

Lesson 35: The Dependence of the Effect on the Cause

[The Mutual Implication of Cause and Effect](#)

In consideration of the definitions of cause and effect it is easy to see that not only is the occurrence of the effect impossible without its internal causes (the parts that compose it), but it is impossible without the occurrence of any of the parts of the complete cause, for it is assumed that the existence of the effect is in need of all the parts of the complete cause, and to suppose that it could occur without one of them would mean that it was not in need of it.

Of course, in cases where the cause is replaceable, the existence of any of its alternates would suffice, but the assumption of the existence of the effect without any of them is impossible. In cases in which it is imagined that an effect comes into existence without a cause (as in cases of miracles), what really happens is that an unusual, unknown cause replaces the usual and known cause.

On the other hand, in cases in which there is a complete cause, the existence of its effect will be necessitated, for the meaning of complete cause is that everything needed for the effect is satisfied, and the supposition that the effect does not occur would mean that its existence is in need of something else, which is contrary to the original supposition.

The assumption that something prevents the occurrence of the effect signifies the absence of the completeness of the cause, for 'the absence of an impediment' is also a condition for the occurrence of the effect, and the assumption of the completeness of the cause includes this negative condition. That is, when we say that the complete cause of something has occurred, this means that in addition to the occurrence of the positive existing causes and conditions, an impediment to the occurrence of the effect does not exist.

Some scholastic theologians have imagined that this principle applies specifically to involuntary causes which do not act out of a will, and that in cases of free agents, however, after the occurrence of all the

parts of the cause there is still room for the volition and choice of the agent.

They fail to observe the fact that rational principles cannot be thus restricted, and that in cases of voluntary action, the will of the agent is one of the parts of the complete cause, and as long as there is no will to carry out the voluntary action, the complete cause is not realized, even if all the other conditions of existence and nonexistence should obtain.

The conclusion is that every cause, complete or incomplete, has relative necessity (wujub bil-qiyas) in relation to its effect, and similarly every effect has relative necessity in relation to its complete cause, and these two points may be together referred to as 'the rule of mutual implication of cause and effect.'

The Simultaneity of Cause and Effect

From the principle of the mutual implication of cause and effect other principles may be derived, among which is the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect, which may be described as follows. Whenever an effect is a temporal existent and at least one of the parts of its complete cause is also temporal, the cause and effect will occur simultaneously, and the occurrence of the complete cause will have no temporal distance from the effect.

For if it is supposed that some time, no matter how short, elapses after the occurrence of all the parts of the complete cause and the effect occurs after that, this would imply that the existence of the effect is not necessary at that very supposed time, while the implication of the relative necessity of the effect in relation to the complete cause is that the existence of the effect becomes necessary as soon as the cause is complete.

However, this principle does not apply to incomplete causes, for the existence of the effect will not be necessary with the existence of any of them. Rather, even if just one of the parts of the complete cause is absent, the existence of the effect will be impossible, for otherwise the effect would not need the said part.

However, if the cause and effect are immaterial, and neither of them is temporal, in that case their temporal simultaneity would be meaningless. The same goes for the case in which the effect is temporal but the cause is completely immaterial, for the meaning of temporal simultaneity is that two existents occur at the same time, while something completely immaterial does not occur in the temporal realm, and has no temporal relation to any existent.

However, such an existent is existentially encompassing in relation to its own effect and present, and the absence of the effect from this cause would be impossible. This subject will become clearer by taking into account the relational character of the effect with regard to its creative cause.

On the other hand, the temporal priority of the effect to any cause, whether complete or incomplete, is impossible, for this would imply that the effect would not be in need of the above-mentioned cause at

the moment it takes place, and that the existence of the cause in relation to the effect is not necessary. It is obvious that this principle is specific to temporal existents.

By taking this principle into account, it becomes completely clear that the interpretation of the causal relation as the succession of two phenomena is incorrect, for an implication of succession is the temporal priority of the cause to the effect. Not only does this have no meaning for immaterial things and creative causes, but it is also impossible for complete causes that include non-temporal elements.

The only case to which the principle of succession applies is that of incomplete temporal causes, for which their temporal priority to their effects is possible, such as the occurrence of a person prior to the performance of a task.

On the other hand, it has already been said that the regular succession of two phenomena is not specific to cause and effect, and many phenomena come into existence one after the other without there being any causal relation between them, such as day and night. So the relation between cases of causation and cases of succession is referred to in technical terms as one of 'generality and specificity in some respects.'

Let it not be left unsaid that the simultaneity of two existents is not confined to causes and their effects. There are many phenomena that occur simultaneously without any causal relation between them. It is even possible for two phenomena to be persistently simultaneous without any of them being the cause of the other.

For example, if a cause brings about two effects, the given effects always come into existence together, while neither of them is the cause of the other. So, the relation between cases of causation and cases of simultaneity is also one of 'generality and specificity in some respects,' that is, in some cases there is both simultaneity and causation, such as the complete temporal cause and its effect; while in some other cases causality exists but simultaneity does not, such as immaterial causes and incomplete causes that exist before the occurrence of their effects. In some cases there is simultaneity without causality, such as the simultaneous appearance of light and heat in an electric lamp.

