. Therefore, the existence of A is itself the answer to this question. Suppose a house is destroyed by flood and someone asks, 'Why was this house destroyed?' We reply that there was a flood.

The second question is, why does B need A and why cannot it come into existence without it? Why is not B independent of A? Obviously, the answer to this question is not that, 'That is because the existence of A required it.' We need to find another answer to this question.

The reply to the first question can be given on the basis of science, which is the product of experimentation, because it is the function of science to discover causal relationships between things⁶. Hence if we are asked as to what is the cause of B, we reply by relying on science that the cause of B is A.

But as to why B needs A and why it is not independent of A or any other cause, the answer to this question lies outside the domain of science and it is not possible to answer it by experimentation, analysis, synthesis or by distilling or grinding in a laboratory. It is here that philosophical analysis and precise rational inference come in.

That is because the question does not relate to any concrete phenomenon, because although the effect's need for a cause is an undeniable reality, it is not a phenomenon isolated from the cause and the effect; that is, we do not have three external phenomena, the cause, the effect and the effect's need for a cause. On the same basis, science, whose function is to study phenomena, is incapable of answering this question, while philosophy, which is capable of discovering these relationships and penetrating into the depth of realities, is the only discipline competent to answer such questions.

From the point of view of philosophy the matter is not that B needs A because B has never been observed empirically to come into existence without A, and therefore B requires A and that the same is

true of every effect with respect to its cause. From the philosophical viewpoint it is impossible for an effect to be not an effect and to be independent of the cause.

The effect's dependence on the cause is inseparable from the reality of the effect, or, rather, it is the very reality of the effect. This is the reason why philosophy poses the issue in a general manner without discussing the particular causal relationship between some B and A: What is the basis of causal dependence and where does the effect's need for a cause arise? Do things need a cause just because they are things and existents?

Are thingness and existence the criteria of causal dependence, so that every thing and every existent should be dependent upon a cause just because of its being a thing and an existent? Or is it the case that mere thingness and existence are not the criteria of this dependence, because, if thingness and existence were the criteria of something they should in principle be the criteria of self-sufficiency and independence, not the criteria of need and dependence. That which can appropriately serve as the criterion of neediness and dependence is some kind of deficiency in thingness and existence, not thingness and existence as such and optic perfection.

Islamic philosophers, as well as the theologians (mutakallimun), who were the first ones to have started this debate, never considered thingness and existence per se as the criteria of neediness and dependence because that would imply that an existent needs a cause merely because it is existent. Rather, they were definite that there is another aspect of things deriving from their aspect of deficiency and nonbeing wherein lie the roots of this neediness and dependence. Altogether three theories have been advanced in this regard.

1. The Theory of the Mutakallimun

The mutakallimun considered the criterion of neediness and dependence of effects upon causes and their lack of independence to be ,hududh, that is, their previous non-existence. They considered the absence of a thing's need for a cause to lie in its being eternal (qidam). They said that if the existence of a being was preceded by non-existence ('adam), or if, in other words, a thing did not exist at a time and came into existence at another time such an existent, on the basis that it was non-existent earlier and came into being later, needs a cause to bring it into existence, and its existence will depend upon something other than itself.

But if there is a being which is eternal and there was never a time that it did not exist, such a being will be independent and without the need for a cause; it would not be dependent upon something else by any means. The mutakallimun held that the causal relationship between two things, for example, A in relation to B, is that A brings B into existence from a state of non-existence, and this is only possible where B's existence is preceded by non-existence.

But if B is assumed to be eternal and there was never a time that it did not exist, then the causality of A

with respect to it makes no sense.

In fact, the mutakallimun identified the [ontic] deficiency that is the basis of neediness and dependence of things upon something else to lie in previous non-existence, that is, in the temporal precedence of non-existence over existence. And they considered the source of perfection, self-sufficiency and absence of dependence upon something else to be eternity or non- precedence by non-existence.

Therefore, from the point of view of the mutakallimun, a being is either deficient, needy, preceded by non-existence (hadith) and dependent upon another, or it is perfect, self-sufficient, eternal and not dependent upon anything.

2. The Theory of Early Islamic Philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, down to the Era of Sadr al-Muta'allihin

These philosophers raised basic objections against the theory of the mutakallimun wherein huduth and previous non-existence were considered the criteria of ontic deficiency, need and dependence upon something else. However, this is not the place to mention their objections. They said that though it is true that everything which is hadith (preceded by non-existence) needs a cause, but the criterion for the hadith's need for a cause is not its huduth but something else.

They also said that eternity is in no way the criterion of self-sufficiency, perfection and absence of dependence. The philosophers claimed that the criterion of ontic deficiency and perfection, and of need and self-sufficiency, should be sought in the essence and quiddity (mahiyah) of beings, not in previous non-existence, huduth, or eternal existence, qidam.

Things in their essence (dhat), from the point of view of being, are of two kinds—or at least can be assumed to be of two kinds. The first is the case where their being is their actual essence, that is, they do not have any essence (mahiyah) apart from their existence. In other words their essence and their existence are one and the same.

