

# Three Topics in Theological Philosophy

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An analysis of Theological Philosophy, discusses Proof of the Contingent and The Necessary, Human Nature: A Proof and the Attributes of God

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# Proof of the Contingent and The Necessary

Before taking up this proof it may be necessary to consider the problem of causality as a prerequisite; for understanding the argument of contingency and necessity is difficult without understanding causality.

## Principle of Causality

One of the most important problems which in all philosophical schools has given rise to a great amount of debating is the question of cause and effect, or the principle of causality. It is this principle that is said to be the basis of all man's intellectual and practical efforts, for we can see that the work of scientists and their endeavors are aimed at either finding causes and effects, or determining how they correlate.

A chemist, for example, who undertakes a chemical experiment, hopes to discover the real properties of the substance he is working on, or to find the effects that can be related to an element under experiment. Likewise, a historian looking into the events responsible for the outbreak of the two World Wars is after the relationship of these historical phenomena with the causes and reasons which might have led to them.

In the course of his search, the scientist wishes not only to see that two things have some kind of relationship, but he also wants to discover which one is the cause or originator and which is the effect or product.

This is also true of human actions; for whatever man does is either voluntary, that is, according to his will and desire, or involuntary, that is, natural and forced. If it is voluntary, then we may say that the act is the effect of a thinker's thought, since it is he who, through thought, deliberation, and after weighing various alternatives, has made his choice, whereas involuntary actions are those which come about as a result of some bodily or natural causes.

It is impossible to conceive of a thing as coming into existence without a cause and by itself. Therefore, we may say that for a thing to exist there has to be something which is a cause of its existence. Thus, to define 'cause', we may say that a cause is something from which some new thing called 'effect' is born.

We may add that as long as the cause (that is whatever is required for origination of the effect) is not fully realized, the effect will not come to exist. On the other hand, if an effect comes into being, we can immediately assert that a cause has pre-existed it.

From what we have said we can conclude that causality is a relation between two beings to the effect that the existence of one is a prerequisite for the existence of the other. In this interdependence, the effect is sequential and dependent on the cause. The principle of causality can be concluded from the following analysis:

There can be only two basic explanations regarding existence of a phenomenon:

a) It comes into being accidentally or by chance;<sup>1</sup>

b) It is the effect of a cause on which it depends.

If the first assumption is accepted, then we have to accept also, firstly, that there is no provable connection between things, or the effects produced by them. For example, there is no way of proving that the fruit is born of the tree, or a man's actions are attributable to him, and, as a result, one can deny one's acts to be one's own and readily regard them as being without causes or as being accidental.

Secondly, we must accept that there can be no valid scientific law; for every law of science is based upon the principle of causality and on the notion that every phenomenon is the product of a cause and dependent upon it.

Thirdly, it should also be accepted that no event can be predictable, that is to say we must allow that many things are probable to occur at every moment, for nothing is a precondition for any other thing.

It is obvious that the above three conclusions are invalid, and the assumption that chance and accident is responsible for emergence of phenomena cannot adequately explain the problem. Thus, we have no alternative except to accept the second assumption, which entails the acceptance of the causal relationship between things.

The principle of causality was looked upon by almost all philosophers except the empiricists as a reasonable way of explaining all phenomena, whether social or natural. It was the English empiricist David Hume who rejected the principle of causality, claiming that causal relationship is not what its exponents assert as an objective reality, but a subjective notion based on conjunction conceived by the mind between impressions.

But it has been proven that such an interpretation of causality leads to pure solipsism and complete denial of the external world. Incredibility of such a view is self-evident.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, some Islamic philosophers hold that ideas such as causality and the like are intuitively obtained by the self through its direct knowledge of itself (*'ilm huduri*). So, it is claimed that not only the ideas of causality and substance, but all the basics of human knowledge are rooted in *'ilm huduri*.<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of what has been said, it is evident that causality is an objective, real and external relation, not a subjective formulation as empiricists claim it to be. Therefore, whenever a complete cause—a cause which possesses all conditions necessary and sufficient for existence of the effect—is realized in the external world, it is necessarily followed by the effect. Likewise, whenever we observe the effect as existing, we can conclude that its cause has already been existing.<sup>4</sup>

## Types of Causes

Causes are of different types; amongst them are: complete and incomplete, simple and compound, real and preparing, contiguous and distant, internal (matter and form) and external.

A complete cause is one which has in itself all necessary and sufficient conditions for the realization of the effect. On the other hand, the incomplete cause is one which lacks some of the necessary factors for realization of the effect; it is not sufficient for creating an effect. In short, the absence of cause (whether complete or incomplete) implies the absence of the effect.

A compound cause, is one which has parts. These parts may be either material or rational (formal); for instance, the idea of species is a compound of the ideas of genus and differentia. A real cause is like causality of the self in relation to its own states such as knowledge. An example of the preparing cause is situation of a moving body at preceding positions in space for arriving at a successive position.

A contiguous cause directly acts to produce an effect, as, for example, the movement of a hammer is the direct cause of driving in of a nail. But the distant cause is an indirect cause, such as the movement of one's hand by exercise of one's will; the will acts on nerves, the nerves on muscles and muscles move to cause the movement of the hand.

Material, formal, efficient and final causes can be explained by the example of a chair: wood is its material cause; the shape its formal cause; the carpenter its efficient cause, and the purpose for which it is made, namely, to sit on it, is its final cause. The first two of these are called 'internal' causes, and the latter two are termed 'existential' causes (*al-`illah al-wujudiyyah*).

## Relation between Cause and Effect

Now that we understand the meaning of causality, we can enter into a more elaborate examination of the relation between cause and effect. Following are some important points.

### 1. Relation of Necessity

As was pointed out, once the complete cause is realized, the effect will also be realized; and whenever we come across an effect, we reach the necessary conclusion that there must have been a cause previously realized. Therefore, the relation of necessity between cause and effect is a real one; that is, it is a kind of relation which cannot possibly be changed into some other kind of relation. In other words, the relation between cause and effect is like the relation between natural integers.

Just as it is necessary for number 4, for example, to occur between the numbers 3 and 5, or otherwise the series is rationally distorted, so also the necessary relation between every cause and effect is that of succession in which the position of any element in the series cannot be changed. According to what has

been said, any doubt about the existence of necessary relation between cause and effect is, in fact, a doubt about the validity of the principle of causality itself.

## **2. Relation of Homogeneity**

A state of homogeneity exists between cause and effect; that is to say, every effect has some kind of agreement and consistency with the cause which has produced it, which it does not have with all other things. Or else, anything could be a cause for anything else, or anything be an effect of anything else, whereas it is not so.

Certain effects result from certain causes only, and this relation, which is a necessary one, can in no way be upset or altered. And this is what we call the relation of homogeneity between cause and effect. As a matter of fact, negation of homogeneity is, in fact, negation of the whole system of necessity of causality and admission of disorder and chaos in the scheme of the universe.

