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Chapter 3: Creation and Resurrection

The Purpose of Creation

Question

Does this world have a Creator? If so, what was His purpose in creating this world? Are there obligations for which we are accountable? These are questions that have puzzled the human being since time immemorial. Obviously, to answer positively to these questions would lead to more specific ones for which the human mind, due to his innate curiosity, seeks logical and definite answers. The questions mentioned above are among the most fundamental ones with which the human mind grapples. One inherently feels the need to arrive at logical and definite answers to these questions.

Answer

The reason why we inquire regarding the purpose of creation is that in doing all our personal and social activities, we strive to achieve certain goals and ideals that suit our purpose: we eat in order to satisfy our hunger; we drink water in order to quench our thirst; we dress in order to protect ourselves from harsh weather; we speak in order to convey our intentions. No human being would undertake an activity consciously without having a purpose, without the possibility of reaping some profit.

Since this is the case for us, we assume that all other intelligent creatures must follow the same logic, and thus we ask, "What is God's purpose in creation?" But is it legitimate to make this comparison? Is it always correct to extend a principle that applies to certain cases to include other cases? The answer is negative.

The only definite way to find a solution to our question would be to analyze the concept of *purpose*, for we cannot reasonably hope to solve the question through induction and by examining the innumerable cases that this question applies to.

Upon analyzing the voluntary actions we routinely perform, it becomes evident that in every case we act

with the *purpose* of gaining some benefit that fulfills a need within us. In eating, for example, the purpose is to satisfy one's hunger, and once the purpose is achieved, the action is terminated. This is the case for every action we perform consciously—drinking, sitting, standing, listening, walking, etc. Even the activities that we do seemingly without any personal interest (such as the altruistic deeds that we occasionally perform) will on closer examination prove to be of some benefit, without which we would not have undertaken the activity: in all such cases we are actually fulfilling our emotional needs, relieving ourselves, for example, of the painful pity we feel for the poor.

Based on the above analysis, we may infer that, generally, the purpose of a conscious action is the drive to achieve a desired end—the fulfillment of a need—that is attainable through the action in question.

At first glance, it may appear that purposive actions are peculiar to conscious agents, which are equipped with intelligence and freewill. Paying closer attention, however, will make clear that the same properties that govern the actions of conscious agents also pertain to inanimate agents. An inanimate agent is similarly equipped with certain faculties that are responsible for satisfying its natural needs. Thus, just as in the case of the conscious agent, the inanimate agent strives toward a particular end for the purpose of satisfying an inherent inclination. The only factor that distinguishes the conscious agent from the inanimate one is awareness: the conscious agent performs actions with awareness whereas the inanimate agent abides blindly by the dictates of its nature.

The Universal Presence of Purpose

The above elucidation clarifies, then, that purpose pervades all creatures, for the principle of cause–and–effect, which dominates the entire creation, precludes the possibility of an agent's performing an action without a purpose.

Take any individual from any species: a human being, an insect, an apple tree, a spike of wheat, a piece of iron, a molecule of oxygen; they are all similar in that they adjust to their environments and perform certain actions so as to achieve an end. Once the end is reached and the agent acquires the gain it sought, the action terminates.

This also applies in more general terms to the species collectively—such as the human species, the horse species, the apple tree species, and so on. By their peculiar activities, individuals of all species pursue certain ends in order to compensate for their inherent deficiencies and thus secure the survival of their species. And in still more general terms, this same truth applies to the entire cosmos whose various parts are, as a matter of fact, linked together in a cosmic nexus.

Generally speaking, every course of activity involves a point of origin and a point of termination. Action is an intermediary stage during which a being evolves from one state into another. Action starts when a being desires the fulfillment of a need. This desire may arise from a purely physical tendency (as in the case of natural phenomena), an instinctive drive (as in the case of animals), or a conscious decision (as

in the case of human beings). The action ceases when the need is fulfilled, but this end may in turn be the starting point for another action that leads to another end.

The above explanation should suffice to demonstrate that it is inconceivable that an action should come into existence without being directed toward a definite end or that its relation with its end be fortuitous. It is just as inconceivable that an agent should initiate an action without having a causal relationship with the action and the end of the action.

Universal principles—one of which is the amazing causal order that dominates the cosmos—admit of no violation. They regulate the cosmos uniformly, rendering fortuity impossible.

According to the studies of a knowledgeable scholar, the possibility that a thing composed only of ten atoms may have come about haphazardly is one in ten billion. Therefore, to cite chance in explaining the phenomena of this world is an inane claim. The intellect, which has its roots in the Divine nature of the human being, clearly denounces such attempts at negating the necessary relation between an action, its agent, and its purpose, for such negation would destroy the very foundations of science and nullify the mind's self-evident principles.