The second case is where the essence of a thing is something distinct from its existence and nonexistence. We call the first kind necessary being (wajib al-wujud), and the second, contingent being (mumkin al-wujud). The Necessary Being, from the standpoint of being existence itself—it being senseless for a thing to be devoid of itself, and impossible for it not to exist while being existence itself—is not in need of a cause, because causality implies that the cause brings the being of the effect into existence, and when the essence (dhat) of a thing is actual existence and there is no vacuum in it in this regard, the need for a cause does not exist.

But a contingent being, from the viewpoint that it is neither existent nor non-existent in itself, being equally indifferent with respect to both the sides and having a vacuum in relation to both of them, needs something else to fill this vacuum, and that something is the cause.

The existence of the cause fills that vacuum with existence, and that which is contingent-existent-in-itself (mumkin al-wujud bi al-dhat) becomes necessarily-existence-through-another (wajib al-wujdd bi al-ghayr). The nonexistence of a cause fills that vacuum with non-existence and a contingent-existent-in-itself becomes impossible due to the absence of its cause (mumtani' al-wu jad bi al-ghayr).

The philosophers call this [ontic] vacuum “essential contingency” (imkan dhati) and consider it to be the criterion for requiring a cause. Similarly, they name [ontic] plenitude “essential necessity” (wujub dhati).

In fact, from the point of view of philosophers, the essential deficiency which makes existents needy, deficient, and dependent upon something else is that essential vacuity (khala' dhati), and the essential perfection (kamal dhati) which is the source of perfection of an existent and makes it needless with respect to dependence upon another is that 'essential plenitude' (mala' dhati), that is the identity of essence (dhat) and existence.

As these philosophers consider the root and criterion of dependence to be essential vacuity and not previous non-existence, if there were to exist a being in the world which is eternal, there being no time that it did not exist and without ever being preceded by non-existence, it would still be a contingent existent (mumkin al-wujud), that is, its essence is not identical with its existence and it has a vacuity of existence at the plane of its essence. Such a being is an effect, a creature, and dependent upon another despite being eternal and everlasting. The philosophers believe that such existents do exist and they name them 'uql al-qahirah (the Supreme Intellects).

3. The Special Theory of Sadr al-Muta'allihin and His Followers

Sadr al-Muta'allihin conceded that every hadith existent depends upon something else. He also accepted that every contingent being is in need of a cause. He considered valid the objections raised by the philosophers against the theologians, and agreed with the philosophers that there is nothing to prevent an existent from being temporally eternal, existing since pre eternity and everlasting, while being dependent, a creature and an effect. Similarly he endorsed the view of the philosophers that the criterion of neediness and dependence should be sought within things themselves and not in their previous non-existence.

However, he proved that in the same way that huduth cannot be the criterion of neediness, so also essential contingency (imkan dhati), or in our words 'essential vacuity,' too, cannot be the criterion of dependence and neediness because essential contingency is an attribute of essence, and it is essence which is said to be essentially indifferent to being and non-being and something hollow and empty, requiring something else to fill it.

But considering that essence is derivative (istibari) and not fundamental, it lies outside the realm of neediness and self-sufficiency causing and being caused, efficiency and receptivity. Rather essence lies outside the domain of existence and non-existence. Essential contingency (imkan mahuwi) cannot be

the principal basis of this neediness.

All these characteristics such as existence and non-existence, causing and being caused, neediness and self-sufficiency, can be attributed to essence, but only accidentally (*bi al-'arad*), metaphorically, and secondarily, that is following existence, from which essence is derived and abstracted.

Therefore, the real basis of intrinsic neediness and intrinsic self-sufficiency should be sought in existence itself. In the same way that Sadr al Muta'allihin proved the fundamentality of existence (*asalat al-wujud*), he also proved the gradation of existence, that is the hierarchy of different planes of existence.

Accordingly, in the same way as self-sufficiency does not lie outside the reality of existence, similarly neediness too is not external to the reality of existence, and in the same way as perfection is not something extraneous to the reality of existence but is identical with it, so also deficiency is not external to it.

It is the reality of existence which receives perfection and deficiency, plenitude and poverty, self-sufficiency and neediness, intensity and weakness, necessity and contingency, infinitude and finitude or is rather identical with them.

The reality of existence in its purity and at the plane of its own essence is equivalent to perfection, self-sufficiency, independence, intensity, necessity and infinitude, while deficiency, need, dependence, contingency, and the like are posterior to the plane of the essence and derive from being an effect (*ma'luliyat*) with its implied deficiency.

From Sadr al-Muta'allihin's point of view, the notion of essential vacuity of essence in respect of existence and the need for something else to fill this vacuum is correct only on the basis of fundamentality of essence, not on the basis of fundamentality of existence.

On the basis of fundamentality of existence, attributing need and essential vacuity to essence and the notion that something else called 'cause' is required to fill this vacuum, are only correct as a loose philosophical metaphor. Causing (*'illiyyat*) and being caused (*ma'luliyat*), as well as self-sufficiency and need, all pertain to something which is concrete and real, and that is existence. The roots of an existent's dependence on another existent lie in its essential deficiency and its essential finitude.

