Good and Evil

With my continuous chain of authorities reaching up to the Pillar of Islam and Muslims, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (R), from Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr, who said, Abu al-Hasan al Rida (A) said, God has said: "O son of Adam, it is with My will that you are such a being that you will for yourself whatever you will, and it is with My power that you carry out the duties I have prescribed for you, and it is with My bounty that you found the strength to disobey Me. I made you hearing, seeing, and strong. Whatever good visits you is from God, and whatever evil strikes you is from your own self. That, because I have a greater right to your virtues than yourself, and you are worthier of your vices than Me. And hence I am not asked concerning [what I do and they are asked.[1]"[2

Exposition

There are in this noble tradition certain sublime and important themes pertaining to the higher metaphysical science, which if mentioned with their elaborate preliminaries would take us beyond the scope of these pages and prolong this discourse inordinately. Hence, inevitably, taking a middle course, we will deal with them with brevity, mentioning, in the course of a few .sections, some of these issues as established conclusions. And our trust is in God

Two Stations Of Divine Names

It should be known that there are two stations for the Will (mashiyyah) of God, the Exalted-majestic is His glory-or, rather, for all the other Names and Attributes, such as Knowledge, Life, Power, and the rest of them.

One of them is the station of the Names and Attributes of the Essence. (asma' wa sifat-e dhatiyyah). It is established by metaphysical proofs that the Sacred Essence (dhat) of the Necessary Being combines in Itself all the perfections and all the Names and Attributes, and that in a single mode and from an aspect that is absolutely simple. All the perfections and the Names and Attributes of Beauty and Glory derive from its simple existential mode, and that which is beyond being is deficiency, defect, and non-existence. And as His Sacred Essence is pure being and absolute existence, It is pure and absolute perfection (kamal-e sirf wa sirf-e kamal). [He is] the totality of knowledge, the totality of Power and the totality of Life عِلْـمٌ كُلُّـهُ

قُدْرَةٌ كُلُّهُ حَيَاةٌ كُلُّهُ.

The other station is that of the [Names and] Attributes of the Divine Acts (asma' wa sifat-e fi'liyyah), the plane of manifestation of the Names and Attributes of the Essence, which is the plane of manifestation of the Attributes of Glory and Beauty. And this is the station of ma'iyyat-e qayyumiyyah (contiguity of the Sustainer and the sustained existents), [referred to in the Qur'anic verse]: He is with you, wherever you may be. (57:4)

Three conspire not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them, neither five men, but He is the sixth of them, neither fewer then that, neither more, but He is with them, wherever they may be. (58:7)

And it is the plane of the Face of Allah (wajh Allah): Whithersoever you may turn to there is the Face of God. (2:115)

And it is the plane of the Divine effulgence (nuriyyat): God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. (24:35)

And it is the plane of the Absolute Will (mashiyyat-e mutalaqah): And you will not without God's willing. (81:29)

God created all things with His will, and He created the will by itself.[3]

And there are still other terms and descriptions for it in the language of the People of God, and both of those planes are referred to in this noble verse of the Divine Scripture: He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. (57:3)

The plane of the absolute, active Will has an encompassment of sustainment (ihateh-ye qayyumiyyah) over all the existents of the realms of mulk and malakut, and all the existents are, from one aspect, its particular modifications (ta'ayyunat), and front another aspect its manifestations (mazahir).

It is in respect of this station of active Will (mashiyyat-e fi'liyyah) and the manifesting character (mazhariyyat) of the wills of the creatures and their dissolution (fana') in it-or, rather, the fact that the creatures themselves, with all their aspects, manifest and reflect it-that the noble tradition says: O Son of Man, it is with My Will that you are one who wills. Your being (dhat) and its perfections are by My will itself, and, rather, you yourself and your perfections are particular expressions (ta'ayyunat) of my will: And when thou threwest, it was not thou that threw, but God threw. (8:17)

And there are so numerous statements in traditions and Qur'anic verses in support of this matter that their mention is not essential.

The august Shaykh al-Ishraq Suhrawardi (Q) considers God's detailed knowledge ('ilm tafsili) of things as being the same as this plane of active knowledge, and the Muhaqqiq (Khwajah

Nasir al-Din) Tusi (Q) has followed him in this opinion. Hadrat Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Q) considers (God's) detailed knowledge to be the same as the plane of the simple Divine Essence. To him the statements of those two figures are not absolutely satisfactory, but this author considers the opinions of each of them to imply essentially the same position, the disagreement between them being merely verbal, though an elucidation of this matter is not appropriate here.

From this explanation, it is known that every thing that comes into existence, whether they are the sacred substances of the divine realm, or the natural substances of the realm of mulk, or accidents, whether it is the essences, or attributes, or acts-all of them come into being with the sustainment, sway, and all-inclusiveness of the Divine Power. Hence, the meaning of the statement becomes clear: It is with My Power that you carry out the obligations prescribed by Me.

