

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Putting aside those very few who are providentially endowed with certainty, the rest come to it by first crossing the bridge of doubt and apprehension. So just because our age is an age of doubt cannot be seen to be the reason for it being an age of deviation and decline. What is for sure is that this type of doubt is not any less than the simpleminded instances of “certainty” and “peace” that are much witnessed these days.

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

this area.

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

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

Published works on religion, just as I have pointed out in some of my other works, are not systematic. Putting aside those works which are fundamentally damaging and disgraceful, even useful works are not thought out and have not been produced after taking into account the needs at hand. It seems that every author writes and publishes whatever he himself deems useful. Hence there are many useful and necessary subjects that do not even have a single book on them, while there are some subjects that have countless books written on them and more are being written all the time.

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

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

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

I am by no means claiming that the subjects that I have chosen and written about are the most pressing and necessary subjects. The only thing that is being claimed is that I have stayed within the bounds of

the (above) principle—according to my own understanding of it—and have, to the extent of my ability, attempted to untangle and resolve the problems surrounding Islamic matters. In so doing, I have wherever possible, presented Islamic truths as they are; for though it is impossible to eliminate deviant practices, it is in some way possible to fight deviant thoughts and erroneous ideas and specially to expose the stratagems of the enemies of Islam. In this endeavor I have tried to prioritize issues and deal with them in order of importance—at least as I see it.

In the last three or four years I have spent a great deal of my time on Islamic matters pertaining to women and women's rights—with the result that a series of articles on the subject have appeared in magazines and periodicals, or have been printed in book form.

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

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

We can say this much about the topics discussed in this book that all of them are carefully “chosen” and that none of them are there by “chance”, as it were. They are issues that were taken up with me many times over—especially by the youth. What I have included in this book is in reality a general answer to all those that repeatedly posed questions on the subject. The questions were so many (and similar) that they called for a general and public response.

The arguments presented here have two perspectives or dimensions: intellectual and authoritative¹. Of course, in respect of the latter, references have been made to verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams (upon them be Peace). With respect to the intellectual arguments though, it

was possible to proceed in two ways or “styles”: theological and philosophical. Now because I do not endorse the theological methodology in addressing such issues, but rather see the arguments of the philosophers to be correct and convincing, I totally abstained from using the methodology of the former. Of course, wherever it was called for, I did refer to the arguments of the theologians—and even to other arguments such as those of the Traditionalists (*Ahl al-hadith*) and materialists (or sensationalists).

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

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

Y’aqub ibn Ishaq Kindi, whose book Ibn al-Nadim mentions, is the oldest of Islamic philosophers and because he was an Arab, he is known as “the Arab philosopher”. It is unlikely that al-Kindi would have argued in the manner of the theologians. He most likely used the method of the philosophers.

I have recently been told by a respected scholar that the master of the Islamic philosophers, Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna)² has a short treatise on this subject which was written in response to a question posed to him. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get hold of that treatise.

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

Predestination And Freewill

Theological discussions made their debut halfway through the first Islamic century—as is discernable from available history texts. From amongst these discussions it appears that the oldest one is the discussion on free will and predestination or determinism. The issue of free will and predestination is primarily an issue that concerns man as such and only secondarily involves God and nature. This is because on the one hand, the subject up for discussion is “man” and the question as to whether he is free or predestined?

On the other hand, the problem pertains to God and nature—as it is asked whether Divine decree and destiny or the laws of cause and effect in nature have left any room for man's freedom or whether they determine and compel him (to do things). In any case, because the issue is one that pertains to humanity and has to do with the destiny of man, it is difficult to find a man, with any philosophical or contemplative potential at all, who has not at some point thought of this issue. Similarly, it is not possible to find a society which has entered any of the stages of abstract thought and which has not posed this question for itself.

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

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

The Issue Of Justice

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

From the outset the theologians were divided into two groups. The first, which favoured free will and justice, was called Mu'tazilah. The second, which opted for predestination, was a group of Sunnis which later came to be known as the Ash'arites. Needless to say, that those who opposed justice, did not openly and directly say that they deny Divine justice. This is because both groups claimed adherence to the Qur'an, and the Qur'an strongly negates injustice with respect to God and affirms His justice. What the opponents of justice did do though, is to define justice in a special way. They said: Justice is not a reality in itself that we can describe “beforehand” and set as the standard by which to judge God's acts.