In contrast to the opinion of the theologians and the vast majority of philosophers, according to Sadr al-Muta'allihin's view, need, the needy, and the criterion of neediness are not different things; need, the needy, and the criterion of neediness, all the three are a single thing. Certain planes of existence are identical with actual need with respect to another plane by virtue of their essential deficiency and essential posteriority (*ta'akhkhur dhati*) to the principal source of existence, .

Sadr al-Muta'allihin also follows the classical approach of such philosophers as Ibn Sina while

discussing the issue of criterion for the need of a cause, but elsewhere he expresses his own opinion on this issue, which is a definite and inevitable result of the principles he has propounded.

As he has dealt with the issue in the classical manner by adopting the approach of his predecessors, later scholars and the followers of his school, like the late Hajji Sabzawari, have imagined that Sadr al-Muta'allihin does not have a distinct opinion of his own on this issue. We have for the first time highlighted this fact in the footnotes of *Usul al-falsafeh wa rawish al-riyallism* ('The Principles and Method of the Philosophy of Realism') and have presented it for the benefit of others.

In any case, that which is definite in accordance with the views of all the schools is that the roots of dependence upon a cause do not lie simply in being a thing or being an existent. Things, just because they have existence, do not require a cause. Existence, more than being indicative of dependence, is indicative of self-sufficiency.

From what we have said two facts come to light:

1. That which is often said that 'Every thing, or every existent, requires a cause,' is not only incorrect but also a grave error. The correct thing to say is that 'Every deficient being is in need of a cause.' As we have seen, the different schools which have discussed this topic differ in their determination of the deficiency which makes the criterion for dependence on a cause, but they concur that every deficient thing requires a cause, not every thing whether it is deficient or perfect.

2. Our conception of the First Cause has now become clear. It became evident that the First Cause, which is the same as the eternal, perfect, infinite Essence (dhat) of the Necessary Being, is the first cause because existence itself is its essence, and existence in itself is perfect, not deficient, and limitless, not limited, thus ruling out any dependence upon a cause. The meaning of the First Cause is neither that it is its own cause—in the sense that it lays the foundation of its own existence and brings itself into being—nor that the First Cause does not differ from all other existents with regard to the need for a cause and that it is an exception to the law of causality.

Here it is possible that a doubt may arise in the minds of those who are not trained in these issues, that although it is correct that the First Cause, because of its being eternal, perfect, infinite and necessarily existent, is free from all forms of dependence, while all other things on account of their not possessing these qualities are dependent and in need, but why did the First Cause become the first cause?

That is, why did only the First Cause, from among all existents, become eternal (qadim), perfect, infinite and necessarily existent? Why didn't It become hadith and deficient? Why didn't another existent, which is presently deficient and dependent, not take the place of the Necessary Being?

In view of the explanation provided, the answer to this question is obvious. It has been presumed in this question that it was possible for the Necessary Being not be a necessary being and that it was through the interference of a cause that It became a necessary and not a contingent being. It has also been

assumed that it is possible for a contingent being not to be a contingent being, and that it became such due to the intervention of some cause.

In other words, it was possible for an essentially perfect and infinite being to be deficient and finite, and for a deficient and finite being to be essentially perfect and infinite, and it was due to the intervention of some factor that one became essentially perfect and infinite while the other became essentially deficient and finite. Yes, this is the basis of the question.

The questioner is oblivious of the fact that the plane of existence of each existent is the essence (dhat) of that existent, in just the same manner as the plane of each number is the actual essence of that number. Therefore, if an existent becomes independent of a cause as a result of essential self-sufficiency and essential perfection, the consequence is that no cause can interfere with it in any manner, no cause has brought it into existence, and no cause has placed it at the plane at which it subsists.

The question as to why the First Cause became the first cause—which is considered unanswerable in Western philosophy—is actually a meaningless question. For the First Cause, Its existence is Its reality and Its very essence (dhat), and being the First Cause is also identical with Its essence, and in both capacities it has no need of a cause.

This question is just like saying, 'Why is the number one, one? Why didn't it not become two? Why did two become number two and not one, and why it didn't take the place of one?' Since we have discussed the matter that the plane of existence of each existent is actually the very essence of that existent in greater detail in our book 'Adl al-Ilahi ('Divine Justice'), we shall refrain from repeating it here.

As a conclusion to this part of the discussion it would be appropriate to cite the remarks of Bertrand Russell, a contemporary philosopher, about the First Cause for ascertaining the character of his philosophical views concerning this profound issue.

Russell has a small book by the name *Why I am not a Christian*. In it he does not simply limit his criticism to Christianity, but rather criticizes religious ideas in general, and the idea of God in particular, which is accepted even by some non-religious persons.

Among the things he objects to in that book is 'the First Cause argument.'¹ In order to know how Mr. Russell, this great Western philosopher whose fame has spread everywhere, has conceived these issues in his mind we shall quote him here. He says:

It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God.