## **3. Impossibility of Endurance of Effect without Presence of Complete Cause**

Commonly we are inclined to think that it is possible for the effect to survive the cause. In this regard example is given of enduring of a building after its builder or enduring of artifacts after a craftsman has made them. But if the meaning of cause and effect and their relations is really understood and the true concept of causality is known, then it will be seen that the effect is like the shadow or reflection of the cause, so that it can never be separated from it, as it is not possible to separate the shadow from its object.

Such examples, which are erroneously forwarded, concern types of incomplete cause, not the complete cause. In the case of a building's survival after its builder, the existence of the builder alone is not the complete cause for the building's endurance; rather, it is the quality and composition of the construction materials (along with other factors) which constitute the complete cause for the building to endure.

Having dealt with the nature of causality, now we shall return to our main subject: the argument of contingency and necessity. This is a theological argument to prove the existence of God by demonstrating dependence of all contingent things on the Necessary Being.

## **Contingency**

If we consider the nature of a thing, we cannot say of it that it should necessarily have existed or not existed. To our rational mind its relation to existence or non-existence is neutral. If the object exists in the external world, then there must have been a cause which has brought it into existence.

For, on the basis of the principle of causality nothing can come into existence without a cause, and that for every phenomenon or event there has to be a cause. A being which has the characteristic that its existence depends on that of another, is called a contingent being (*mumkin al-wujud*).

A Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*), on the other hand, is such that no reason can be found for attributing its existence to that of another being. Therefore, necessity, when applied to existence, means independence of existence; it is characteristic of a Self-existing Being, which is self-sufficient and independent of other things for its existence.

Having briefly explained these two terms, let us now see how we can employ the contingent and necessary argument to prove the existence of God. There is no doubt that some things in the universe come into being which did not exist before.

We can see many examples of this in nature, such as blossoming of trees in spring after falling of their leaves and flowers during autumn, passing of nights and coming of days, ending of spring and beginning of fall, youth is followed by old age and old age by death, and so on. Right at this moment, I perceive sounds, flavors, sensations of touch which did not exist few moments ago (acquired knowledge or *'ilm husuli*).

At this very moment I have a feeling of love and affection for the people around me, and I am moreover conscious of such feelings; while only a few moments ago I did not have such sentiments, nor was I aware of them. Now, I have awareness of my own self and I am aware of this awareness (*'ilm huduri*).

All these things which did not exist before and are now existent are called phenomena. It is self-evident that no phenomenon can be without a cause. This means that the existence of every phenomenon is entirely dependent on that of another, and, therefore, it is contingent. Now the question arises whether or not the cause of a phenomenon or any contingent being can also be a contingent being dependent on other beings, or if it has to be self-existent, independent, or, what is called, a Necessary, Self-existing Being.

In answer it may be said that both cases are possible; that is, the cause may be either contingent or necessary. Now, if this cause (the producer of the contingent effect), is itself a necessary being, then our claim of necessary cause is proven. But if it is contingent, then we are faced with two alternatives:

1. either it is the effect of another contingent cause, which in turn is itself the effect of another cause, and so forth till infinity (a linear or infinite series);
2. or the chain of cause and effect is not linear but circular; that is the cause at the beginning end of the chain of causation is itself the last effect at the end of the chain.

Therefore, in the case we accept the second alternative, that is, if we consider all causes in the chain of causation as being contingent, there are only two plausible hypotheses: (i) an infinite series (ii) or a vicious circle. Accordingly, the existence of the Necessary Being cannot be proved unless we follow Ibn Sina in showing that an infinite series or a vicious circle of causation is absurd and that the chain of causation should necessarily end in the Necessary Being. In other words, we have to show the impossibility of a linear or circular chain of causation which does not end in the Necessary Being.

## Falsity of Circular and Infinite Series in Causation

The invalidity of circular series can be proven in this manner. There can be two or more elements in the circle of causation. If there are only two elements A and B, we may represent the causal relationship by writing  $A \rightarrow B$ . If there are more than two elements, for instance A, B, C and D, we may represent the causal relationship in this way:  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ . In this case, A is the cause of B, B is the cause of C, C is the cause of D, and D is again the cause of A. Both the cases are, however, invalid, since it entails that A should be existent and nonexistent at the same time: it should exist to create B and not exist to be created by B. This is self-contradictory and stands refuted. Also, the circle with more than two elements implies a succession of several effects without a cause, which is also seen to be invalid.

As to the infinite series, there are many reasons for considering it invalid. We shall discuss two of them here.

a) If we consider a chain of causes and effects whose last link is an effect which has not yet become a cause of another thing—for example, a slight movement of the hand, which we consider as an effect of preceding causes, but it is not yet a cause for another effect—we shall see that every preceding link of this chain, which precedes this last effect, must at the same time be a cause for its next link and an effect for its previous link, and so on. Thus, every link of this chain is at the same time a cause and an effect, and we know that if a link in the chain is the cause of its succeeding link that does not excuse it from the need of a cause preceding it. Therefore, every link in the series is an effect dependent on a cause.

Now supposing that this chain is infinite and there is no First Cause, it implies an infinite number of middles with no sides,<sup>5</sup> which is of course impossible. For example, in the chain  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow E \rightarrow \dots$  we take A to be the last effect (the slight motion of the hand which has not yet become a cause for another thing).<sup>6</sup>

The link B (the muscles, in our example) is the cause for A and is also the effect of C or the effect of nerves). Link C is the effect of D (the effect of will, in our example). Thus every one of the links of the chain is both a cause and an effect at the same time. As has been argued, though every link is the cause for the following link, it does not mean that it can itself dispense with a cause preceding it. Therefore, every link is necessarily an effect, too. So we may overlook the causation of all links and illustrate them thus:  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow E \rightarrow \dots$ ; this means that we have an endless chain of effects without coming across anything which is a cause without being an effect; as we have already shown, it is impossible.

b) We said that the existence of an effect or phenomenon is dependent, not self-existent, or in other words, it is a contingent being or an intermediary existent. Now the supposition that there is an endless chain of contingent beings, implies an infinite chain of dependent and intermediary beings which do not depend for their existence on an independent, self-existent being, and this is impossible.

From what we have said, we can draw this conclusion: first, that we perceive the existence of phenomenon or the contingent being either through our acquired knowledge or through introspection (*`ilm huduri*); i.e. we perceive the external world through acquired knowledge (*`ilm husuli*) and the inner states of the self through introspection (*`ilm huduri*); second, that every contingent being is dependent on a cause, otherwise it cannot possibly be existent; third, the chain of contingent beings and causes must inevitably originate from the First Cause, the Self-existent Being, that is, God.

Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi has formulated the argument of the Necessary Being in this statement:

الوجود ان كان واجبا، فهو المطلوب والاسئلزمه لاستحالة الدور والتسلسل

Which means, if we accept the cause of all existence as the existence of the Necessary Being, we have reached the desirable conclusion; otherwise—that is, if we do not accept the Necessary Being as the first cause—the existence of the Necessary Being is necessitated by the impossibility of a causal circle and a causal linear series.