The Cosmic Purpose

The components of this expansive universe, from the smallest particles to the most startlingly gigantic galaxies, are linked together in a true nexus, forming a uniform whole. This whole, with all its innumerable properties and modes of existence, is in motion, a general and universal motion. (This view is corroborated by philosophic arguments and scientific theories.)

The cosmos, as a uniform whole, pursues a particular goal; it is navigating toward its destination. Once that destination is reached, this ever-changing and noisy universe will be transformed into an immutable and serene world. The future world, in contrast to the present commotion, will be characterized by stability and harmony, its imperfections perfected and its potentialities actualized.

The question that this may raise is, will that stability be relative and in comparison to the present order of things? Or will it be absolute stability and serenity, free of any degree of change? The truth is that the future world will enjoy an absolute and true stability, a veritable state of perfection. The instability that is integral to the world of today will be sealed and locked away, for the world will have reached the point where it originally started out, thus completing a perfect cycle, a point whereat, to employ the "modernist" vernacular, comprehension will be four dimensional as phenomena will be free of relative temporal orientation.

What we have said above, though in brief (for, it is a very complicated subject, which we have condensed into a nutshell), makes clear that the future world toward which the cosmic caravan is navigating in full speed will be a place of perfect stability. Obviously, in attempting to digest this subject,

one may encounter numerous questions, which form the material for some profound and complicated philosophic discussions (we say complicated because the topics at issue are abstract ones that fall beyond the ken of sensory perception).

From the instant we open our eyes and view the wanders of this world, all that we see is in motion, in becoming, first evolving then disintegrating. All along we have been among the passengers of this caravan, never hearing from those who leave it—"He who heard the truth was never again heard of." As such, the topic at hand is one that can be resolved solely through meticulous philosophic reasoning based on apodictic rational arguments derived from valid premises. (It should be pointed out that this philosophic topic corresponds to the religious doctrine of Resurrection as preached by Islamic religious authorities.)

God's Purpose in Creating the World

In light of what has been said above, it should be clear, then, that purpose is meaningful only when two elements are present: an agent (which strives to achieve the purpose in question in order to fulfill an inherent need) and an action (the agent's action in striving towards the purpose in question). Furthermore, as demonstrated by sound rational arguments, God is Absolute Perfection, free of any need or imperfection. The conclusion that results from juxtaposing these two premises is that one can speak of an *end* with regard to God's action, but, in reference to the Divine Essence, it would be incorrect to speak of a purpose.

In other words, the question "What is God's purpose in creation?" can be viewed in one of two ways: if by this question, one is inquiring about the end of God's action (that is, to what end it is directed), the answer would be that our imperfect world is progressing toward a more perfect state. If, however, one means to determine what need God intends to fulfill or what benefit He desires to secure in creating the world, the question would be incorrect. 1 What our religious sources say in this regard is that God's purpose in creating the world is to benefit others not Himself.

The conclusion that results from the above analysis is that purpose is meaningful when the agent or the action has a deficiency that can be cured by achieving the purpose. For this reason, purpose, in the common definition, does not apply to beings that transcend the domain of materiality—that is, to God and the purely immaterial intellects.

However, philosophers have through meticulous analysis arrived at a more subtle understanding of purpose. They distinguish two meanings for purpose. One pertains to the action and designates its fruition; the other pertains to the agent and indicates the fulfillment of a need. It is in the first meaning that purpose is correctly applicable to the actions of immaterial beings. But to understand this, there is need for further explanation.

Actions of immaterial beings are instantaneous; that is, they do not involve motion. As such their actions

constitute in and of themselves the actualization of their purpose. The same holds true with regard to the existential purpose of immaterial beings themselves. As they are perfect, their existence is in and of itself the actualization of the purpose of their existence. From this point of view, God's purpose in creating the world is solely His Essence, and the purpose of this world is to develop into the perfect world. The purpose of that perfect world would be itself: the purpose in the creation of any perfect creature is itself.

God's Purpose in Testing Humankind

Question

If a potter makes two vases, one with a single handle and the other with two handles, he cannot disapprove of the single-handled one for having only one handle, for it is his making. Moreover, if the vases be hidden from him, he would still know their shape, color, and other characteristics. In the case of a painter, he is fully aware of a painting once he has finished his work on it, and it would be absurd if he later claimed that he wanted to examine it to determine whether it was good or bad.

Considering these examples, let me raise the following question: God has created all celestial and terrestrial beings, all spiritual and material beings. He possesses absolute and eternal knowledge of the world, for He is the Creator and would be imperfect if He lacked such knowledge, but His Essence is Absolute Perfection. In this light, why does He need to try humankind, whom He created and whose destiny lies in His Hands?

