

# Lesson 62: Demonstrations of the Necessary Existent

## Introduction

The arguments given to establish the existence of Almighty God are copious and of various styles, and in general they can be divided into three groups:

The first group proceeds from reasons which are established on the basis of observations of divine effects and signs in the cosmos, such as the argument from design and providence, which on the basis of the discovery of the existence of a wise design, purpose and plan from the coherence, interdependence and propriety of phenomena, establishes that there is a wise designer and a knowing planner of the cosmos.

While these arguments are clear and pleasing, they do not provide answers to all doubts and misgivings, and in reality, they mostly play the role of awakening that which is inherent and bringing about an awareness of innate knowledge (ma'rifah).

The second group consists of arguments which establish the existence of a needless Creator by way of the needs of the cosmos, such as the argument from temporal beginning (burhan-e huduth), which proceeds from the posteriority of phenomena to nonexistence and nothingness to prove their essential need, and then, with the help of the impossibility of a circle or regress, proves that there is a needless Creator, or the argument from motion, which from the need of motion for a mover and the impossibility of an infinite regress of movers, proves the existence of God as the first originator of motion in the cosmos, or the arguments which prove the existence of a needless creative cause from the origin of the soul or substantial forms and the impossibility of their production from natural and material agents. These arguments also more or less are in need of sensory and empirical premises.

The third group consists of purely philosophical arguments which are formed from utterly rational premises, such as the demonstration from contingency and the Demonstration of the Sincere (burhn-e

siddiqin).

This group of demonstrations has some special features: first, that they do not require sensory or empirical premises; second, the doubts and misgivings which surround the other arguments have no way here, and in other words, they have greater logical validity; and third, the premises of these demonstrations are also more or less needed in other arguments, for example, when the first designer and planner or originator or mover is established, their essential needlessness and necessity of existence must be proven on the basis of premises which are also used in the third group of arguments.

Nevertheless, the other arguments have advantages which the third group lacks, that is, the arguments of the third group merely establish that there is an existent which is the Necessary Existent, and other demonstrations are needed to establish that He has knowledge, power, wisdom, and even that He is not a body and is distinct from the material world.

Here, it shall suffice to mention some of the arguments of the third group; and first, to prove the Necessary Existent and then to explain His attributes.

## **First Demonstration (The Argument from Contingency)**

One of the famous philosophical demonstrations to establish the Necessary Existent is a demonstration called 'the demonstration from contingency' (burhan- e imkan) or 'the demonstration from contingency and necessity,' and it is formed from four premises:

1. No contingent existent essentially has necessary existence, that is, when the intellect considers its whatness, it sees it as equal in relation to existence and nonexistence, and disregarding the existence of the cause, the necessity for its existence will not be seen.

This premise is self-evident (badihi) and without need of demonstration, for its predicate is obtained through the analysis of the concept of its subject, and the assumption of being contingent is the same as the assumption of lacking necessity of existence.

2. No existent becomes real without the attribution of necessity, that is, until all the ways of nonexistence to it are blocked, it will not come into existence. As the philosophers say, 'That which is not made necessary is not brought into existence' (al-shay' ma lam yajib lam yujad).

In other words: an existent will be either essentially a necessary existent, having necessary existence by itself, or it will be a contingent existent, and such existents only come about when necessitated by a cause, and their existence reaches the level of necessity, that is, it comes to shed the possibility of nonexistence. This premise is both certain and indubitable.

3. When the attribution of necessity is not required of the essence of an existent, there is no other alternative but that it is brought about by another existent, that is, a complete cause makes the existence

of the effect 'necessary by another' (dharuri bil-ghayr).

This premise is also self-evident and indubitable, for every attribution must be in one of two states: by itself (bil-dhat) or by another (bil-ghayr). If it is not by itself it must be by another. Hence, if the attribution of necessity required of any existent is not essential, it must derive from another existent called the cause.

4. Circles and regresses of causes are impossible. This premise is also certain and was explained in Lesson Thirty-Seven.

Given these premises, the argument from contingency may be formulated as follows: the existents of the cosmos are all brought about with the attribution of necessity by another, because, on the one hand, they are contingent existents, and do not have the attribution of necessity essentially (the first premise).

On the other hand, no existent occurs without the attribution of necessity (the second premise), hence, they must be necessary by another, and the existence of each of them is required by a cause (the third premise).

Now if we assume that their existences are required by each other, this implies a circle of causes, and if we assume that the chain of causes extends infinitely, this implies an infinite regress of causes. Both of these are invalid and impossible (the fourth premise). Hence, there is no alternative but to accept that at the head of the chain of causes there is an existent which by itself necessitates existence, that is, which is the Necessary Existent.

This demonstration may also be formulated in another version which does not require the fourth premise (the invalidity of the circle and regress), as follows. For the set of contingents, no matter how imagined, necessity will not be realized in any of them without the existence of the essentially Necessary Existent.

In conclusion, none of them comes into existence, for none of them by itself possesses necessity so that the others could derive necessity from it. In other words, the necessity of existence in every contingent existent is a borrowed necessity, and as long as there is no essential necessity, there will be no room for borrowed necessities.

This can also be formulated in a more concise version: an existent is either essentially a necessary existent or is a necessary existent by another, and every necessary existent by another unavoidably will ultimately lead to an essentially necessary existent: 'Everything which is by another ultimately leads to that which is essential.' Hence, the essentially Necessary Existent is established.