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1. By 'chance' here we mean occurrence of a phenomenon without cause. The word is also used for two other meanings: i) occurrence of a phenomenon through the agency of an unusual cause; ii) an unexpected outcome of an action which was not the premeditated goal of the doer.

2. See Paul Foulquie's *Treatise on Metaphysics*; Persian trans. by Y. Mahdawi. See also *Comparative Ideology* published by Dar Rah-a Haqq Organization.

3. For more details see *The Principles and Method of the Philosophy of Realism* by `Allamah Tabataba'i, footnotes by Murtadha Mutahhari, vol. 2.

4. It should be noted here that causal precedence is not the same thing as temporal precedence. For example, when we move a pen, while writing, we usually say that the hand moves first, and then the pen follows the movement of the hand, or that the motion of the hand precedes that of the pen. However, they both move simultaneously. This type of precedence is called 'causal precedence'.

5. Ibn Sina, and other Muslim philosophers after him, termed this argument as the "middle and side argument".

6. Here 'c' stands for cause and 'e' for effect.

## Human Nature: A Proof

The human nature offers one of the most important ways to demonstrate the existence of God. When we say that human nature is disposed toward the knowledge of Divine, we mean to say that every human being's nature and disposition is so constituted that it is naturally disposed to acquire Divine gnosis or knowledge.



In other words, in the same way as all living creatures are driven by urges of hunger and thirst, or craving for love, likewise all human beings are by instinct inclined to seek the knowledge of God. As the presence of those instincts does not need any explanation, in the same way no reasoning is required to prove man's inclination to know God.

A bird, without any prior learning, knows by instinct how to make a nest and how to feed its young and how to take care of them and love them, likewise man also, without any acquisition of prior knowledge, is attracted towards the omnipotent and omniscient Being by way of his heart and conscience. Rumi describes this similitude in a beautiful verse:

همچو میل کودکان با مادران سرّ میل خود نداند در لبان

همچو میل مفرط هر نو مرید سوی آن بیر جوانبخت مجید

جزء عقل این از عقل آن کل است جنبش این سایه زان شاخ گل است

سایه اش فانی شود آخر دراو بس بداند سرّ میل وجستوجو

***Like an infant unaware of its craving for the mother's milk,***

***Like the novice's unthought respect for the adept sage,***

***Like a thinking particle of the universal intellect,***

***Like the swaying shadow of the flower bough,***

***Decreases as it merges with the tree trunk,***

***Effacing itself, discovers the secret of its love.***

It has already been mentioned that human beings possess a prior knowledge of God. The presence of this unacquired, pre-existent inclination towards God is also attested by several psychologists. They have counted this inherent quality of human nature among the sublime tendencies of the human mind for the following reasons:

1. Search for truth, or inclination to fathom the reality of being, which is the fountainhead and source of love, wisdom, and philosophy. In the words of Aristotle, a philosopher first falls into a state of wonder and perplexity, and afterwards, in order to overcome this condition he goes in search of reality by the

means of speculation and philosophizing.

This tendency exists much before intellectual maturity—even during early childhood—sometimes making a child to pose so many questions as to exhaust the answering elders. Sometimes the child's questions are concerned with such problems as have still remained unsolved for humanity, and are apparently likely to remain so. However, with a little variation of degrees, this tendency is present in all human individuals to a greater or lesser extent, and is regarded as natural.

2. Inclination towards moral perfection and human virtues such as benevolence and kindness to others, truthfulness, sincerity, self-sacrifice, solidarity, etc.

3. Attraction towards beauty in all its forms and shapes, from the beauties of nature, such as flowers, gardens, mountains, to values of spiritual beauty and moral grace.

4. Inclination towards absolute perfection, or towards the One Being, who is the origin and source of all things. Presence of this insight and un-acquired vision is posited by religious philosophers, in the sense that man possesses a direct knowledge which is not gained through the senses. This type of knowledge is 'knowledge by presence' (*'ilm huduri*) and stands against 'acquired knowledge' (*'ilm husuli*).

As already explained above, 'knowledge by presence' is the self-knowledge of the self of its own states and causes of its acts and deeds, through immediate experience, such as consciousness of one's own feelings of love, fear, hope, etc. Knowledge by presence also includes the immediate recognition that man himself is an effect of a cause and that his being originates from a divine source and absolute perfection on which his being depends.

Now, it has to be seen that when we say that man is naturally disposed towards God, whether we mean that man is naturally inclined to seek God, or if man has a natural insight and vision of God, or if both these senses are meant. With reference to what we have said, it must be stated that both these senses are included.

That is, both of them are natural: inclination towards God as well as intuitive and immediate knowledge of His sacred Essence. It means that within the profound depths of his being, man fully realizes, without any prior instruction, his dependence and reliance on the Supreme, Perfect and Self-existing Being. Man also realizes that only under the guidance of such a Being can he attain perfection and enlightenment, and that the instinctive attraction towards that Sublime, Perfect and Self-existing Being is ingrained in his nature and temperament.

However, how can one demonstrate that such a natural inclination underlies human nature? In truth it does not stand in need of any rational demonstration, because the truthfulness of it is obvious for every individual by direct and intuitive knowledge of his own self and also from the indications and signs he observes in others which attest to this directly experienced fact.

The natural vision of the Divine Being is obtained through 'knowledge by presence' (*ilm huduri*), and like awareness about such feelings as love, fear, anxiety and hatred, does not require any reasoned demonstration whatsoever.

## The Quran and Natural Knowledge of God

There are several verses in the Quran which prove that the knowledge of God and inclination toward the Divine are part of natural tendencies of mankind. Two verses are often cited in this regard. We shall discuss them now.

### First Verse

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۖ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ  
اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

***So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith—God's nature upon which He originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know it not.*** (30:30)

Now, we shall see what this 'religion' is, turning towards which is regarded as a natural human inclination. 'Religion' may be interpreted in one of the two following ways:

a) Agreement and harmony of human nature with the principal and basic tenets of religion. Religious instructions such as the command to eat pure and good things and to abstain from impure and corrupt things, to be kind and benevolent to others, especially one's father, mother and other relatives, to lead a wholesome married life, to act with justice, to refrain from tyranny and repression, to refrain from taking into possession any property belonging to orphans, to refrain from doing harm to anybody, especially the weak, to be humble before the creator and to worship Him, to refrain from jealousy, malice and hypocrisy, and to cultivate a purity of heart and sincerity of mind—all these things, specially the worship of God, are among the most important tenets of religion that are in complete conformity and harmony with our nature. We are constantly attracted towards its doctrines and teachings consciously or unconsciously, even though it may appear that we do not show any considerable interest in them.

b) The state of absolute obedience and submission before God is named by the Quran as 'Islam' and one committed to it is called a 'muslim'. Ibrahim ('a) is reported to have said:

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا

## إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

***Our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee .... (2:128)***

Ya'qub ('a) is quoted as addressing his sons:

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا  
وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

***...God has chosen for you the religion; see that you die not save in [a state of] surrender [to Him]. (2:132)***

Even the most implacable Pharaoh, as he is engulfed by waves in the sea, says:

وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ وَجُنُودُهُ بَغْيًا وَعَدُوًّا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَدْرَكَهُ  
الْغَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

***...I believe that there is no god but He in whom the Children of Israel believe; I am of those that surrender [to Him]. (10:90)***

There are many instances like these in the Quran, and everywhere it means the same state of absolute submission, veneration, and humbleness before God Almighty. The religion of Islam (lit. submission) has its name because it stands for absolute submission and resignation towards God's command and will—something which has been a characteristic of all the prophets of God from the first to the last.