Also, the station of the absolute Will is the same as that of the all-encompassing Mercy (rahmah) and the all-inclusive Bounteousness. Hence He has said: And it is with My bounty that you obtained the strength to disobey Me.

An Allusion To The Topic Of Jabr And Tafwid

There is a clear allusion in this noble tradition to the problem of jabr and tafwid, and it spells out the right creed in this regard, that of amr bayn al-amrayn or manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn, which is in accordance with the way of the gnostics and the path of the People the heart. That is because it affirms both the Divine Will (mashiyyah) as well as the power and role of the creatures, which are moreover considered to derive from the Divine Will. (It means to say): You exercise your will, and it is by My Will that your will has been manifested.

You carry out the duties, and your power is a manifestation of My power. And it is with My bounty, which is the expansive table of My all-inclusive mercy, that your power to disobey was acquired. Hence all the acts and attributes and existents [that relate to you] are not capable of absolute negation in relation to you, in the same way as these cannot be affirmed of you absolutely. You exercise your will, and your willing is subsumed in My Will and is its manifestation and a conditioned expression (ta'ayyun) of it. It is with your own power that you have the capacity to obey or disobey Me, and, at the same time, your power and strength are manifestations of My power."

Thereafter, a likely objection -that, on this basis, the defects, vices, and sins [of creatures] are to be attributed to God- is dispelled by a metaphysical and discursive, as well as a mystical and gnostic, rejoinder that since God, the Exalted, is pure perfection, goodness, beauty, and

glory, everything that derives from His sacred quarter is perfection and goodness. Rather, the order of existence and the reality of being, the visible and the invisible, is concurrent with perfection, completion, and beauty. And that which is deficient, vicious, evil, and bad derives from non-existence and finitude and is associated with essence (mahiyyah), which is not the object of creation (ja'l) and Divine emanation.

Rather, the evils present in the realm of nature and the narrow realm of mulk pertain to the contradictions between the existents. And the narrowness of the world and the contradictions between them are not the object of creation. Hence, all good, perfection, and virtue derives from God, and all deficiency, evil, and sin derives from the creatures, as stated (in the Qur'anic verse): Whatever of good befalleth thee (O man), it is from Allah, and whatever or ill befalleth thee it is from thyself. (4: 79)

Hence, all the felicities of the world and the Hereafter, and all the good pertaining to the realms of mulk and malakut emanate from the Mainspring of goodness, and all the evil and wretchedness of this world and the Hereafter derive from the essential deficiency and lack of the existents themselves. And that which is commonly said, that felicity and wretchedness do not derive from the Creator's creation but from the essences (dhat) of things, is without basis in relation to felicity (sa'adat).

Because felicity is the object of Divine Creation; and emanation, and felicity does not derive from any essence or quiddity. Rather, sheer extinction and complete wretchedness derive from essence. However, it is correct [to say that] in relation to wretchedness (shaqawah), for it derives from essence (mahiyyah) and is not the object of creation (ghayr maj'ul), being lower than the plane of creation. And as to the famous tradition: The felicitous one is felicitous in his mother's womb, and the wretched one is wretched in his mother's womb, it has a different meaning relating to the science of the Names and the Attributes, and its mention is not relevant here.

And as following the explanation of this truth based on metaphysical proof, there remained the likelihood of a doubt that the negation of any role for the existents in relation to all that is good, and the negation of the evils in relation the eternal and necessary power of God, implies jabr and tafwid-which are contrary to established truth, in accordance with the way of gnosis and the path of metaphysical reasoning-it was met with the statement, clothed in the language of the previous metaphysical argument and one which substantiates it, that God, the Exalted, is worthier than the creatures in regard to the attribution of virtues and that they are worthier than the Sacred Divine Essence in relation to the attribution of vices. In this affirmation, there is affirmation of worthiness of ascription in relation to each of the two sides.

As to God's being worthier than the creatures in relation to all that is good, and the principle of its attribution to the creatures, that is because the relation of good to the Source of all sources is the relation of existence (wujud) and intrinsic (bi al-dhat), because good is intrinsic to existence, being identical with the Essence in the Necessary Being and, in the contingent, through creation (ja'l) and emanation (ifadah).

Hence the emanating principle of good derives from the Necessary Existent, the Exalted, and the contingent is the mirror for Its manifestation and Its manifester (muzhir), and that relation of (active) manifestation (zahiriyyat) and emanation is more complete than this relation of receptivity and (passive) manifestation (mazhariyyat).