In fact, setting such a standard and point of reference for Divine acts is to in some way impose obligations on God and to constrain and limit His will. For can rules and laws be set for His acts which have authority over Him?! All laws are created by Him and fall under His jurisdiction, and He is the

ultimate Authority. Any type of “superseding” authority which He must follow is against His absolute Immensity and Dominion. Divine justice does not mean that there are a set of previously defined “just” laws which He must abide by. Rather Divine justice means that He is the source of justice; whatever He does is just, not that He does what is just. Justice and injustice are consequences and derivatives of Divine acts. Justice is not the standard to judge Divine acts by, rather, Divine acts are the standard by which justice is defined.

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

Essential Goodness And Essential Evil

The next topic that arose as a “development” and expansion of the subject of justice is that of good and evil actions. In general, is it the case that good and evil can be attributed to actions and deeds in their essence? For instance, are deeds such as telling the truth, keeping trusts, generosity and the like, good in and of themselves? While telling lies, treachery, and usurpation and their like, are bad and reprehensible in themselves? Are qualities such as goodness and nobility of the order of the real and essential qualities of actions; implying that any action (having this quality)—regardless of its subject or any other external condition—assumes this quality in and of itself while negating the opposite of this quality?

Rationally Derived Realities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Motive And End Of Divine Acts

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

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

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

Philosophers have proven that a completely purposeless and absurd act can never be performed by man, as it is an impossibility. All such absurdities are relative. For instance, an act which issues from an imaginative temperament has a purpose and end that is appropriate to that temperament. Now because such an act lacks a rational end, we call it “absurd” and “vain”. In other words, with respect to the agent and subject which performed the act, it is not absurd and purposeless. But with respect to any other source that could have performed it but didn't, it is considered absurd.

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

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

Why did you do so—and-so?

Because of this—and—that purpose.

Why did you give preference to that purpose and end?

For the reason of this-or-that particularity.

Why did you use such-and-such means?

Because of this-or-that distinction and priority.

Any human act that cannot give a rational answer to “why”-to the degree that it is imperfect in this respect-gives lie to the defective wisdom of the man who carried out the act.

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

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

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

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

Lines Of Demarcation

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

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

Justice Or Divine Unity?

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

لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِنَ الذُّلِّ ۗ وَكَبَّرَهُ تَكْبِيرًا

Allah, who has neither taken any son, nor has He any partner in sovereignty, nor has He any wali out of weakness,' and magnify Him with a magnification (worthy of Him).. (Qur'an, 17:111)

So the wisdom and expediency that the Mu'tazilah *posit* for Divine acts, runs counter to His essential unity and self-sufficiency as well as conflicting with His incomparability and causal transcendence. This is because when a man performs acts towards certain ends and purposes, he in fact becomes influenced and motivated by those ends. For is it not the case that the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause. That is to say, the final cause is what causes the efficiency of the agent; in its absence the agent is no longer an agent. Now the man who has a motive, purpose and end in his actions is in reality governed by the determinism called for by that purpose and end. But God is free from any form of determinism and limitation, even the one that is caused by a purpose or motive.

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

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

The Mu'tazilah, on their part, held that the beliefs of the Ash'arites were in opposition to the principle of incomparability that is oft repeated in the Qur'an. They argued: Ash'arite positions necessitate that we ascribe qualities to God that He is absolved of—the Qur'an being very clear on this matter. Things such as injustice, caprice, and vice become ascribed to Him. This is because if we don't accept Divine justice and human free will, then we must hold that God is unjust; for He has created and made created beings

totally obliged (and compelled to do only His will), whereas at the same time he has made them responsible for their actions and goes on to punish them when they sin.

So whatever deed man–God's handiwork does, in reality it is not he who does it but rather it is God. So, then it follows that it is God who becomes implicated in vices and crimes, not His creation and vassal. What's more, because the Ash'arities hold that Divine acts are not goal-oriented, God is seen to act capriciously and without purpose. Hence the logical consequence of Ash'arite beliefs is to ascribe qualities to God, such as injustice, capriciousness, and vice—that both reason and revelation clearly absolve Him of.

Each one of the two schools of thought, the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite, had a strong point and a weak point. Their strong points came to the front when they found fault with the opposing school; and their points of weakness were revealed when they tried to defend their school as a complete self-contained system.

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

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

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

One day Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, a Mu'tazalite was in the audience of Sahib ibn 'Abbad. Just then Abu Ishaq Isfara'rii made his entrance. Abu Ishaq was an Ash'arite who believed in predestination, while Qadi Abd al-Jabbar was a Mu'tazilite who held that man had a free will. As soon as Qadi saw Abu Ishaq, he said: “Holy God, the One who is clear of all vice”. (Meaning that, you hold that all things, including vices, are from God.)