This call for submission to Divine will has underlain all prophetic missions, although it has received its most articulate and pronounced form in the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (S).

If we consider the two above-mentioned interpretations of the term 'religion', there are two meanings which can be attributed to the statement that 'religion' constitutes a natural tendency ingrained in the nature of every human being. It may mean that inclination to worship the Almighty and to obey His commands is ingrained in the human nature.

It may also mean that the human being, by nature, has a prior knowledge of God. Now, the question arises whether, in addition to the above-mentioned tendencies, the knowledge of God is, also, a natural attribute? Our answer to this question is in the affirmative; because the existence of every kind of

tendency implies some kind of awareness of the object of attraction.

Attraction can take place between two objects devoid of consciousness—such as between a magnet and a piece of iron—or between a conscious being and something which may be either a being endowed with consciousness and awareness or something devoid of it. In the second condition, it is not possible that the attraction should occur without some kind of awareness and knowledge about the source of attraction.

So, on this basis, when we accept that affinity to God is natural to man, we must also admit that the knowledge of God, which it necessitates by the presence of that affinity should. also be natural. Because it is not acceptable that an inclination towards something should be natural, while its knowledge and awareness, which is its necessary counterpart, should be unnatural and an acquired one.

Thus, it is evident that natural 'theophilia' in man requires and necessitates instinctive 'theology' as well, and both are ingrained in human nature. It should be remembered that this kind of 'knowledge' is distinct from knowledge in its usual sense and must not be confused with it; because it is something similar to animal instinct which fulfils its function without any prior training or learning.

## Second Verse

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

***And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify'—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this,' or lest you say, Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?' (7:172–173)***

There exists some diversity of opinion regarding the interpretation of these verses. The two most important among them are as follows:

a) God has created mankind in such a way that if they ponder over their own creation and their perpetual dependence on their Sustainer, and if they keenly observe and meditate about the manifestation and

signs of His wisdom, power, and providence, they will confess and bear testimony to His existence as the One God, who creates them and sustains them.

In view of this statement, this verse is expressive of the human situation: like a thirsty animal after water, like a hungry human being or beast in search of food, or like the longing of one suffering from sickness for a healer, the situation of the human being is such that it speaks eloquently of his constant need for a Sustainer and reminds man of his Wise Creator.

His situation is such as if his Creator keeps on questioning him: 'Am I not your Sustainer, your Lord? Am I not the One God?' and man with his entire being replies to his Creator, 'Yes. I bear testimony that You are my God. Yes, You are the One God.' This bearing of testimony, this constant acknowledgement of a covenant between man and his Maker goes on throughout his life. And this is what represents the Divine testimony against man, so that on the Day of Judgment he may not excuse himself for lack of knowledge and justify his not being a monotheist because he inherited the religion of his ancestors who were idolaters or polytheists.

b) Every human being has an incorporeal and immaterial being as well, which is the cardinal reality of his being; his physical and corporeal existence is subsequent and subordinated to his real, spiritual existence, and is merely a shadow or an image of his spiritual being. In other words, every human being, and even every creature, follows a cyclic course with respect to God: *it originates from God and returns unto God* **إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ**.

However, this course and existential journey varies according to its merits and shortcomings. Prior to this worldly existence a human being has some kind of a more perfect, a more unrestricted and a sublime existence, which becomes imperfect, infirm and restricted after entering the material world; however, again when he leaves it, he returns to that prior state of perfection. The verse:

وَأِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ

***Naught is there, but its treasuries are with Us, and We send it not down but in an appointed measure.*** (15:21)

is cited as evidence that every being had a more extensive existence before its material stage, and becomes more confined as it enters the material world. The late `Allamah Tabataba'i commenting on the following verses of the Quran,

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (82) فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ  
كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (83)

***His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it Be', and it is. So glory be to Him, in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto whom you shall be returned. (36:82–83)***

وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ

***Our commandment is but one, as the twinkling of an eye. (54:50)***

says that these, and several other verses like them, prove that the gradual emergence of all living beings, including man, is consequent to God's command ('Be'). It is with the utterance 'Be' that existence is conferred at once and without gradualness upon things.

On account of this, all existents have two visages: one is physical and this-worldly, associated with their gradual emergence from potentiality to actuality and from nothingness into being; the other visage is with respect to God and is non-gradual. According to the first visage, a thing is imperfect at its beginning, but involves during its passage through the world of matter, until, ultimately, it returns to God.

The second visage, which is with respect to God, is ungradual; it means that a thing has from its beginning everything it needs to acquire actuality. These two faces, though they are different aspects of the same thing, are nevertheless two different facets.

These verses imply that despite all its enormous vastness the universe possesses a unified, unitary existence before God, and every part of this whole is present simultaneously for God. In fact, it is not possible that a creation should not be present for its creator or an act for the doer. This is the thing referred to as 'kingdom' in the Quran:

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

***So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith. (6:75)***

But the worldly visage that we behold of human life, a visage in which all things are different from one another in their conditions, circumstances and behavior, their varying situation in time and space, engages the senses and alienates human beings from their God.

This material visage is a secondary derivative of the other and a by-product of the original visage. The relationship between these two is that between *Kun* ('Be') and *Fayakun* ('and it is'). The first represents 'alam alamr', the 'world of command', a world of incorporeal and abstract existence free of the fetters of space and time. The second, the 'alam alkhaliq', 'the world of creation', is the world of gradual physical

birth, subject to the restrictions of space, time and matter. 1

This explanation is sufficient to show that this world (*alam al-khalq*) is preceded by another existence (*alam al-amr*), which is similar to it, except that in the second there is no screen separating creatures from the Creator. In that world, the knowledge of God and testimony to His Divinity and Unity are not based on acquired knowledge (*ilm husuli*), but on direct experience and knowledge by presence (*ilm huduri*).

Now, if we study the verse 7:172 in the light of this discussion, we will see that there is a distinct allusion to the existence of *alam al-amr* ('world of command'), a world prior to that of physical existence where mankind existed before taking birth in this world. There God had already made the human individuals distinct from one another, made them witnesses to His Divinity by asking them, 'Am I not your Lord?' to which they replied, 'Yes, we testify.'