## **The Second Demonstration (Ibn Sina's Demonstration)**

The second demonstration is originally close to the first demonstration, and it is formulated with three premises:

1. The existents of this cosmos are contingent existents, and they do not essentially require existence, for if one of them were the Necessary Existent, the argument would be finished. This premise is like the first premise of the previous demonstration, with one subtle difference. In the previous demonstration the stress was on the necessity of existence and the denial of it for contingents, while here the stress is on existence itself.

2. To become existent every contingent existent is in need of a cause that brings it about. This premise is another way of putting the point that every effect is in need of an efficient cause, which was proven in the discussions of cause and effect, and it is like the third premise in the previous demonstration, with the same difference as was indicated.

3. It is impossible for there to be a circle or regress of causes. This is the very same as premise four in the previous demonstration.

Given these premises the demonstration may be formulated as follows. Every existent in this world, which is assumed to be a contingent existent, needs an efficient cause. It is impossible for the chain of causes to proceed infinitely, or for there to be a circular relation among them. Hence, the chain of causes unavoidably leads to an ultimate cause at the beginning, which itself are without need of a cause, which is the Necessary Existent.

This demonstration was formulated by Ibn Sina (Shaykh al-Ra'is) in his *Isharat* as follows. An existent is either the Necessary Existent or a contingent existent. If it is the Necessary Existent, the point is proven, and if it is a contingent existent, it must ultimately lead to the Necessary Existent in order to avoid a circle or regress. He considered this to be the firmest demonstration and called it the 'Demonstration of the Sincere' (*burhan-e siddiqin*).

What is outstanding about this version is that not only does it not require recourse to the attributes of creatures and a demonstration that they have a temporal origin or motion or some other attribute, it does not require a demonstration of the existence of creatures at all, for the first premise is propounded in the form of an assumption.

In other words: the procedure of this demonstration turns upon nothing more than the acceptance of the principle of entified existence, which is self-evident and indubitable. Only those who would deny the most self-evident and most intuitive things, including the presentational knowledge of themselves, who would absolutely never accept the existence of any existent, not even their own existences, thoughts and words would deny this principle!

However, to those who accept the principle of entified existence it will be said: entified existence is either necessary existence or contingent existence, and there is no third alternative. In the first case, the Necessary Existent is proven, and in the second case, unavoidably one must accept the existence of the Necessary Existent because contingent existents need a cause and in order to avoid a circle or regress, the chain of causes must end with the Necessary Existent.

In these two demonstrations, as was noted, there is recourse to the contingency of existents, which is an intellectual attribute for their whatnesses, and by means of this attribute their need for the Necessary Existent is established.

Hence, in a sense each may be considered to be a burhan limmi (demonstration from cause to effect), as was explained in the previous lesson. However, reliance of the discussion upon whatnesses and whatish contingency is not entirely in keeping with the position of the fundamentality of existence.

For this reason, Sadr al-Muta'allihin has formulated another demonstration which has its own particular advantages, and this he calls the 'Demonstration of the Sincere,' and he considered the demonstration of Ibn Sina to possess a mere resemblance to the Demonstration of the Sincere.

## **The Third Demonstration (Mulla adra's Demonstration)**

This demonstration was formulated by Sadr al-Muta'allihin on the basis of the principles of transcendent theosophy (hikmat-e muta'aliyyah) which he himself had propounded, and he considered it to be the firmest demonstration and most deserving of the name 'the Demonstration of the sincere.'

This demonstration has been formulated in a number of different versions, but it seems that the strongest of them is the one he himself formulated, whose presentation is composed of three premises:

1. The fundamentality of existence and the respectivalness of whatness, which was proved in Lesson Twenty-Seven.
2. The possession of levels for existence and its particular gradation (tashkik- e khass) between cause and effect, such that the existence of the effect does not have independence from the existence of its existence-granting cause. [1](#)
3. The criterion of the need of the effect for the cause is the being relative and dependence of its existence on the cause; in other words, it is the weakness of the level of its existence, and as long as there is the least amount of weakness in an existent it will necessarily be an effect and in need of a higher existent and it will have no sort of independence from it. [2](#)

Given these premises, the Demonstration of the Sincere can be formulated in accordance with the taste of Sadr al-Muta'allihin as follows:

The levels of existence except for its highest level, which possesses infinite perfection and absolute needlessness and independence are the very relation and dependence itself, and if the highest level did not occur, neither would the other levels, because what is implied by the assumption of the occurrence of the other levels without the occurrence of the highest level of existence is that the mentioned levels would be independent and without need of it, while their existential aspect is the relation itself and poverty and need.

In addition to the fact that it possesses the advantages of the demonstration of Ibn Sina, this demonstration also has several other excellences. One is that this demonstration relies upon the concept of existence, and neither whatnesses nor whatish contingencies are mentioned. It is clear that such a demonstration is more suitable to the doctrine of the fundamentality of existence.

The second is that it does not require a rejection of the circle or infinite regress, but rather it itself is a demonstration for the incorrectness of the assumption of an infinite regress of efficient causes.<sup>3</sup> The third is that with the help of this same demonstration, not only unity, but also some of the other attributes of perfection of Almighty God may be established, as will be indicated in the appropriate place.

<sup>1.</sup> Cf., Lesson Thirty.

<sup>2.</sup> Cf., Lesson Thirty-Three.

<sup>3.</sup> Cf., Lesson Thirty-Seven

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