Then Russell goes on to refute the argument in these words:

I may say that when I was a young man and was debating these questions very seriously in my mind, I for a long time accepted the argument of the First Cause, until one day, at the age of eighteen, I read John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, and I there found this sentence: 'My father taught me that the question, "Who made me?" cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question, "Who made God?"'

That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument.

Our previous observations highlight the fallacy in Russell's argument. The argument is not about whether everything must have a cause or if it is possible for a being to exist without a cause as an exception, that if it is possible for one thing to exist without a cause, what difference would it make whether it is God or the universe.

The issue involved is that [the thingness of] every thing and [the existence of] all that exists is neither the criterion of dependence upon a cause nor that of non-dependence in respect of its being something and having some kind of existence, so that the question may arise as to what difference is there among these things in this respect.

The issue at hand is that among things and existents there exists an entity and a being which is pure existence and absolute perfection, and every perfection derives from it and is directed towards it, and it, being identical with existence, is in no need of a cause—as against things which have a borrowed existence—and such a being neither lacks existence nor any of its perfections for it to either seek them, or hasten to acquire them, nor does it lose them.

On the other hand, we live in a world in which everything has a transient nature and is in search of something which it lacks, and everything at another time loses what it presently possesses. We live in a world in which everything is subject to decline, annihilation, change and transformation, and all the signs of poverty, need, dependence, indebtedness and having a borrowed existence are evident on the face of every thing. Therefore, such a world cannot be the First Cause and the Necessary Being. And this is the Abrahamic argument mentioned in the Noble Qur'an:

***So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith. When night outspread over him he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set he said, 'I love not the setters.' When he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me I shall surely be of the people gone astray.' When he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greater!' But when it set he said, 'O my people, surely I am quit of that you associate. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolaters.'* (6:75–79)**

The summary of the argument is that, in consonance with primordial nature and self-evident judgement

of the intellect, he considers himself a being that is servile and subject to and sustained [by something else], and dedicates himself to the search of his lord and sustainer.

The star, the moon, and the sun—which are the most luminous existents and which the people of Abraham's time considered as power that regulated and ruled the world—by turns capture his attention, but after a moment's contemplation the signs of subjugation, subjection, and being sustained by something else become evident in them as well as other existents in the world of nature.

Thereat Abraham sets everything aside and turns his heart towards the mighty power which is the absolute sustainer and absolutely supreme, and in which there is no sign of subjugation, subjection, huduth, annihilation, need and poverty. From the presence of need and annihilation, transience and decline, dependence and subjection, he discovers the existence of that subjugating power and perfection.

God and Evolution

Among the various issues which in my opinion have had a great impact on materialistic tendencies is the false notion that there is a contradiction between the principle of creation on the one hand and the theory of evolution, especially the evolution of living organisms, on the other. In other words, the fallacy is that creation amounts to instantaneous coming into existence of things, while evolution means that things do not have a creator.

As history indicates, the idea existed, especially in the Western world, that the implication of the universe being created by God is that all things should be unvarying and fixed, and that there should be no change in the universe, especially in the principles of the universe, that is, the species. Hence evolution is impossible, especially where it relates to the essence and necessitates a change in the essence of a thing and a mutation of its species.

On the other hand, we observe that with the development of the sciences the notion that things, especially living creatures, show an ascending evolutionary movement becomes ever more confirmed and established. The conclusion that is drawn from these two premises is that the sciences, especially biological sciences, are moving in an anti-theistic direction.

As we know, the views of Lamarck and Darwin, especially those of the latter, raised a storm in Europe. Although Darwin was himself a believer in God and religion, and as related, sat the time of his death he held the Bible pressed to his chest,¹ and repeatedly in his writings declared his faith in God, his ideas were introduced as being totally anti-God.

Someone might say that evolutionism in general (especially Darwinism, in view of the hypothesis that the origin of man is from the ape, which was later abandoned) was considered anti-God because it went against the contents of the holy scriptures.

In religious scriptures the creation of man has been usually traced back to a single human being named Adam, and this apparently implies that he was directly created from dust. Accordingly, it was both correct and proper that Darwin and the Darwinists, or rather all the proponents of evolution, be branded as anti-God, because in no way is it possible to reconcile faith in religion with belief in the theory of evolution. There is, therefore, no alternative to accepting one from among these two and rejecting the other.

The reply to this is that, firstly, what the sciences have opined in this regard are hypotheses which are either constantly changing, modified, or even abandoned and replaced by other hypotheses. On the basis of such hypotheses, it is neither possible to reject some idea stated explicitly and without any room for interpretation in a divine scripture, nor is it possible to consider such hypotheses a proof of the baselessness of religion as such and the baselessness of religion as a proof for the non-existence of God.

Secondly, scientific opinion has moved in a direction which shows that the basic changes occurring in living creatures, especially at stages where their species changes and their essence undergoes mutation, are in the form of a leap, swift and sudden. Therefore, the concept of very gradual, intangible and cumulative changes is no longer relevant. When science considers it possible for an infant to cover a distance of hundred years in a single night, what evidence is there that it cannot cover the distance of hundreds of million years in forty nights?