In short, every human individual, before stepping into this physical world of change, transition, decay and motion in space and time, had a kind of immaterial existence, devoid of all the dimensions of material change and movement. It was a mode of existence immersed in knowledge, and awareness in which he experienced the Divinity and Unity of God.

In that mode of existence, he had experience of God, not through any acquired rational knowledge based on concepts and arguments, but on direct experience. God spoke to man, made him bear testimony to His Divinity and Unity, made His covenant with man, and did not leave any room for pretexts and excuses.

It is obvious that a claim is established only when there is no room for any denial, or for explaining away the claim. As mentioned, that claim has to be based on evidence experienced directly through *ilm huduri*, not on evidence based on *ilm husuli*. For acquired knowledge is based on general concepts and ideas which cannot establish the verity of a particular truth or fact.

On the other hand, the verity of a truth directly experienced by a knower is indubitable. Thus, in the above verse (7:172), the Divine address to man is one directly experienced by him, and man has attested to God's Divinity and Unity directly without any intermediary or mediator.

Therefore, there is no room for any denial of this primordial testimony. However, if God had taken this testimony through an intermediary (i.e. through acquired knowledge), there was room for him to deny or debate something which he had not directly experienced.

So, the purport of the verse is that there has taken place a certain kind of dialogue or encounter between every human being and God. As a result of that experience, man had direct knowledge of God's Divinity and His Unity.

During this dialogue or encounter, God has taken from him a confession to His Divinity and Unity, and



man, too, confessed to it as an evident truth imbedded in his own nature. As a result, there is no room for any pretext or excuse for denying that once directly experienced truth.

However, it is possible that man's natural vision may be clouded by forgetfulness and negligence, which may engulf his being and obscure his natural sense of godliness. But once he removes the dust of forgetfulness from his heart, he is able to regain his vision, recollect his real self, and hear the echoes of that sacred dialogue in the depths of his being—the first dialogue between his Creator and himself, and his original covenant with God.

This natural voyage of the self or the heart was the 'path' used by various mystics and saints. When Hafiz says:

جناب عشق را در گه بسی والاتر از عقل است

***Love has an abode higher than that of reason.***

he is referring to a state of direct religious experience reached by means of self-purification and achievement of a beatific vision of Absolute Love, Beneficence, Power and Beauty, which surpasses the reach of rational understanding, conception and imagination.

Those who are not satiated by rational, philosophical arguments can quench their spiritual thirst and obtain the peace of mind and spirit through the way of nature. Even those who are not in quest of truth to this extent, and are not interested in purely rational pursuits, or those who are not capable of such endeavors, they approach God through this way of nature, as Rumi puts it:

ارتباط بی تکلیف بی قیاس هست رب الناس را با جان ناس

***A relationship free of categories and syllogisms,  
exists between the Lord of Men and souls of men.***

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1. Editor's note: The reader's attention is called here to Martyr-Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Beheshti's article "The Qur'an and the Theory of alam al-Khalq and alam al-'Amr", Al-Tawhid, vol. 1, No. 2, in which he rejects the entire theory of alam al-amr and alam al-khalq as a notion alien to the Qur'an and as a deviate transference of non-Qur'anic notion to it by the Mutakallimun.

# The Attributes of God

Hitherto, some of the proofs of the existence of God were discussed. We shall now examine briefly the attributes of God, an issue which is one of the most important topics of theology, and which, if properly understood, can remove doubts of those who negate His existence and resolve their difficulties.

The attributes (sifat) of God are of two kinds: affirmative (*thubutiyyah*) and negative (*salbiyyah*). The former kind of attributes are posited for God, and the latter are those which are negated of Him.

Likewise, the affirmative attributes are of two kinds: attributes of Essence, and attributes of Divine Acts.

The attributes of Essence are those which are inherent in His Essence by Itself, without taking into consideration His relation to creation, and, therefore, always qualify It. For example, the attribute of power is an attribute of Divine Essence, because power is an inherent quality of God; it cannot be affirmed of Him at one time and negated at another.

However, the attributes of Acts are those which, with respect to the relation that exists between the Divine Essence and any one of God's creatures, are derived from that relation, and it is obvious that whenever one side of this relation—here, that particular creature undergoes a change, then the attribute applicable to the other side—in this case, God—also changes. For example the attribute represented by the epithet 'Provider' (*al Razzaq*) is derived from the relation between God, as the Provider, and His creatures, who are provided by Him.

Now, whenever a creature (which is one side of the relation) provided and maintained by Him dies, then that relation also ceases, and providence of God with regard to that creature comes to an end.

It should be remembered that although numerous attributes, affirmative and negative, are mentioned in revealed religion and in theological philosophy, they all are reducible to a single affirmative and a negative attribute. That single affirmative attribute is that God is complete perfection (i.e. every imaginable quality of perfection is attributable to Him); and the single negative attribute is that God is devoid of every imaginable defect or shortcoming.

Some of the affirmative attributes of God are as follows.

## Power

In defining power, it can be said that one is powerful if he can act whenever he wants to and refrain from action. whenever he doesn't. Therefore, 'powerful' is one who, firstly, has will (by virtue of this definition, power cannot be attributed to stones, plants, and, in short, all things devoid of will), and, secondly, the freedom to act or not to act, or both. Thirdly, his will only confirms either one of the two alternatives of

action or inaction.

Therefore, the domain of will is more restricted than that of power. Fourthly, since will is always related to some action of which one who wills has some kind of knowledge, because one cannot will to do something which is unknown to him—it could, therefore, be said that knowledge and awareness precedes will.

Moreover, since will has been included in the definition of power, therefore, in accordance with this definition, every 'powerful' being, in relation to what it wills, possesses knowledge of it as well.

Now, let us see how we can demonstrate the attribute of power in relation to God. In the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being, it is shown that the chain of possibilities and causes originates from the First Cause. The existence of all phenomena is ultimately derived from the First Cause and, therefore, they have, in some way or other, a pre-existence in the First Cause. If the First Cause were totally devoid of them, that is, if It had no power over their creation, they could not have come into existence.

Therefore, the coming into existence of a thing is also a sign of the existence of the attribute of power in its creator. The more expansive the domain of creation is, the greater the power of the creator. Accordingly, the proof of the First Cause includes the demonstration of the attribute of power in the First Cause. If the First Cause were devoid of power, no effect could result from It, and thereby It could not have been the First Cause.

On the other hand, it is clearly evident from the proof of order in the universe that the Creator of order must have power—in the sense as has already been mentioned; that is, power embracing knowledge and will. For, if He lacks knowledge, He cannot shape and arrange the ingredients of an orderly system in such a manner that a network of necessary relationships is established between the ingredients, and some kind of definite purpose is realized within that system.