Abu Ishaq, without bothering to defend his own belief, immediately retorted, “Holy God, the One in whose kingdom nothing transpires but by His Will”. (An allusion to that fact that you, Qadi, with your belief in total freedom and delegation of power, have effectively accepted the existence of a partner alongside God in His kingdom; you believe that man is independent in his acts and that he has been left on his own having no need of God now.)

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

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

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

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

Over and beyond their not being able to properly place the concepts of justice, reason; free will, and wisdom, the Ash'arites had other weak points as well. They found themselves extremely frustrated on the issue of Divine unity—an issue over which they showed great sensitivity. For instance, with the excuse of defending the Unity of Divine actions, they were forced to deny the order of essential and formal causality and held that everything was the direct and unconditional effect of the Divine will. Now, the experts in the field know that such a belief is in opposition to the simplicity, sublimity, and eminence of the Divine Essence.

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

Although the points of contention between the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilah are plentiful, the major ones are Divine unity and justice. As was previously shown, the theological discussions took justice as their point of departure and ended up in the arguments over Divine unity. Divine unity has stages. There is

Unity of the Divine essence, Unity of the Divine attributes, Unity of Divine acts, and Unity of acts of worship. The Unity of the Divine essence means that the Sacred Essence is One and incomparable.

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

Nothing is like Him. (Qur'an, 42:11)

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

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

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

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

The Effects Of Islamic Theology On Islamic Philosophy

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

In addition to paving the way for philosophers by tabling a series of new questions, theologians performed other important services. In particular, theologians were opposed to Greek thought and did not "give in" to it. They attacked and tarnished the image of philosophy and philosophers whenever they could. They wrote books criticizing and denouncing philosophy and philosophers—refuting their arguments. It was the theologians who opened the door of doubt and uncertainty with respect to philosophical ideas. This friction and locking of horns between traditional theologians and philosophers

and the resultant vigorous attempts of the latter at trying to escape deadlocks and (conceptual) dead-ends, initiated a certain movement and development in Islamic philosophical theology. Such exertions and efforts lead to flashes of inspiration, revealing new ground and uncharted territory.

The Shia Intellectual School

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

The issues of Divine justice and unity were also tabled in the Shia school of theology and philosophy, and the opinions expressed in their regard in this school were some of the most profound. On the four famous issues of justice, reason, free will, and wisdom, the Shia school supported the Mu'tazilah stance and consequently also came to be called “justifiers” (*adliyyah*). But in the Shia school, the concept of each one of these four was different from that of the Mu'tazilah.

For instance, in the Shia school the concept of free will was not posed as absolute delegation of authority and freedom—which would amount to a type of negation of Divine freedom and an affirmation of the pure independence of human actions; a type of deification of man, naturally implying polytheism or shirk. Instead, and for the first time, the immaculate Imams of the Shia (may Peace be upon them) who were the source of inspiration for the Shia school, put forth the principle of “an affair between the two affairs”. Their statement in this regard became famous:

لا جبر ولا تفويض بل أمر بين الأمرين

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

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

العدل والتّوحيد علويّان، والجبر والتّشبيه أمويّان

Justice and unity are Alawi (Shia); determinism and anthropomorphism are Ummayyad.

In the Shia school, fundamentality of justice, sanctity of human reason, dignity of human free will and sagacious ordering of nature were established without any detriment to the principle of Divine unity—in essence or acts. Man's free will was demonstrated without him becoming a partner to God's dominion

and power and without God's will becoming subservient to the human will. Divine decree and destiny were also proven to encompass all of Being without it leading to man being determined in his actions and subjugated to predestination.

All the tendencies in the Shia school of theology were unitive or *tawhidi*. To explain: in the debate over the unity or multiplicity of attributes, the Shia sided with unity. In so doing, they denied the Ash'arite belief in this regard and agreed with the Mu'tazilah—with this difference that the Mu'tazilah denied the (independent existence of the) attributes and spoke of the essence “representing” (and performing the functions of) the attributes. The Shia though, held a belief—one of the most profound beliefs in the divinities—in the unity and identity of the essence with the attributes. When it came to the Unity of Divine acts, the Shia sided with the Ash'arites, but with this discrepancy that they did not deny causality. Hence the doctrine of the Divine unity of the essence, attributes and acts was propounded by Shia theology at a height and intensity not yet witnessed in the world.⁴

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

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

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

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

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ

and that the terminus is toward your Lord. (Qur'an, 53:42)

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

The Idea Of Justice In The Field Of Jurisprudence

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

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

As to exactly when the method of *ijtihad* was instituted and what developments it went through in the Shia and Sunni worlds requires a long and involved discussion whose place is not here. There is no doubt that *ijtihad* existed at the time of the Prophet, or at least from the time of his death. But whether or not it was correctly carried out at that time or not is another question. We have covered this topic in another place.⁵

Islamic jurisprudence, like other sciences, quickly developed and evolved leading to the formation of different systems. Among the Sunnis, two main systems or schools of jurisprudence developed: The Traditionalist system (*ahl al-hadith*) which was popular amongst the jurists of Medina, and the Analogist system (*ra'y wa qiyas*) which was influential amongst the jurists of Iraq.