Even if that which has been mentioned in religious texts be presumed to imply explicitly the creation of the first man directly from dust, it has been expressed in a manner that shows that it involved some kind of action and reaction in nature. It is stated in religious texts that Adam's clay was formed in forty days.

Who knows, perhaps all the stages which the first living cell had to cover in the natural course in billions of years for it to eventually give rise to a human being, may have been covered in forty days by Adam's clay in extraordinary conditions which the hand of Divine power had brought about, in the same way as the human ovum, in a period of nine months in the womb, is said to cover all the stages the animal predecessors of man took billions of years to cover.

Thirdly, suppose that what the sciences say in this regard is more than a mere hypothesis and is a confirmed scientific fact, that it is not possible to create natural conditions so that matter may swiftly and speedily cover the stages which it covers slowly under a different set of conditions, and that it is a scientifically confirmed fact that man had animal ancestors.

In the light of these assumptions, are the relevant religious texts such that they cannot be interpreted accordingly? If we specifically take the Noble Qur'an as the criterion, we find that the Qur'an has narrated the story of Adam in a symbolic manner. I do not mean to say that the Adam mentioned in the Qur'an is not a person's name but a symbol representing the human species. I don't mean to say that.

To be certain the first Man (Adam) was an individual and a person having concrete existence. What I mean is that the Qur'an has narrated the story of Adam in a symbolic way from the point of view of his

stay in heaven, his seduction by Satan, greed, and jealousy, his expulsion from heaven, his penitence, and so on.

The conclusion the Qur'an derives from this story is not from the standpoint of the wonderful creation of Adam and it does not play any role in drawing any theological conclusion. Rather, the Qur'an narrates the story of Adam solely from the point of view of man's spiritual station and from the viewpoint of certain ethical issues. It is fully possible for a person who believes in God and the Qur'an to retain his faith in God and the Qur'an while interpreting the story of Adam's creation in some manner.

Today, we know religious persons who have faith in God, the Prophet (s) and the Qur'an, and who interpret the story of Adam's creation in a manner consonant with the modern sciences. No one has claimed that these views contradict with faith in the Qur'an. I myself, while studying these views in books on this subject, find in them many points worthy of attention and reflection, although I am not totally convinced about them.

However, to consider such issues a pretext for rejecting the Qur'an and religion is far from scientific justice, to say nothing of using them as an excuse for negating belief in God.

Fourthly, suppose we accept that the literal meanings of religious texts are not susceptible to an alternative interpretation and that man's descent from animals is scientifically definite. At the most it would mean that one will lose faith in religious scriptures.

But why should one lose faith in God? Firstly, it is possible that new religions may emerge which do not subscribe to the idea of man's direct creation from dust as explicitly as the Torah. Secondly, does the rejection of a single, some, or all religions logically imply the rejection of belief in God? There have always been individuals who have had faith in God without adhering to any religion.

From all that we have said it is known that the assumed contradiction between the contents of religious texts and the theory of evolution cannot be considered a reason for inclining towards materialism; the reason must be something else. The fact is that the European materialists imagined the hypothesis of evolution to be rationally and logically incompatible with the issue of God, irrespective of its compatibility with religion. Accordingly, they proclaimed that belief in God is negated by acceptance of the theory of evolution.

Let us now examine this argument, to see whether there is any rational and logical contradiction between these two issues, or if the inadequacy of the concepts of European philosophy is responsible for an imagined contradiction. Whatever it may be, we need to examine the approach taken by the materialists in taking this contradiction for granted.

We can explain their statements in two ways. Firstly, in the sense that the theists are deprived of their most important argument with the emergence of the theory of evolution. A major argument of the theists for proving the existence of an omniscient and wise creator was the presence of a perfect order of

existents.

This perfect order is more evident in the plant and animal kingdoms. If the creation of plants and animals had been instantaneous, the argument based on the perfect order of existents would have been correct, because it was not rationally acceptable that a being could come into existence instantaneously and all of a sudden without any intelligent plan, especially where it possesses such structures which show that its formation, design, and organism has been created with a planned purpose.

But if the creation of the existents was gradual and extended in time, that is, if it has taken place in the course of hundreds of millions of years and the structure of existents has acquired the present form little by little with the passing of centuries and generations, there is no obstacle to regarding these intricate systems as entirely unplanned. That is, no intelligent power has supervised it and only coincidences and forced conformity with the environment have been the cause of these systems and organisms.

Therefore, with the acceptance and confirmation of mutation the main argument of the theists is taken away from them, and this by itself is sufficient to tilt the balance in favour of the materialists and make a group incline towards that side.

But this interpretation is in itself incorrect. If such views are presented before a vigorous theistic school of thought it will immediately reply that, firstly, it is a mistake to consider the perfection of design as the only argument for the existence of God, and to mention it as the main argument is indeed an exaggeration.