Moreover, if His power is not accompanied by will (that is, inclination which arises from freedom) but, like the force of gravity, is exercised automatically without exercise of will, it necessitates that the system be eternal (*qadim*) and not created (*hadith*); because, the First Cause as the fountainhead of power—and, likewise, power itself, which is Its essential attribute—is eternal; therefore, the universe, as the order arising from the First Cause, must also be eternal and without beginning. However, we have proved that the entire animate and inanimate worlds are incessantly in the process of creation.

This was a brief discussion about the meaning of power and affirmation of the attribute of power with respect to God. Now let us consider its scope and extent. According to philosophical proofs, Quranic testimony, all revealed Scriptures, and also according to the traditions of the blessed Household (Ahl al Bayt) of the Prophet (S), the power of God is infinite and absolute. That is, God is omnipotent; for Him nothing is impossible. The following statement is recurrently made by the Holy Quran:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

**Indeed God has power over everything.**

The Quran also states:

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

**His command, when He intends [to create] anything, is only to say to it, Be', and it is. (36:82)**

Here, very often, this question is asked: Does God have the power over any and every thing imaginable? Can God, possibly, make two plus two equal to five, or insert a bigger body into a smaller one without the bigger body becoming small or the smaller one becoming larger? Certain philosophers, such as Descartes, have maintained that the meaning of Divine omnipotence is that God's power encompasses everything and that nothing is impossible for Him. Therefore, they say, God can ordain that 2+2 should equal 5 or 7, and so bring about things which to us appear impossible. Of course, in the present world, He deems not to do such things, but if He wills to do so, He can. In order to answer the above question, and to examine the view of Descartes, the meaning of 'impossible' in all its various senses must at first be examined; then it must be seen which of these meanings pertains to the power of God.

## The Meaning of Impossibility

The word 'impossible' is used in three different senses:

- (a) Inherent impossibility (*muhal dhati*),
- (b) Impossibility of occurrence (*muhal wuqu`i*),
- (c) Habitual impossibility (*muhal `adi*).

(a) **Inherent Impossibility:** It applies to a statement which, if assumed to be true, would imply self-contradiction. It refers to situations which are logically impossible. That is, it necessitates that something should be both existent and non-existent at the same time. It applies to statements like the above-mentioned example relating to insertion of a bigger body into a smaller one without the larger one becoming smaller or the smaller one larger; because, if true, it would lead to the conclusion that the bigger body in its state of largeness should not be large, since a larger body can be inserted into a smaller one only if it becomes smaller itself; that is, it should not be large, and this is a contradiction.

Similarly, the proposition  $2+2=5$  is necessarily self-contradictory, because if 2 books are added to 2 other books, and if instead of 4 we have 5 books, it means that  $2+2$  is and also is not  $2+2$ , because when  $2+2=5$ , it means it is not equal to 4. So 2 books plus 2 books makes at the same time 4 and not 4 books.

(b) **Impossibility of Occurrence:** The mere supposition of this kind of impossibility does not necessarily lead to contradiction as such, but if it occurs in reality, its occurrence necessarily leads to contradiction.

For example, if we know that some effect B must necessarily be an effect of cause A, and that existence of A is necessary for causing the existence of B, now if B comes into existence without A, we are confronted with a contradiction between what we know to be true and what we observe (namely existence of B without A).

However, there is no self-contradiction in the supposition itself that B can exist without A. But if A is known with certainty to be a necessary cause of B, emergence of B without the presence of A (the necessary cause of B) involves a contradiction. This kind of impossibility refers to situations involving necessary causation.

(c) **Habitual Impossibility:** Here, an effect B, as a rule, is observed as originating from a particular cause A, but, in fact, occasionally, it might possess another cause C, as well. A case that may be cited as an example is that of the healing of sick by means of miracles. Healing, customarily, has its specific cause like medicine; but when it is caused by a miracle, it is due to the special powers of saintly figures, granted to them by God on account of their piety. This kind of impossibility depends on habitual association between cause and effect.

From among these three kinds of impossibility, the first and second do not apply to Divine power; because the first kind, or inherent impossibility, is something the mere supposition of which involves a self-contradiction, and occurrence of anything involving a self-contradiction is also, of necessity, contradictory.

However, the second kind of impossibility, that is impossibility of occurrence, also necessarily involves contradiction like the first kind; since even if the supposition itself is not self-contradictory, but because if it is known with certainty that emergence of a particular effect B depends on a particular cause A, if B emerges without A, it implies a contradiction; because, the observation that A does not exist is inconsistent with the deduction that A exists (a deduction derived from the statement known to be true that A is always the cause of B). In these two cases (i.e., the first two kinds of impossibilities), there is no 'thing' involved (with reference to the Quranic verse 36:82 quoted above) so that God may command it to be.

The third kind, habitual impossibility, is, strictly speaking, not an impossibility at all; rather it is our ignorance of the actual causes of an event that makes us think so. Therefore, events and effects in this class are subject to the power of God.

# Knowledge

Knowledge, like power, is another attribute of Divine Essence. On the basis of the proofs forwarded for demonstrating the existence of God, it can be said that God is omniscient. Moreover, it was stated in the discourse on power that it is deduced from the proof of order that God, who confers order and regularity on a system, must, of necessity, be aware of the characteristics of its components, their number, composition, and their connection with the system's purpose.

Creation of an orderly system of phenomena without knowledge of the components of which it consists is something irrational, which the Holy Quran rejects by this interrogative negation:

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

***Shall He not know, Who created, and He is All-subtle, All-aware?*** (67:14)

The proof of the Necessary Being demonstrates that God is the First Cause of all creation, and in the discussion of the proof of contingent and necessary it was stated that an effect depends on and arises from a cause, or, in other words, the effect is present for the cause. Accordingly, it is impossible that the cause should be unaware of its effect, which itself depends on the cause.

Of course, God's knowledge is "knowledge by presence" (*'ilm huduri*) not acquired knowledge (*'ilm husulli*), since in the discussion on the difference between these two kinds of knowledge it was stated that the former kind is directly present for the knower without the need for any intermediary, whilst the latter kind is gained by means of the sense organs.

From an epistemological viewpoint, in 'knowledge by presence' (*'ilm huduri*) the known object is itself, in its entirety, present in the mind of the knower, not just the idea of its form. However, in acquired knowledge (*'ilm husulli*) only the form of the known thing is present in the mind of the knower, not its complete essence—like our knowledge of sensible objects in the external world acquired by means of the sense organs.

With this brief explanation, we come to know that knowledge possessed by God cannot be the acquired type of knowledge, but is 'knowledge by presence'; since the existence of every object and all effects caused by the First Cause depends on Him and is 'present' for Him, and this is the same as what we call 'knowledge by presence'.

Besides, acquired knowledge comes through sense organs, and since God is free of any kind of organs whatsoever, the idea of acquired knowledge is inapplicable to Him. Therefore, we may conclude on the basis of what has been said that God's knowledge is 'knowledge by presence', not acquired knowledge.

Some other attributes such as hearing and vision are also related to the attributes of knowledge. When we say that God hears and sees, what is meant is that God is knowledgeable about things that can be heard and seen. He knows the attributes and qualities, perceived by creatures by means of hearing and seeing, by means of His 'knowledge by presence'.

