

Part 15: Could Allah's Knowledge be Wrong?

At the end of this discussion of fate and destiny it will not be out of place to take up the criticism made in this connection by the predestinarians and to analyze what they say

They have adduced many and varied arguments to prove their theory. The Muslim predestinarians mainly rely on the Qur'anic verses regarding fate which we have already quoted. Sometimes they cite the sayings of the Holy Prophet or the Imams in this connection.

We have commented upon the intellectual arguments advanced by them in the footnotes of our book, 'The Principles of Philosophy'. vol. III.

The most famous argument which they have advanced concerns the Knowledge of Allah.

They say that Allah knows from eternity what will happen. No event is hidden from His Eternal Knowledge.

At the same time His Knowledge is unchangeable. Any change in it will not be in keeping with His perfectness. It is not possible that anything should happen contrary to what He knows from eternity. Otherwise His Knowledge will prove to be defective, and instead of being knowledge, it will become ignorance, which is again against the perfectness of His Being.

Hence on the basis of the two premises that:

Allah knows everything; and

His Divine Knowledge is unchangeable and nothing can happen contrary to it.

It may be inferred logically, that every event in the world must take place in accordance with what He knows from eternity.

Furthermore, Divine Knowledge is active and not passive, in the sense that in the case of Allah the known springs from His Knowledge of it, and His Knowledge is not based on the known as is the case with human knowledge of the things and the events.

On this basis of Allah knew that such and such person at such and such time would commit a sin, he is bound to commit it accordingly. It will not be possible for him to behave otherwise. No power on earth can stop him from committing that sin at the appointed time. Otherwise Allah's Knowledge will prove wrong.

The world famous Persian poet Umar Khayyam says:

I drink wine; and a sound person;
Should have no objection to that;
God knew from eternity that I would;
If I don't, His knowledge would amount to ignorance.

For a man who is aware of the correct conception of fate and destiny it is easy to refute this specious argument, based on the presumption that Divine Knowledge in eternity was attached to the occurrences haphazardly; and now to ensure that the prior Divine Knowledge should not go wrong and everything should occur according to the prearranged plan, it is necessary that all events should be controlled.

To advance this argument it has been presumed that Divine Knowledge attaches to the occurrence and the non-occurrence of events independently of the system of causation, and that it is imperative to control this system and, where necessary, to curb the natural laws and the liberty of human will in order to ensure that there should be no inconsistency between the Divine Eternal Knowledge and what actually happens.

On the basis of this conception it is necessary to deprive man of his power, liberty and will so that his actions may be brought under control.

But this conception of Divine Knowledge itself is totally wrong and based on complete ignorance. It is impossible that Allah's Knowledge should attach to the occurrence or the non-occurrence of an event haphazardly and then it should be necessary to bring about any change in the firm and stable system of causation or to curb a natural law or the liberty of human will.

In this circumstance it appears to be very unlikely that the above quoted lines should be genuinely of Khayyam who was at least a semi-philosopher, Perhaps they have been wrongly ascribed to him after his death. Anyhow, if they are really his, then it may be said that he has only versified an idea in a beautiful style, but these verses do not represent his philosophy. Khayyam is known all over the world for his striking ideas and beautiful style.

The Eternal Knowledge of Allah cannot be detached from the system of causation. His Knowledge is actually the knowledge of that system, and it makes it necessary that this world should exist with its specific systems. It does not attach to the occurrence or the non-occurrence of an event direct and irrespective of its causes. The Divine Knowledge in fact attaches to the emanation of an event from its particular cause and agent. The causes and agents are varied. Some causes are natural, while some

others are conscious. Similarly some agents are free, having the power of choosing, whereas some others are not. What the Knowledge of Allah necessitates is that due effect should be produced by its due agent. It does not render it possible that the effect of a free agent should emanate from an agent not actually free.

In other words the Eternal Knowledge of Allah is the knowledge of a system. Allah knows that such and such effect will be produced by such and such cause. But all causes and the agents are not alike. Some causes are conscious and some others are not. Some agents are free and some others are not. Allah knows them as they are. It would be even better to say that they are as Allah knows them. What the Divine Knowledge requires is that the act of a free agent should emanate from a free agent and the act of a non-free agent should emanate from a non-free agent.

As we have stated earlier, man in this world has a particular sort of freedom and choice. As far as his acts are concerned, he has such potentialities as other things in existence including animals, do not have divine knowledge being the source of everything in existence, the whole system as it actually exists is based on what is known to Allah. His Eternal Knowledge attaches to human acts and deeds in the sense that He knows from eternity who will do his duty of his own will and who will commit sins of his own will. Allah's Knowledge requires that he who obeys Him does so of his own will and he who disobeys Him also does so of his own will. That is why it is said that man is free performance. He cannot help being at liberty. The Eternal Knowledge of Allah does not force anyone to commit a sin nor does it deprive anyone of his liberty as already determined by His Knowledge.

Hence both the premises mentioned above on which the criticism was based are false and do not hold good. It is true that Divine Knowledge is active and not passive. But that does not mean that man has no choice. When he commits a sin he is not compelled by an external force. He has been created free and Allah knows that when man does a thing he does it of his own free will. If he were forced to do a thing, that would have meant that Allah's Knowledge is wrong. The critic who says that Allah knew from eternity that he would drink wine, should be asked to explain whether Allah knew that he would drink it of his own will or He knew that he would be compelled by an external force to do so. Evidently what Allah knew from eternity was neither forced drinking, nor drinking simply. It was voluntary drinking that He knew. Hence Divine Knowledge would prove wrong if he drank by compulsion. The Divine Knowledge of the acts and deeds of the beings having freedom of will does not mean compulsion at all. It means just the opposite. Men must enjoy the freedom of will with which they have been endowed. He was right who said that it is height of ignorance to regard Divine Knowledge as the cause of sinning.

All this was about Divine Knowledge from the angle of its being eternal and prior to every happening. It is this aspect of Divine Knowledge which the Qur'an has called the Book, the Protected Tablet, the Pen etc.

Anyhow it should be remember that while all things in this world and its entire system of causation are known to Allah, they at the same time constitute His Knowledge also. This world and all its systems are

Allah's Knowledge as well as known to Him. Nothing can be hidden from Him. He is everywhere and with everything.

The Holy Qur'an says: ***"Wherever you turn, you are always in the presence of Allah"***. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:115)

Allah in the Holy Qur'an says: ***"We are nearer to him than his jugular vein"***. (Surah Qaf, 50:16)

"He is the First and the Last, and the Manifest and the Unseen; and He knows all things". (Surah al-Hadid, 57:3)

Thus the whole world with all its characteristics and systems is an aspect of Allah's Knowledge.

At this stage of knowledge, the known and the knowledge are identical. They are one and not two. Therefore the question of consistency or inconsistency between them, does not arise. It cannot be said that in such and such case Allah's Knowledge will be right and that otherwise it will be wrong.

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