Secondly, the whole order of creation is not limited to the structure of animal organs for it to be said that the gradual evolution of species is enough to explain their accidental existence. Thirdly, the important and also the principal reply to this criticism is that the gradual emergence of and accidental changes occurring in the structure of plants and animals are not at all sufficient for explaining the precise systems of their bodies.

Accidental changes can be considered sufficient only when we presume that there occurs a change in the body of a living creature as a result of an accident or an aimless act, or an act meant for some purpose other than the consequence produced; for instance, when a web is formed accidentally on a duck's feet and proves helpful in swimming and is transferred to later generations as a result of heredity.

But, firstly, from the viewpoint of heredity, the transfer of acquired and individual characteristics, especially acquired characteristics, is highly improbable or rather ruled out. Secondly, all organs and members of the body are not like the web of a duck's foot. Generally, every part is itself a part of an elaborate and complicated system, such as those relating to digestion, respiration, vision, hearing, and so on.

Each of these systems is an organized and interlinked apparatus in which the related function and characteristic is not achieved unless all its parts come into existence. For example, the membranes of

the eye are not such that each of them be assumed to perform a separate function of the body and as having come into existence gradually in millions of years.

Rather the eye, along with all its membranes, fluids, nerves and muscles with their astonishing number, variety, organization and formation performs a single function. It is not admissible that accidental changes, even in billions of years, would gradually give rise to the ocular or auricular system.

The theory of evolution more than anything points towards the role of an intelligent and guiding force in the being of living creatures and demonstrates the principle of teleology.

Darwin himself propounded the principle of adaptation to environment in such terms that he was told that he spoke of it as if it were a metaphysical principle. It is a reality that the capacity of living organisms to adapt to the environment, which is a very mysterious and astonishing power, is something metaphysical; that is, it is subject to a kind of guidance and consciousness of purpose, and is in no way a blind and aimless power.

The principle of evolution implies the presence of an unseen regulating power in the universe no less than any other theory. The reason that Darwin and many other later biologists are theists and religious persons is this that they have not considered the principles and laws of nature—such as the principles of struggle for survival, heredity, selection of the fittest, and adaptation to the environment (if interpreted solely as an ordinary blind natural reaction to the environment)—by any means sufficient for explaining the emergence of living organisms.

Of course, we do not say that they did not consider them necessary and reverted to the theory of instantaneous creation of living organisms. All that we are saying is that they did not consider them sufficient.

Actually, the reason why the theory of evolution was considered contradictory to the famous theist argument for the existence of God based upon perfect design was doubtlessly the weakness of the systems of philosophy and metaphysics.

Instead of utilizing the emergence of the theory of evolution to the advantage of the theist school, they considered it as antithetical to theist thought, because they imagined that only an instantaneously created universe needed a cause and creator, and if the universe or any species were to come into existence gradually, the gradual natural factors were sufficient to explain their existence. Such assumptions indicate the weakness of the Western systems of philosophic thought.

Apart from the assumption that the theory of evolution weakens the argument by design and perfection of creation, there existed another reason why the evolutionary school was considered antithetical to theism, thus assisting the spread of materialism. This was the supposition that if there were a God, things must have come into existence according to a prior plan; that is, the existence of things should have been anticipated in God's knowledge and then created by His irresistible will.

The presence of a prior plan implies the total absence of chance, because chance contradicts foreknowledge, being something unexpected and unpredictable. But we know that chance plays an extraordinary important and effective role in the creation of the universe. Even if we suppose that chance is not sufficient for the initial existence of things, we cannot deny its existence and effective role in the process of creation

For example, the earth, which is the cradle of living organisms, was a fragment which came into existence due to a chance, for instance, due to the sun's nearing a big spherical body and coming under its gravitational pull. Had there existed a prior plan, or a fate predetermined since eternity, chance would have no role.

The conclusion is that if God exists things should come into existence in a manner preplanned and foreknown in His eternal knowledge, and had things been foreknown in God's eternal knowledge there would be no chance. And since chance has an effective role in creation, the creation of things was unpredictable, and since it was unpredictable, there is no God.

Apart from this, if things came into existence due to the eternal Divine will, it was necessary for them to do so instantaneously at one stroke, because God's will is absolute, irresistible and unconditional. The implication of God's absolute, irresistible and unconditional will is that everything He intends to create comes into existence without a moment's delay.

Hence it is mentioned in religious texts that God's command is such that when He wills something He says, 'Be', and it comes into existence immediately. Therefore, if the world and things existing in it have come into existence by God's will, it follows that the world must come into existence from the very beginning in whatever form or state it would eventually assume.

The conclusion derived from these two points—one of which relates to God's eternal knowledge and the other to the Divine will—is that if God exists, there exist both an eternal Divine knowledge and an eternal will, and eternal knowledge and eternal will require that things come into existence

instantaneously.

The reply is that neither God's eternal knowledge nor His eternal will require that things come into existence instantaneously. Further, neither the theists the world over nor the religious texts have posed the issue in this manner.