However, the knowledge of God encompasses all things—those which can be seen and heard, and all other things as well. The greater emphasis laid on the attributes of vision and hearing of God is apparently due to the fact that these two faculties are more manifest and perfect in creatures endowed with the power of perception; in addition, their relationship with the body and bodily members, like the other faculties, is not as evident and conspicuous.

On the other hand, faculties such as taste and touch and their relationship with the body is very intense and their imperfection is more conspicuous. Perhaps it is due to this that in theological parlance, from among the faculties pertaining to the senses, these two faculties of hearing and seeing—disregarding the fact of their being senses—are attributed to God, although God has absolute and unlimited knowledge by presence not only of the visible and the audible but also of taste, touch and all other characteristics possessed by things.

## **The Attribute of Free Will**

By free will is meant that a conscious and aware creature is able to select one way which is the most expedient from amongst all imaginable alternatives for accomplishing of something, and in reality the only thing that may compel him to do something is expediency. However, insofar as it pertains to God, the meaning of free will is that no agent outside His Essence can compel Him to do something, since there is no cause above the First Cause which may influence It and cause It to do something.

Hence, all the Acts of God originate from His free will, or, in other words, God is a free doer. As opposed to free will is compulsion and determinism. What it means is that an agency or impetus influences a creature having will, compelling it to do something without exercising its own free will or capacity of choice. In other words, such a creature is divested of the exercise of free will in its action.

## **Divine Unity**

One of the attributes of God is Unity, which is stressed by certain religions, especially Islam. Monotheism and belief in Oneness of God is one of the prominent characteristics of Islam, for which it has been named the religion of monotheism. Theological philosophers have also always believed in monotheism, and have resorted to following arguments to prove the unity of God.

1. Necessity of existence leads us to conclude that there must not be more than one Necessary Being; because whenever we talk of two or more things, it is necessary that those two things should possess some points of similarity, on the one hand, and some points of difference, on the other.

For example, when we talk of two books, it is necessary that, firstly, they have something in common in that they are both 'books', and, secondly, differ in at least one respect; otherwise, if they are similar in colour, appearance, weight, size, author, paper, subject matter, time, place and all other peculiarities, they cannot be considered as two books and can only be one and the same book.

Therefore, every sort of plurality has certain points in common, on the one hand, and differences, on the other. Now if we suppose that two or more gods exist, then they must have at least one aspect in common and one or more aspects of difference. That is, each one of them must have one thing in common with the other and also have a point or points especial to itself.

Therefore, each one of them has a compounded being composed of at least two aspects or characteristics, and each compound would require its own components on whose existence its own existence depends. It is obvious that a being which is compound is dependent for its existence on its parts, and hence is not self-existing. This is contradictory to the definition of the Necessary Being. Accordingly, the assumption that there can be two or more Necessary Beings leads to a self-contradiction.

2. The orderly state of the universe, of necessity, shows that its creator cannot be more than one; because, if such were the case, there would have been a difference of essence and natures between creators. Moreover, two or more creators of differing essences and natures will necessarily produce different and divergent effects depending on the manner of relationship of these effects with the differing will of the creators.

Further, it is obvious that two or more different entities possessing differing wills would offer differing schemes for the order of the universe—an order which in reality is an interconnected, integrated unit. Also, their varying wills and plans for creation would necessarily cause disorder, leading to ultimate destruction. The Holy Quran states this point:

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ

***If there had been in them (heavens and earth) any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder. (21:22)***

The late 'Allamah Tabataba'i, in his commentary on this verse, writes:

*"In our commentary on Surat Hud, and also subsequently, we have made it clear that the controversy between the idolaters and the monotheists does not relate to the issue of unity or plurality of the Necessary Being; because, that the Necessary Being is one and without divine associates is not a matter of dispute; rather, the dispute concerns God as the deity worthy of worship.*



*Idolaters contend that administration of the world with its multiple affairs has been delegated to noble beings such as god of the heavens, god of the earth, and god of human beings, all of whom have nearness and access to God; they must be worshipped, so that they may intercede with God on behalf of their worshippers and thus bring them near to God. They are gods of beings inferior and subject to their authority, and Allah, the god of gods, is the creator of everything. As the Quran, in this regard, says: **"And if you ask them `who is the creator of the heavens and the earth, they will say `Allah',... and if you ask them who has created the heavens and earth they will say `the Powerful and the Wise has created them'."***

The verse under discussion negates these gods in this sense, not in the sense of their being creators or makers; for no one had insisted on a belief in plurality of creators.

However, the obvious import of the verse is that if there were more than one God, they would differ as to their essence and nature, and such difference would be tantamount to departure in their schemes, resulting in their mutual destruction and disorder throughout the system of the heavens and the earth. But the existing order of the universe is a unified one, whose parts and components are in coordination and harmony with one another and in conformity with its purposes. Therefore, there cannot be more than one God.

Another verse cited in relation to the proof of the Unity of God, is the following:

مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِذَا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ  
بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ

***God has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any god besides Him; for then each god would have taken off that he created and some of them would have risen up over others; glory be to God, beyond that they ascribe [to Him]. (23:91)***

The purpose of this verse is apparently to state that if we suppose two gods as existing, some kind of difference between them is inevitable; for two distinctly separate beings entail that they differ at least in one respect. As stated in connection with the preceding verse, will is also one of the essential characteristics of these two beings. Accordingly, a universe subject to two differing wills, would inevitably result in disorder and discord; because each one of the gods with a separate will of his own would act independently of the other and in accordance with his own will.

That is, the verse implies that if there were two gods, each one of them would have governed his creation according to his own will, and, consequently, no order whatsoever could be established in the universe, since the creation of each god would differ from that of the other, and, as a consequence, integration, order and coordination would not exist, or granting that some kind of order could be

achieved, sooner or later it would come to naught and would not endure. This is the case if neither of the two or more gods is subordinate to another but each one of them administers a part of the universe independently.

But the observable order of the universe is the best witness of the fact that the universe is governed by a single hierarchy of laws; that is, though some sections of the universe are subject to some special laws (such as the plant kingdom and animal kingdom), they, in addition to their particular laws, are governed by the general laws of the universe (the law of gravitation, for example).

Now if we attribute each one of these kingdoms with their special, more general, and most general laws to each of the gods, each one of them would inevitably be subordinate to the superior god, and, as a matter of course, each would become a tool for realization of the actions and objectives of the superior god. However, such beings cannot be called 'gods', since they are effects among various effects. This is what is meant when the above verse states 'some of them would have risen over others.'

This proof of monotheism, which was obtained from the proof of order, demonstrates the Unity of Divine sovereignty (*tawhid rububi*); that is, by demonstrating that there is a single unitary order prevailing in the universe, it proves that the universe is administered by one Designer and Sovereign.