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

The methodology of the Analogists was different from that of the Traditionalists. If they did not find the ruling on an issue in the Qur'an or in categorical and definitive Prophetic traditions, they would not so readily turn to and trust the transmitted (*manqul*) traditions—for they held them to be for the most part

made-up and doctored. They were of the belief that a Muslim jurist, due to his command over and experience of categorical Islamic rules and regulations, was in tune with the spirit of the Law and could come to the ruling on any particular issue by way of analogy and comparison.

Along these lines, the Analogists were of the opinion that “justice” and “expediency” were good guidelines for jurists to follow. Hence it was incumbent on the jurist to ponder and deliberate on the “dictates of Divine justice” and the “callings of expediency.” It was due to this that terms such as *istihsan* and *istislah*; were coined.

The Traditionalist-Analogist Dispute

The Traditionalists saw the method of the Analogists to be somewhat extreme in its referral to reason and faulty in its recourse to traditions. In other words, they saw their method to be a type of short sightedness with respect to the discovery of true expedients. They would say: The (Divine) Law is founded upon collecting and bringing together differing elements and variegated collectivities—something that is beyond the scope of normal intellects. Reason, by an act of simplification, presumes that it has arrived at the root and spirit of the Law, while this is not the case. For their part, the Analogists would accuse the Traditionalists of being backward and rigid.

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

كَلَّ مَا حَكَمَ بِهِ الْعَقْلُ حَكَمَ بِهِ الشَّرْعُ

و كَلَّ مَا حَكَمَ بِهِ الشَّرْعُ حَكَمَ بِهِ الْعَقْلُ

The Law dictates what reason dictates
and reason dictates what the Law dictates.

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

From the perspective of Islamic jurists, especially those who were more inclined towards analogy

or unfettered opinion (*qiyas wa ra'y*), there exists perfect harmony and correspondence between reason and the Law. Islamic laws and rules are not a set of cryptic, hidden, and unknowable laws which demand only (blind) obedience. Rather, intellection and rationality also have a role to play in the understanding and derivation of these laws.

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

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

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

[The Shia Jurisprudential Method](#)

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

The Shia refutation of analogy was not due to the argument used by the Traditionalists among the Sunnis—namely, reason lacking the authority to be one of the sources of the Law. It was rather due to two other reasons: firstly, the fact that analogy is based on supposition and not on certain knowledge—it is the preference of imagination over the intellect; secondly, turning to analogy or unfettered opinions is tantamount to saying that the general principles of Islam are insufficient; and this is either an injustice to Islam or an ignorance of it.

While it is true that not all the rulings of all issues are spelled out in detail—something which is not even possible because particulars are unlimited, the general principles of Islam are laid out such that they meet the demands of these endless particular instances and the differing situations of various times and places. Accordingly then, the responsibility of a jurist is not to be pedantically stuck on literal

words—wanting the particular ruling for each and every event from the Qur'an and traditions; nor is it his obligation—with the excuse of not having a ruling for a particular issue—to let his imagination go wild and make liberal use of analogy (to come up with a ruling).

On the contrary, the mandate of a jurist is deduction (*tafri'*) and inference by reasoning from the general to the specific (i.e. weighing particular facts or instances against general principles). Islamic principles already exist in the Book and Tradition; only one skill is necessary, and that is *ijtihad* or the skillful correlation and application of general Islamic principles to transient and changing particulars.

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

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

Shia jurisprudence made distinctions between reason and imagination—in other words, between logical proofs and irrational (*zanni*) analogies (which are the same as the “analogies” of formal logic). It was affirmed that the sources of jurisprudence are four in number: The Book, Tradition, consensus, and reason. Hence, while analogy was rejected in this school of jurisprudence, in its stead reason and formal proofs were given credence.