It is mentioned in religious texts that God created the universe in six days. Regardless of whatever may be implied by 'six days,' be it six periods, or six days of God, each of which is equal to a thousand years, or six ordinary days amounting to 144 hours, that which is understood from this statement is gradualness.

The theists have never said that the eternal knowledge of God and His absolute will necessitate that the

heavens were created in a single moment and instantaneously. The scriptures say that they were created gradually during a certain period of time.

And the Noble Qur'an also states very explicitly the gradual development of the foetus in the womb and considers it as a pointer to the knowledge of God. Nobody has ever said that the necessary implication of God's eternal knowledge and will—which is such that when it relates to a certain thing and He says, 'Be,' the thing comes into being—is that the foetus develops momentarily. This was from the viewpoint of the scriptures.

From the point of view of philosophy, the claim that God's eternal knowledge implies that chance does not play any effective role whatsoever, requires a bit of explanation.

From the philosophic viewpoint, fortuity and accident, or in other words chance, does not exist at all, and that which men calls chance is not chance in reality and does not essentially differ in the least from all other causes and effects, prerequisites and consequences.

The word 'chance' is used in two different senses. The first sense is where something comes into being without any efficient cause, that is, a thing that supposedly did not exist comes into existence without the interference of any factor.

This kind of chance is rejected by all schools of thought irrespective of their being theists or materialists, because even the materialists do not accept such a hypothesis about the origin of the universe. This kind of chance is also not related to the topic of our present discussion, because even those who claim that organic changes in animals are due to chance factors do not imply this kind of chance.

The other sense in which this word is used is where a consequence follows from conditions which are not its prerequisite, or when conditions give rise to a consequence which does not follow from them. For example, if you get into a car in Tehran and drive on the Tehran–Qum highway you will reach Qum after two or three hours.

You never say that I drove on this highway and accidentally reached Qum, because the natural outcome of this journey is your reaching Qum. Now suppose you have an old friend whom you have not seen for years. While travelling to Qum you are neither thinking about him nor looking around for him, but as soon as you reach 'Aliabad on the Tehran–Qum highway, you get off the car to relax for a while at an inn. Finding an empty chair at a table, all of a sudden you find your friend whom you had not seen for twenty years.

You come to know that he was living in Shiraz and had come to Tehran, that he too had stopped there to relax for a while when he saw you. Here each of you will say, 'We met by chance on the Tehran–Qum highway.' The reason why both of you consider this meeting accidental is that in the general course of nature travelling between Tehran and Qum does not necessarily result in such a meeting. Were it necessary, it would mean that such a meeting should occur whenever you travel from Tehran to Qum

whatever the circumstances, while it is not so.

This event took place only during this particular journey which took place at a particular time under its particular circumstances. That is why this meeting was not foreseeable for you or your friend or anyone in your place, and neither you nor your friend would have been able to include this meeting in his plans while planning his journey. Things which can be foreseen and included in an itinerary are those which occur in the natural course of journey between Tehran and Qum.

But if you turn your attention from the general character of the journey from Tehran to Qum and focus your attention on this particular journey which was made at a particular time under particular conditions, and if you take it into consideration with its accompanying circumstances and conditions and other accompanying events, you will find that your meeting your friend at that specific point and at that moment was not at all accidental; rather it was necessary, natural and inevitable consequence of your journey towards Qum, and was also totally predictable for someone who was aware of all the movements and circumstances of both of you.

This meeting is accidental in the eyes of someone who takes into view the general nature of the journey from Tehran to Qum. Obviously this journey has a set of general implications, and that which lies outside them, from the point of view of its general nature, will be considered chance. But that which exists is not just the general nature; that which exists is that general nature along with a set of condition, and the notion of chance vanishes on taking into consideration these conditions and additional facts .

Here we give another example to further elucidate how accident and chance are subjective in nature; that is, it is an accident or chance from the viewpoint of a person who is ignorant of the causes, whereas from the standpoint of one who has knowledge of the causes involved there is no chance or accident.

Imagine two persons employed in a certain institution and who receive their instructions from a single source. One of them, Mr. A, is employed in Khurasan and the other, Mr. B, works at Isfahan. Instructions are received from the headquarters ordering Mr. A to leave on a certain date for a disaster-stricken area to perform some specific task, and soon afterwards instructions are received by Mr. B ordering him to go on the same day to the same place for performing another task. Obviously Mr. A and Mr. B meet each other at that place and their meeting is accidental for each of them. Both of them will say that they met each other accidentally on a certain day and at a certain place.

Each of them separately views the nature of his task and finds that this meeting was not a necessary consequence of his task and that it was not predictable for either of them. But from the viewpoint of the headquarters, which ordered both of these apparently separate and unrelated assignments that were carried out under its instructions, this meeting was not at all accidental.

For the headquarters, which determined the courses of the two journeys from Isfahan and Mashad to that point and arranged both of them in such a manner that the two individuals reached that point on a specific date, their meeting and coming together was very natural and inevitable.