However, this case is the reverse in respect of evils and vices; but each of the two relations stands affirmed. That is because that which is emanated by God is good, and this good is accompanied with associating evils in a sub-ordinate manner. Hence they are attributable to Him accidentally (bi al-'arad,) and attributable and essential to the deficiency and inadequacy of essences (mahiyyat). Accordingly, these two points of view are also mentioned in the noble verses. There, where the sovereignty of Unity prevails and overshadows plurality and deficiency, He says: Say (O Muhammad): Everything is from God. (4:78)

and there where the intervention of accidental plurality is taken into account and the mediating means are considered, He declares, Whatever of good befalleth thee (O man), it is from Allah, and whatever or ill befalleth thee it is from thyself. (4: 79)

God, the Exalted, is not Answerable Concerning what He does and other Existents are Answerable It should be known that the authorities amongst the philosophers say that there is no end or purpose for the Divine act except the Sacred Essence and Its essential manifestations, and that it not possible for the Sacred Essence to have any end for the creation of things beyond itself and Its manifestation. That is because every agent that creates something for an end beyond its essence, whatever that may be, even if it is for procuring a benefit for itself, or bestowing a reward on another than itself, or for worship, or knowledge (ma'rifah), praise and glorification, needs it for its own perfection, and its existence is preferable to it over its non-existence, and this implies deficiency, inadequacy, and deriving benefit from something else.

This is impossible for the absolutely perfect Divine Essence which is self-sufficient and necessary in all respects. Hence, there is no teleological ground, nor a question of wherefore, in His acts, and He is not asked concerning what He does. However, other existents have ends and purposes in their acts that lie beyond their essence. Thus the end of the acts of the lovers of Divine Beauty and those blessed with nearness (muqarrabin), and extinction in the Divine

(majdhubin) is reaching the door of Allah, encounter with the Divine (liqa Allah), and reaching the threshold of Divine sanctity. And so do other beings have ends additional to their essences, in accordance with their perfection and deficiency, intensity and weakness.

Also, That which is Absolute Perfection and necessary-in-itself, is necessary in all respects, and in the same way that His sacred essence is devoid of teleological grounds, His acts too are devoid of any teleological grounds beyond the Essence, contrary to all other existents.

Similarly, since His sacred Essence is Ultimate Beauty and Perfection, it is the Ka'bah of aspiration of all existents and the ultimate end of the entire chain of being, but the Ka'bah of aspiration and the ultimate end does not have an end beyond itself, as other existents are essentially deficient and every deficient thing is, by nature, the object of repulsion, in the same way that every perfect thing is the object of attraction and pursuit. Hence, the end of all movements and acts is the Sacred Essence, and for the Sacred Essence itself there is no end beyond Itself.

He is not asked concerning what He does, and they are asked. (22:23)

Also, since the Sacred Essence is ultimate Beauty and Perfection, the order of existence, which is the shadow of the Beautiful Essence, is utmost perfection and the universal order is the most perfect of all conceivable orders. Hence, the question concerning teleology, end, purpose, and benefit arises due to ignorance and deficiency. Accordingly, the accursed Iblis put the well-known sevenfold questions and God, the Exalted, answered all of them, concisely and in the manner of fair disputation, with a single answer. Hence, God is not to be questioned concerning His acts due to His ultimate perfection and other existents are liable to question due to their deficiency, in essence as well as actions.

Also, since God, the Exalted, is absolute wisdom, each of the acts that derive from Him possesses ultimate soundness, and so is unquestionable, contrary those of other existents.

Similarly, since every act of God, the Exalted, derives from the Reality of His Essence and. the very truth and absoluteness of His Being, and other existents are not such, therefore, He is agent-by-essence, and a question concerning His ends is invalid, contrary to the case of other existents. And since His Will and Power are the same as His Sacred Essence, efficiency-by essence in that Sacred Essence is the same as efficiency by will and power, and there is no room for any objection relating to efficiency-by-nature (fa'iliyyat bi al-tab'). This is one of the noble topics that is established in its own place, and through it are resolved many of the doubts posed by the theologians (mutakallimun) concerning various topics relating to the divine sciences.

From this explanation, we come to know the causal interrelation between the sentences of this

noble tradition. Thus since Divine Acts are consummate perfection and perfect order, He is not questioned concerning what He does, and others are questioned, because they are not such. This is the cause for His being worthier of virtues and the creatures' being worthier in relation to the attributability of vices. And this is the cause for the attribution of every vice to the creature and every virtue to God. This relationship can also be established by other explanations, which were not mentioned here. And to Allah belongs all Praise, at every .beginning and end

Notes:

[1] 21:23.

[2] Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, i, p. 152, "kitab al-tawhid," "bab al-mashiyyah wa al- iradah," hadith 6.

.[3] Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, i, p. 110, "bab iradah annaha min sifat al-fil," hadith 4