The Idea Of Justice In Society And The Political Forum

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

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

أَفْضَلُ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَةٌ عَدْلٍ عِنْدَ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ إِنَّ

The best (way of) holy war is (true and) just speech in front of an unjust ruler.⁶

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

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

The Real Origin

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

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

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

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

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ

God bears witness that there is no god except Him—and (so do) the angels and those who possess knowledge—maintainer of justice (Qur'an, 3: 18)

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

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ

He raised the heaven high and set up the balance (Qur'an, 55:7)

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

بالعدل قامت السموات والأرض

The heavens and the earth are maintained with justice. [7](#)

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

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly, We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice (Qur'an, 57:25)

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

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

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ

Say, 'My Lord has enjoined justice. (Qur'an, 7:29)

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

ذَلِكَم أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

That is more just with Allah (Qur'an, 2:282)

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

لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

My pledge does not extend to the unjust. (Qur'an, 2: 124)

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

يَحْكُمُ بِهِ ذَوَا عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ

as judged by two fair men among you (Qur'an, 5:95)

Or in another verse:

وَأَشْهِدُوا ذَوِي عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ

and take the witness of two honest men from among yourselves (Qur'an, 65:2)

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

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

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

When Qur'anic justice pertains to *tawhid* or *ma'ad*, it offers a unique perspective on being and creation;

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

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

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

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

In the opinion of the followers of this school, if we see that there is talk of justice in a society, then we much search for its roots in economic and social imbalances, and nowhere else. Moreover if we see two groups—in the guise of jurisprudence or theology—opposing one another: a group which seriously supports the principle of justice as a valid world view or a legal criterion and standard, and the other one

which denies all of these principles, then we must understand that the intellectual, theological, or legal opposition here actually shows that there is a behind-the-curtains struggle going on. In this opposition, there is a group that is connected with the have-nots and the other with the haves or well to do class. Human thought is but a slave of the stomach. It is impossible for a well to do person to defend the cause of justice, just as it is impossible that a needy person should deny the ideal of justice.

Now, in our opinion this is a one-sided and myopic accounting of history. No doubt, material needs are a very important factor in man's interests and tendencies—and sometimes it is even possible to find traces of economic causes in some Islamic intellectual, social, and political debates. But it is not possible to reduce all human tendencies and effects, and all the fundamental elements of human history, to economic needs. Though it may be too soon to give a categorical judgement on the sum total of the fundamental elements and factors that govern man's individual and social life, what is for sure is that material needs cannot be accepted as the sole and most basic need.

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

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

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

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

In addition to the fact that he kept his ministerial post until the end and gained a good name like that of '*ulama*' for himself, Sahib ibn 'Abbad had another unique characteristic: they say that he was the only minister in history whose father and grandfather were also ministers. Three generations, one after the

other, passed on the ministerial post as an inheritance. Sahib ibn 'Abbad's name was Isma'il, his father's name was Abbad, and his grandfather's name was Abbas. Poets have written the following about him:

Notable after notable inherited the ministry,

Muniment linked to muniment;

Abbad obtained ministerial authority from Abbas,

And Isma'il (acquired it) from Abbad.

Even with all these endowments and holdings, Sahib ibn 'Abbad was an obstinate defender of the doctrine of justice and saw this as a source of honour and pride. He wrote⁸

If my heart were rent asunder, in its midst would be seen,

Two lines inscribed without a scribe;

On one side "Justice and *Tawhid*,"

On the other, "Love of the People of the House."

We see the same phenomena with regards to the justice of the law or the level of jurisprudence. For instance, Abu Yusuf, the Haruni Head Judge, was a rigid supporter of the justice doctrine, while Ahmad ibn Hanbal categorically denounced it, despite being imprisoned and tortured (on account of it).

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

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

We do not claim that this book has investigated the subject of justice from all of its angles and in an exhaustive manner so as to be worthy of Qur'anic sanction. But what can perhaps be claimed here is that, to some degree, this book has looked at it from the perspective of Divine or "ontological" justice—one of the issues in the overall field of justice that the Qur'an takes into consideration—in a new and novel fashion.

29 Khordad, 1352 S.H.

17 Jamadi al-Ula, 1393 A.H.

Murtadha Mutahhari

- [1.](#) Literally “transmitted” or naqli – signifying the recourse to traditions and sayings of immaculate religious personalities and saints who are the recipients of Revelation and Divine inspiration.
- [2.](#) See Endnote 2
- [3.](#) See Endnote 3
- [4.](#) We have dealt with this subject in our work, Glimpses of the Nahj al-Balagha and in volume 5 Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism. We have also discussed Divine decree and destiny in our book, Destiny of Man.
- [5.](#) See the book by the author entitled, Ten Discourses
- [6.](#) Al-Kafi, vol, 5 p. 60
- [7.](#) Tafsir al-Safi, vol 2, p. 106
- [8.](#) See Endnote 4

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