The unity of the Divine Sovereign, of necessity, leads to monotheism in worship; because worship is directed towards a Divine sovereign, and if He is one, then worship is addressed solely to Him—not to numerous sovereigns. Accordingly, unity of divinity, divinity being a necessary counterpart of sovereignty, and sovereign of the universe being the same as its god—is proved: the universe has one God and one Sovereign.

## **Monotheism and Human Nature**

In the discussion on the proof of the existence of God, it was said that one of the ways of knowing God is through natural instinct. It was pointed out that just as God is known by means of *'ilm huduri*, knowledge of Divine Unity is also obtained by the same means. Because when we, by means of our knowledge by presence, discover that our own existence is a relative one, dependent upon that of a Self-existing Being, by means of the same knowledge we also find that the Self-existing Being, who constitutes the other end of this relation, is one and unique.

If there were more than one self-existing beings, then by means of knowledge by presence we would have found them to be multiple, whereas the fact of the matter is that it is not so. In the verse 7:172 it was pointed out that God had obtained humanity's confession in regard to His sovereignty, in a world which preceded this world.

The reason for this was that there should be no valid excuses on behalf of polytheists on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, in this confession, God must have been experienced as the One Sovereign by

every human individual through his knowledge by presence; otherwise the confession would not be valid.

## Divine Speech

We know that human speech derives from the vocal chords causing vibrations in the air and these vibrations are heard as meaningful sounds or `speech'. However, `speaking', in this sense, does not apply to God, because He has no corporeal form that He should have vocal chords to cause vibrations and sound. Therefore, we must find some other meaning for Divine speech.

Some contend that Divine speech is through creation of sound impressions in the hearer. This is true in the case of intelligent beings with a physical constitution which enables them to hear sounds. However, in the case of incorporeal beings such as angels or human spirits, the creation of sound is not feasible; that is, it is not possible to convey an audible message to the addressee, since he lacks the auditory equipment.

Besides, God has also spoken to inanimate things like the sky, the earth, fire, etc., and has commanded and prohibited them. Can such `speech' be also said to be caused by the agency of sound? Obviously the answer is in the negative.

Therefore, it must be asserted that Divine speech, when addressed to man and other creatures, is in the sense of induction or creation of meaning resulting from speech. That is, the same meanings that human beings convey to one another by means of speech, God induces similar kind of meanings in the intellect of a human being without the need of a voice, larynx etc. Sometimes the speech of God with creatures is in the sense of an act of creation, as in the verse:

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

***His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it Be', and it is.*** (36:82)

Because saying `Be' to something which does not exist, can only mean creation. Apart from the two meanings stated above, other cases of Divine speech are mentioned in the Quran, as God's commanding the sky and the earth: "Come", to which they replied:

***"We come willingly."*** (41:11)

## Divine Wisdom

`Allamah Tabataba'i—may God's mercy be upon him—in his exposition on Divine Wisdom says: 1

The various movements originating from us can be considered as our actions when they are related to and dependent upon our will in some way. Therefore, health, illness and other involuntary movements cannot be considered as our actions. It is obvious that we will an action only in the event of a preference; that is, when we see that it is better to do something than not to do it, and the benefits accruing thereof exceed the drawbacks, and would be a step towards perfection for us. Therefore, the advantage related to our intended action, which persuades us to prefer action to inaction, is the very good which is the cause of our activity.

That good is what is called the end of an action. and it has been demonstrated in philosophical discussions that an action, voluntary or involuntary, is not without purpose. This good proceeding from an action, is what is called the 'wisdom' of an action by society, and this 'wisdom', considered so by reason, is what causes the doer of that action to be depicted as 'wise'. If there were no wisdom in an act, it would be considered futile and vain.

It is obvious that the benefit or good which follows an action has no external existence prior to the act, and it is the idea of a benefit which compels or inspires the would-be doer to act, in the sense that each one of us has some idea of a benefit derived from our experience of the external order and the general laws governing it.

This order guides our actions to their perceived ends and objectives. Likewise, this idea of benefit is the result of our experience of interrelationships between things and, undoubtedly, this system of ideas is dependent upon and derived from the order prevailing in external reality.

It is characteristic of our voluntary actions that they are performed in accordance with our system of knowledge, and our will is dependent upon the good or benefit which we perceive in our actions. Now, if there is conformity or correspondence between an action, on the one hand, and perception and knowledge, on the other, then such an action is considered as judicious and wise and its doer is said to be 'judicious' or 'wise'. But if we default, whether due to some shortcoming or neglect, then the action is considered as futile and erroneous and the doer is considered unwise.

Therefore, wisdom is the quality of the doer of an act whose work conforms to his subjective understanding, which, in turn, corresponds to the order prevailing in external reality. The 'good' or 'wisdom' of an action is also its correspondence to subjective understanding that is derived from external reality. So 'wisdom' implies conformity to external reality, and is a characteristic of a doer whose acts, through the agency of the mind, conform to the external reality. So; also, the objective or benefit of an action depends on correspondence of subjective knowledge to external reality.

However, this is true in the case of those actions in which conformity of subjective knowledge with the external reality is implied— like our voluntary actions. But an act of God is external reality itself, and stands in no need of correspondence to the order prevailing in the external world. Therefore, when it is said that the acts of God are based on an objective, it is meant that the 'objective' of His act is derived

from the act and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

In brief, one is said to be wise if he carefully examines the external reality, and from among the various options available, selects one which promises a maximum amount of benefit.

Then he so organizes his actions that he can attain the desired objective with minimum amount of effort. Wisdom is the conformity of an act with its objective or the desired benefit, which it is considered to yield. This interpretation of wisdom assumes the pre-existence of an external reality which guarantees the attainment of premeditated objectives on the basis of conformity of the actions of the doer with it. It is obvious that 'wisdom' in this sense could only apply to one whose acts are performed against the background of external reality and which fit into its perspective.

However, in the case of God, whose acts are external reality itself, the attribute of wisdom is riot applicable in this sense, but solely implies that God never does anything futile, devoid of benefit or in vain. However, it does not mean that God has to conform His acts to the external reality in order to make them useful or purposeful. He does not do anything futile or useless, because He is a free actor with free will. We stated that free will is attributed to someone who selects one out of the many possible courses of action which would fulfill his objective better than others.

Now if this doer possessing free will is a creature other than God, its objectives are those which fulfill some of its needs or bring it some kind of advantage.

But if the free doer is God, who is free of every need and necessity, then, in His case, He cannot have an 'objective' in this sense. Rather, He acts for the sake of an objective or purpose whose gain and benefit accrues to others. In other words, God acts solely out of beneficence and grace; not for achieving any good for Himself in order to satisfy some need of His own, nor in order to attain some advantage:

***I did not bring forth creation to profit by it,  
But to bestow My Beneficence upon My creatures.***

And this beneficence and grace are essential to Divine Essence, because He is absolute perfection. Without beneficence God would not be perfect.

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1. Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, vol. 8, pp. 335-6.

2. Ibid., vol. 16, see verses 21:16-33.

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