Therefore, the correct interpretation of causation is neither in terms of the succession of two phenomena nor in terms of the simultaneity of two phenomena. Succession and simultaneity cannot even be considered to be implications of cause and effect, nor can the interpretation of causation in terms of them be considered a kind of 'specific necessity' for neither of them is specific to cause and effect.

Likewise, one cannot consider the interpretation of causation in terms of them to be a kind of 'general necessity', for neither of them is true of all cases of cause and effect. Furthermore, it is basically incorrect to define something in terms of something more general, for such a definition in no way specifies the object defined.

The Persistence of the Effect is also in Need of a Cause

Another principle which can be derived from the mutual implication of cause and effect is that the complete cause must persist for the duration of the effect, for if the effect persists after the destruction of the complete cause, or even after the destruction of one of the parts of the complete cause, this would imply that the existence of the effect would not be in need of its cause during its persistence, while this need is an essential requirement of the existence of the effect of which it can never be divested.

This principle has long been a topic of discussion among philosophers and theologians. The philosophers have always emphasized that the persistence of an effect is also in need of a cause. They have reasoned that the criterion of the need for a cause by an effect is the effect's whatish contingency, and the whatness of the effect can never be divested of this property. Therefore, it will always be in need of a cause.

The theologians, who for the most part consider the criterion of the need for a cause to be coming into existence (huduth), or contingency and coming into existence jointly, do not consider the persistence of an effect to be in need of a cause, and it is even reported that some of them held that if it were also possible for God, the Exalted, to perish, this would be of no harm to the existence of the world.

In order to support their position, they have resorted to cases of the persistence of effects after the destruction of their causes, such as the remaining alive of a child after the death of its father, or the remaining of a building after the death of its builder.

In response to them, the philosophers say that the only criterion of the need for a cause by an effect is contingency, not coming into existence and not a combination of contingency and coming into existence. In order to establish this point, they set forth the following rational analysis: Coming into existence is an attribute of the existence of the effect, and from a rationally analytic point of view, this is posterior to its existence.

Existence is subordinate to creation, and creation (ijad) is posterior to necessity (wujub) and being made necessary (ijab). Being made necessary pertains to a thing which lacks existence, that is, which has contingent existence. This contingency is the very attribution which is abstracted from the whatness itself, for it is whatness which is equal with respect to existence and nonexistence, and does not have preponderance for either of them.

Hence, the only thing which can be the criterion for the need for a cause is this essential contingency itself, which is inseparable from whatness. For this reason the need of an effect will also be persistent, and the effect will never be without need for a cause.

However, this position, as was indicated earlier, is in conformity with the fundamentality of whatness, and with regard to the fundamentality of existence the criterion for the need for a cause must be sought in

the existential characteristics of the effect, that is, as was stated by Sadr al-Muta'allihin, the criterion for the need of an effect for a cause is essential poverty (faqr-e dhati) and dependence, in other words, the weakness of its existential level which is inseparable from it.

With regard to the cases which the theologians used as evidence for the persisting of an effect after the destruction of its cause, it should be said that that which is destroyed or whose effects are terminated is not a real cause (haqiqi), but merely a preparatory cause which in reality is merely an accidental cause for the mentioned effects.

This may be further explained as follows. The building which persists after the death of its builder has a set of real causes, including: the existence-giving cause, internal causes (matter and form), conditions for the existence of the building, such as the arrangement of the building materials in a specific shape and configuration, and a lack of impediments which could result in the separation of these materials. As long as this set of causes persists, the building will also persist.

However, if the Divine Will is not in accord with the persistence of the building, or if the building materials, due to external factors, should decay, or if the conditions which are necessary for the maintenance of the shape of the building should change, then, without a doubt, the building will be ruined. The builder who puts together the building materials is really the preparatory cause for the appearance of this particular situation regarding the building materials.

That which is a condition for the existence and persistence of the building is this very particular situation and not the person who by the movement of his hands causes the transference of the building materials and the appearance of the above-mentioned situation. The agency which is superficially related to the building is merely an accidental agency, and the builder's real agency is with respect to the movement of his own hands, which obey his will. In the absence of the will, the movement would come to a standstill, and naturally, with his own destruction there would be no possibility of its continuation.

Likewise, the existence of the child is an effect of its own real causes, which besides the existence-giving cause include specific organic materials with special qualities which make the body disposed to possess a spirit, and as long as the necessary conditions for the possession of a spirit by the body persist, its life will continue. The father and mother have no role in the persistence of these causes, factors, and conditions. Even their agency in relation to the transference of the sperm and its establishment in the womb is also an accidental agency.

Likewise, the movement of a body, in reality, is the effect of some specific energy, which comes into existence in it, and as long as this agent persists, the motion will also continue. Relating the movement of the body to an external mover is like relating an effect to its preparatory agent which plays no other role than transferring the energy to the body.

Moreover, it has become clear that preparatory agents of this kind, which are really accidental agents, are not considered to be parts of the complete cause, and the complete cause is composed of the

existence-giving agent, internal causes, and conditions of existence and nonexistence.

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