

[Home](#) > [Philosophical Instructions](#) > [Part 7: Theology](#) > [Lesson 67: Attributes of Action](#) > Wisdom and the Best Order

---

## Lesson 67: Attributes of Action

### Introduction

As was made clear in Lesson Sixty-Five, the criterion according to which an attribute is counted as an attribute of essence or an attribute of action is that if the concept of refers to an existence outside the essence, it will be an attribute of action, and otherwise it will be an attribute of essence.

Therefore, if we consider the concept of knowledge in such a way that it implies the existence of an external object of knowledge, it will be an attribute of action, as in verses of the following sort:

***And verily We will try you until We know which of you are mujahidin (those who struggle) and patient. (47:31)***

This verse refers to the occurrence of knowledge at a specific time, and so, the concept of knowledge contained in it bears the meaning of reference to something external to the essence, and its temporal qualification is due to the temporality of the object of knowledge.

On the other hand, if we consider the concept of an attribute of action in such a way that it does not imply an external existence, it becomes an attribute of essence, as is the case with the concept Creator which refers to the power to create.

Given this standard, we shall review several well-known attributes.

### Hearing and Seeing

These two attributes are usually considered to be attributes of essence, while it seems that according to the above-mentioned standard, they should be considered to be attributes of action, for the concepts of audition and vision still refer to an awareness of audible and visible existents, even after one divests them of material requirements such as having ears, eyes and knowledge acquired through the senses.

Their application to cases in which the objects of hearing and seeing do not have actual existence is contrary to ordinary language, although they can be so applied if they are interpreted as knowledge of audible and visible things or the ability for hearing and seeing, and the other attributes of action can be similarly interpreted.

## Speaking

Speech (kalam) in ordinary usage is a word which on the basis of convention refers to a determinate meaning, and a speaker (mutakallim) uses it in order to convey his intentions to others. This requires the possession of a larynx, vocal chords, a mouth and the exhalation of air through the vocal tract, as well as the previous existence of conventions.

No matter how we develop this concept and delete the characteristics of its instances we cannot ignore the properties of conveying a meaning to a person addressed. For example, gesticulation can also be considered a kind of speech, while it possesses none of the mentioned characteristics, and even creating a meaning in the mind of the person addressed can be considered a kind of speaking.

But, if these properties are not considered, it will not agree with common parlance ('urf). Even though philosophical and intellectual truths are not subordinate to language and common understanding, here the discussion is about the employment of concepts for divine attributes, which are defined by means of language.

It may be concluded that the concept of speaking includes the existence of the person addressed and the speech which is communicated to him, and hence it should be considered an attribute of action. However, one may interpret it as the power for speech, or as something else, so that it will also become an attribute of essence.

## Will

Another of the most difficult problems of philosophical theology is that of God's will, which has raised many differences of opinion among philosophers and sectarian differences among theologians and has brought about abundant debates and discussion, a complete review of which requires an independent book.

On the one hand, one group considers the Divine Will to be an attribute of essence additional to the essence, while on the other hand, another group considers it to be the same as the essence itself, reducing it to knowledge of the best. Some have imagined it to be an accident of essence, like human will, which appears in the soul of man.

Others have considered it to be the first creature of God, by means of which other creatures are brought into existence. Finally, some have considered it to be an attribute of action abstracted from the plane of

action. There are other minor differences about such things as whether the Divine Will is one or many, created or pre-eternal, etc.

In order to solve this problem, first, the meaning of will should be explained precisely, and then its proper place among the attributes of essence and action should be determined and its principles and implications should be discovered.

## The Concept of Will

As was explained in Lesson Thirty-Eight, the expression will (iradah) is employed in at least two senses: one is wishing or desiring and the other is deciding to perform an action. The objects of a person's desire and affection may be objective things, but may even be beyond the range of one's power and ability, such as man's affection for the beautiful and enjoyable things of the world

***“you desire the frail goods of this world” (8:67),***

or they may be one's own voluntary actions, such as loving the good and worthy deeds which one performs, called generative will (iradeh-ye takwini), or they may be the voluntary actions of other people, such as desiring that another voluntary agent perform some deed by his own will, in which case they would be called cases of legislative will (iradeh-ye tashri'i).

However, the will to order and to establish rules and regulations are in fact cases of the will to legislate rather than legislative will, and should be considered a kind of generative will. (Take note.)

## The Reality of Will

Will, in the sense of wanting and loving, are psychic qualities of animals and men, but in the sense abstracted from this, it denotes aspects of the existence of immaterial things which may also be related to completely immaterial entities and to God, the Supreme.

As was previously indicated, love can be considered one of the essential attributes of God, which is basically directed toward the essence itself, and subordinate to this, to the effects of the essence in that they are good and perfect. Therefore, in this sense will can be considered an attribute of essence the reality of which is nothing but divine love, which is identical to His essence.