Answer

In the Qur'an, God, the Exalted, approaches the topic of the purpose of the creation of humankind in two ways. One way is the language of the common people. In this approach, God reveals Himself as the Absolute King with absolute sovereignty, declaring that all are His slaves. When speaking in this language, He portrays this world as the preparatory stage for the next world, the Eternal World. In this preparatory stage, His slaves must comply with His commands, for which they will be rewarded in the Hereafter. In this approach, the life of this world is a test, a trial in which God is the Examiner:

"Every soul shall taste death, and We will bring upon you good and ill by way of trial..." 2

The second approach is purely intellectual, based on the true knowledge of the world. In this approach, creation with all its good and evil is viewed as a painting, a painting that has ugly scenes as well as nice ones. From this point of view, test is meaningless. There is, however, one fundamental point that should be heeded: the spots of ink on this canvas act on their own accord. That is, they have been placed on the canvas in such a way that allows them some freedom. They should use this freedom to create

pleasant scenes, but they may use it to create unpleasant ones as well. The drawings that they create will determine what future is awaiting them.

The Creation of the Heavens and Earth in Six Days

Question

God's will is actualized instantaneously. The moment He wills something, it comes into existence *ex nihilo*. Based on this truth, the question is, why did the act of creation span six days?

Answer

The above question has received sufficient attention in books of philosophy. But the problem at the heart of the question is more fundamental than what the question assumes. Material phenomena, in general, are governed by motion; everything comes about through a course of motion; creation in material phenomena is a gradual process. But on the contrary, action in immaterial agents is instantaneous. So the problem is how to explain the dichotomy between the instantaneity of the cause (the immaterial agents that affect the material world) and the gradualness of the effect (the material world).

In traditional books of Islamic philosophy, this problem is referred to as "the relation of the temporal to the atemporal," or "the relation of a temporal effect to a transcendent cause." It is a very complicated discussion (you may want to refer to books of philosophy for a thorough explanation). What can be briefly said in this letter is this: the concepts of gradualness, change, and time are relative concepts, similar to the concepts of small and large. These relative concepts are derived when phenomena of this world are compared to one another. In relation to God, however, all things are immutable, and such relative concepts lose their meaning. The following two verses of the Qur'an speak to this truth:

"All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is... "3

"Our command is but a single word, like the twinkling of an eye."4

According to the former verse, what God does is solely creating [which is instantaneous], and according to the latter verse the relation of phenomena to God is beyond the scope of time; in relation to Him, all things are stable, immutable, and instantaneous.

Divine will is not an attribute of Essence; it is rather an attribute of Action, and as such is extraneous to

God's Essence. In other words, it applies only to the domain of Divine Activity. To say that God has willed something is to say that He has prepared the appropriate conditions for its development. (For, it must be borne in mind that the cosmos is governed by the principle of causation.) Hence, as God's will is equivalent to what is willed, in reference to instantaneous matters, the Divine will is instantaneous, and in reference to gradual matters, it is gradual.

The Effects of Belief in the Resurrection

Question

What effects can belief in Resurrection have on our character and conduct? In what ways can it influence our social interactions? What gives rise to this question is that, as a matter of fact, human society subsists on the activities of its individuals. Human beings perform their activities out of an urge to fulfill the needs of their lives. As the human being is driven by a strong instinct of preservation, he takes pleasure in achieving whatever may be conducive to this end.

It is the life of this world that invigorates him, giving him the will to endeavor untiringly. And in this endeavor, the more he achieves his desired goals, the stronger is his enthusiasm to persist. It is this that keeps the wheels of society moving, and once it has started on the road to progress, it constantly accelerates, a newer and more profound development appearing every day. The thought of death, of the afterlife, however, brings this progress to a halt, if not paralyzing it completely.

Answer

There should be no doubt in that all heavenly religions ground their call to a great extent on human obligation and the reward of doing good. Islam, in particular, stands on three pillars, one of which is the doctrine of Resurrection. It sets this doctrine on a par with the doctrines of Divine Unity and prophethood, and as such without acknowledging this doctrine; one is not considered a Muslim. This shows clearly the importance of the doctrine of Resurrection in the framework of the Islamic faith.

The goal of Islam is to revive the primordial human nature, to bring out the pristine human nature in people. From the Islamic viewpoint, belief in Resurrection is one of the critical elements in the life of the human being, without which he is a body devoid of spirit and as such unable to attain to virtue and felicity.