The headquarters cannot say that it sent these two and they accidentally met each other at a certain place. Therefore, accident and chance are relative; it is an accident in relation to one who is unaware of the happenings, whereas for one who knows the details of events and has a complete knowledge of the circumstances and conditions there is no accident or chance involved. This is why they say: that which is called 'chance' is such only in relation to one who is ignorant of the causes, not for one who has complete knowledge of the events.

From this we come to know that for God, the Exalted, and in fact from the viewpoint of reality and what actually takes place, there is no question of accident or chance. Hence, to say that 'if we accept God we must also accept that the events in the universe occur in accordance with a plan and are therefore predictable and involve no accident or chance, whereas the sciences believe in an effective and important role of chance and accident,' is something baseless.

The accidents are such with reference to us who are ignorant of the totality of causes, not with reference to God, who is the Creator and Originator of every thing and encompasses all causes, conditions, and circumstances.

Now something regarding [God's] eternal will.

This objection is weaker than the first one. Strangely enough, has been imagined that God's absolute and eternal will implies that all existents come into being instantaneously! What a big blunder! The implication of God's absolute will is that everything should come into existence in the manner He desires and in the form He intends without facing any opposition and obstacle, that there be no gap between His will and the thing willed, not that everything which He desires should come into existence in an instantaneous manner.

To explain, if we, who have a deficient and finite will, will something, we have to rely upon things other than our own will, and unless we obtain those means our will by itself can achieve nothing. Also we need to remove certain obstacles, because our will cannot be realized with their presence. But since God's will encompasses all things and everything is the result of His will, the means and hindrances too are the creation of His will.

Thus at the plane where His will prevails there exists nothing by way of a precondition, means, or obstacle: all conditions, means, obstacles and their absence are subservient and subject to His will. Therefore, that which He wills exists in the manner willed by Him, without the least delay. If the existence of a thing depends upon the fulfillment of certain conditions, it is proper to say from the viewpoint of that thing that it depends on these conditions, but it is not correct to say about God's will that it depends upon certain conditions.

That is, the execution of Divine will is not dependent upon anything; rather it is Divine will which ordains the thing with those conditions and it comes into existence in the manner willed by Him without any departure.

Thus the meaning of God's possessing an absolute will is that whatever He wills takes place in the manner He wills, without His will depending upon anything beyond Himself for its execution. Therefore, if He wills a thing's existence to be instantaneous that thing comes into being instantaneously. But if He wills that a thing's existence be gradual it comes into being gradually. It depends upon the mode of the thing's existence and the manner in which God has willed its existence.

If Divine will and wisdom so ordain that living creatures should come into existence gradually in a span of billions of years, they will naturally come into existence in this manner. Therefore, it is wrong to say that God's absolute will requires that everything come into existence instantaneously. The logical implication of the absolute Divine will is that everything comes into existence in the manner decreed by Him, instantaneously or gradually, without depending upon anything beyond the Divine will.

Apart from this, the philosophers have proved that things having a gradual character have an existence that can only be gradual; it is impossible for them to have any other kind of existence, either static or instantaneous. Hence the receptivity (qabiliyyah) of the receiver (qabil) also necessitates gradualness.

Sadr al-Muta'allihin has proved that there is a kind of motion in the world called 'substantial motion' (harkat jawhariyyah). According to the theory of substantial motion there is nothing static in nature nor can possibly be. All things existing in nature have a gradual existence and it cannot be otherwise. This philosopher, who is also a divine 'arif (gnostic), never thought that there might be people in the future who would imagine that the instantaneous creation of all things was implied by God's eternal knowledge or will.

A few years ago I wrote an article "Monotheism and Evolution" ("Tawhid wa Takamul") for the monthly Maktab al-Tashayy'u in which I have discussed the errors in the approach of Western philosophers in considering theism to be incompatible with the concept of evolution.

1. Paul Foulque, L'Existentialisme, Persian trans., p96

2. Ibid.

3. Walter Terrace Stace, The Philosophy of Hegel, Dover Publications, pp50-1

4. Ibid., pp71-2

5. This was a problem posed for the first time in Islamic Philosophy, and like many other problems it was the result of the criticisms of the mutakallimun. The criticisms of the mutakallimun led to the emergence of certain problems in philosophy, and in this sense philosophy is greatly indebted to them.

6. These remarks invoke a loose kind of speech. Science is incapable of proving the casual relationship that is the effects needs for a cause. The most sciences can establish is an association or succession between phenomena. We have clarified this topic fully in the footnotes to the Usule falsafeh wa rawish e riyalism, volume 2.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol12-vol13/causes-responsible-materialist-tendencies-west-2-4-murtadha-mutahhari#comment-0>

Links

- [1] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/murtadha-mutahhari>
- [2] <https://www.al-islam.org/organization/al-tawhid-islamic-journal>
- [3] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/mujahid-husayn>
- [4] <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/21807>
- [5] <https://www.al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/21807>
- [6] <https://www.al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/21807>
- [7] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/materialism>
- [8] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/human>
- [9] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/history>
- [10] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/islam>
- [11] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/christianity>