Will in the sense of making decisions is a passive quality in souls attached to matter, or one of the actions of the soul, and in either case, it is a created thing in the soul, originating in idea and assertion and desire. Such a thing cannot be attributed to completely immaterial things, especially not to God, the Supreme, for the sacred divine Being is free of the occurrence of accidents and psychic qualities.

However, it can be considered to apply to God, the Supreme, as a relational attribute of action (such as creation, providence, and ordering, etc.) which is abstracted by comparing the actions of creatures to the

divine essence in that He possesses love of good and perfection. Since one of the terms of the relation possesses temporal and spatial qualifications, these qualifications can be considered to apply to the Divine Will, as well, from the viewpoint of the objects of the will. As was explained in Lesson Sixty-Six, expressions such as:

***“His command when He wills a thing is only to say to it, Be, so it is” (36:82),***

bear the same sort of meaning as was given for knowledge of created things.

It is to be concluded that divine generative will can be taken in two senses: one in the sense of love directed toward His own voluntary actions, which is a single pre-eternal essential attribute identical to the essence, whose relation to actions and objective entities is like essential knowledge, which basically is of the sacred divine essence, and subordinately of His effects and manifestations.

Likewise, divine love basically is directed toward His own sacred essence and subordinately toward the effects of His existence in that they overflow from the divine goodness and perfection, and this is why it is called will.

The second sense of generative will is a relational attribute which is abstracted by comparison between divine actions and His attributes of essence, and because it is subordinate to the newness (huduth) and multiplicity of actions, temporality and multiplicity are attributed to it.

Likewise, the divine legislative will which is directed to the production of good deeds by voluntary agents, will be an attribute of essence in the sense of liking these actions because of their goodness, which is a manifestation of the goodness of the divine essence; it will be an attribute of action and be temporal in the sense of relation of legislation, which occurs in the temporal realm, by essential love.

## **Wisdom and the Best Order**

Another of the divine attributes of action is the attribute of wisdom, whose essential origin is love of goodness and perfection, and knowledge of them. That is, since God, the Supreme, loves goodness and perfection, and also is aware of the aspects of goodness and perfection of existents,<sup>1</sup> He creates creatures in such a way that they may possess as much goodness and perfection as possible. Of course, divine love is fundamentally directed to His own sacred essence, and subordinately to His creatures.

The same fundamental and subordinate relations exist among creatures, as well, that is, a creature without any imperfection other than that of being contingent and created and possessing all contingent perfections characterized by unity and simplicity, will be in the first rank of being loved and favored, and other creatures will be in the succeeding ranks according to their ontological ranks and perfections, until the level of material things is reached, where there is conflict among their ontological perfections.

On the one hand, the continuation of existents that exist at a specific time slice conflicts with the appearance of the succeeding existents, and on the other hand, the perfection of some of them depends on the transformation and obliteration of others, as the growth and development of an animal or man is obtained by means of nourishment by vegetables and some other animals. The more perfect an existent is the more favored it will be.

It is here that divine wisdom requires an order that causes the occurrence of more and higher ontological perfections, that is, the chain of material causes and effects is created in such a way that to the extent possible the maximum number of creatures partake of the best perfections. This is what is called 'the best order' (nizam-e ahsan) in the language of philosophy, and the attribute which necessitates this is called 'providence' ('inayah).

The divine sages have proved that the order of creation is the best in two ways: one is from cause to effect (limmi): divine love for perfection and goodness requires that the order of creation possess maximum perfection and goodness and that the imperfections and corruptions which are necessary for a material world and the interferences among corporeal existents be reduced to a minimum.

In other words, it can be said that if God, the Supreme, had not created the world with the best order, this would be due to the fact that He lacked knowledge of the best order, or because He did not like it, or because He lacked the power to create it, or because He was stingy. In the case of God, the Wise and Gracious, none of these assumptions is correct. So, it is proven that the world possesses the best order.

The second way is from effect to cause (inni): through the study of creation and inquiry into the secrets and wisdom and exigencies which are observed in their qualities and quantities. To the extent that human knowledge increases, awareness of the wisdom of creation also increases.

In view of divine wisdom, it becomes clear why the Divine Will is directed to specific cases, and in conclusion, the realm of things that are willed is more limited than the realm of things within divine power. This was the question which was raised at the end of the previous lesson. The answer is that only the cases within the perimeter of the best order are objects of Divine Will.

This topic will become clearer in subsequent lessons. The position of those who have claimed that the Divine Will is only directed to those things which possess exigency, and that it is exigency which limits the Divine Will, should be interpreted in this way, otherwise, exigency is not an objective and entitled thing to have an effect on the Divine Will, and the effects of an action cannot have an influence on its cause.

Also, those who say that divine power, mercy, and will are conditioned by His wisdom should be interpreted in this way; otherwise, in the sacred divine essence it does not make sense to say that there is a plurality of faculties or an interference among the attributes.

1. Cf., Lesson Thirty-Nine, in which there was an explanation of goodness and perfection

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/philosophical-instructions-muhammad-taqi-misbah-yazdi/lesson-67-attributes-action>