Islamic doctrines and rules are not hollow conventionalities, invented to keep people busy by blindly conforming to them. They form a coherent program—composed of doctrinal, spiritual, and practical elements—which God has formulated in accordance with the inherent needs of human nature, a truth to which the following Qur'anic verses attest:

"O you who have faith! Answer God and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life..."5

"So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of God according to which He originated mankind..."6

Thus, Islamic law is like civil law (which is the law of modern societies) in that its purpose is to provide instructions that guarantee the fulfillment of humankind's social needs as well as the needs that are critical to individual human life. Nevertheless, what differentiates the two systems is a fundamental one.

As opposed to secular civil laws, whose purview is limited to the transient and material life of this world and which are rooted in the sentiments of the majority, the heavenly faith of Islam takes into account the eternal life of the human being, which extends beyond death. In this outlook, one's felicity and misery in the Hereafter are directly related to one's conduct in this world. Thus, Islam offers a program that is based on intellectuality, not sentimentality.

From the point of view of modern civil law, the will of the majority is binding. But according to Islam, only those regulations that are true and verifiable by the intellect are enforceable, irrespective of their agreement with the sentiments of the majority.

Islam declares that the pristine human being, unadulterated by superstition and egotism, recognizes through his primordial nature the reality of Resurrection and, consequently, his eternal life. Unlike the material human being—who is utterly oblivious of his Origin and End, blindly follows his brute instincts, and desires only to indulge his material appetites—the pristine human being acknowledges that he must live in compliance with his intellect (a special grace conferred exclusively unto humankind), always cognizant of what it requires of him.

For the pristine human being, belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection affects every social and individual aspect of life: intellectual, moral, and spiritual. It affects one's intellectual life by shedding light on the true state of the soul and all other phenomena. In this light, one finds oneself as a limited and insignificant particle in the universe, which is journeying like a caravan, day and night, toward the everlasting world.

In other words, one finds oneself relentlessly propelled from one side by the Hand of Creation (the Efficient Cause) and attracted from the other side by the End of Creation (the Resurrection). This insight in one's intellectual outlook in turn influences one's moral and spiritual state. Seeing the true state of things, one then restrains one's sentiments and desires so as to traverse this path in a manner appropriate to the True End.

When the human being considers how his needs make him dependent on the various parts of this restless world and how he, like a blade of hay, is thrust to and fro in the turbulent sea of the cosmos, moving ever closer to the Cosmic End, he will no longer indulge in selfish, pompous, and ignorant self–displays, he will no longer engage in the futile toils of this material world—which turn people into machines—more than what is necessary for a fleeting life. This attitude elevates the human being beyond the personal and social strife, relieving him of the many exacting but vain burdens that erode his true life.

One so enlightened knows that, should he relinquish his fleeting life in the way of virtue, he will have instead an eternal life in felicity, enjoying the rewards of his good deeds. As such, there is no need to instill in his mind the various superstitions that are so prevalent today to persuade him to make sacrifices.

Secular societies, however, resort to illusory ideals in order to compel their people to make sacrifices. They invoke, say, the "sanctities of society:" liberty, law, and patriotism. They encourage their people to secure an honorable name that would go down in history, thus acquiring, so they say, an "eternal life." The truth, however, is that if death is annihilation, as the materialists contend, all these so-called ideals are vain superstitions.

Among the spiritual advantages of having belief in the Hereafter is that it constantly invigorates the soul, for one knows that there will be a day when oppression will be avenged and all rights redeemed, a day when virtuous deeds will be appreciated—a most lofty appreciation. But its main effect is the spirit of vigilance it instills in one's spirit: one is aware that one's actions, whether public or private, are being watched by the All–knowing, the All–seeing God and that there is a day ahead when He will scrutinize one's deeds with the greatest attention. This belief restrains one such that no undercover police could ever achieve, for police is an outward restraint, whereas this belief is an inward guard from which nothing can be concealed.

The above explanation makes clear that the allegation that belief in an afterlife undercuts a society's motivation for work and progress is invalid. Motivation is a state of mind engendered by a sense of need, and belief in the Hereafter only serves to accentuate this sense.

This truth is historically demonstrable. Looking back at the early period of Islam, when Muslims were more firm in their faith, we see that social advancement was astonishing; Muslims have never again been able to regain that vigor. Of course, belief in the Hereafter does reduce one's preoccupation with sensuality; it does preclude people from putting their lives on the line for nonsensical and illusory concerns.

- 1. For, it presupposes the presence of need in the Divine Essence. God, however, is Absolute Perfection; He has no need, and there is no higher perfection possible for Him to desire. [trans.]
- 2. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:35.
- 3. Surah Ya Sin 36:82.

- 4. Surah al-Qamar 54:50.
- 5. Surah al-Anfal 8:24.
- 6. Surah al-Rum 30:30.

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