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Part 2: Freewill and Causality in the Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

In the contemporary Islamic thought regarding the debate of causality and free will, there are two different schools:

1. The school of philosophers like Tabatabai and Mutahhari,
2. The school of usooliyyoon like Na'ini who suggested the theory of Ikhtiyar(willing), and Al-Sadr who established the theory of Saltanah(Sovereignty).

In this part of the study, I accounted the theory of Al-Sadr as a second philosophical theory conflicting with another philosophical theory of wujub (necessity) due to the following two reasons:

- Al-Sadr is a very famous philosopher in the recent era as well as having a high status among the usooliyyoon (the experts in principles of Islamic Jurisprudence).
- The rational and philosophical method used by Al-Sadr to support and prove his theory of Saltanah(Sovereignty).

Also because the source of Al-Sadr's theory, Saltanah(Sovereignty), was established by Na'ini (the main contemporary thinker in the field of principles of Islamic Jurisprudence) in his theory of Ikhtiar (willing), therefore it was important to discuss the theory of Ikhtiar as an entrance of the theory of Saltanah.

There are two main theories in contemporary Islamic philosophy that tried to solve the philosophical problem between causality and freewill in two different ways. The first theory, which is called the theory of (wujub) or necessity refers to the transcendent philosophy that was found by Sadru'l- Muta'allihin (Sadra) and expanded by later philosophers, the latest being Allama Tabataba'ei (d. 1980, 1400 AH).

The second theory, which is called the theory of (saltanah) refers to school of the martyr Al-Imam

Mohammad Baqir Al-Sadr one of the greatest contemporary Islamic philosophers and Jurisprudents.

A. The Theory of Necessity

(Sadra's theory in the interpretation of causality and its relation to human freedom)

Before explaining the theory of necessity, it is worth noting that the reason behind calling this theory the theory of necessity lies in the fact that according to this theory the relation between cause and effect is both the relation of existence and that of necessity. In other words: cause gives the effect not only existence, but it gives the effect both existence and necessity.

The dispute between Muslim philosophers and theologians on all causes on the one hand and between philosophers and modern usuliyyoon on voluntary agent cause on the other hand does not concern bringing of the effect into existence by the cause, but rather granting necessity to the effect by the cause. According to the theory of necessity, the effect not only depends on the cause for its existence, but also for its necessity.

The theory of necessity says that every possible object because of its possibility possesses essentially two equal possibilities: to be and not to be, then it is impossible for any of these two to be the truth without being first the only possible option by its cause, and being the only possible option means negation of the possibility of any other option, which means the necessity of the only possible option. Therefore the cause has to first determine the effect by making it the only possible option that is to necessitate it, and then give it existence.

Early theologians took the cause in a general sense and the mainstream of modern usuliyyoon take the voluntary agent in a particular sense just as the originator of the effect and not as the necessitating.

To give a comprehensive account of “necessity” containing its philosophical grounds in Sadra's view requires a long and broad discussion, which is beyond the scope of this short study. Here we are concerned with three subjects that we will study in the following order:

- Short explanation of the ‘Theory of necessity’ in Sadra's thought.
- An account of the hypothesis of philosophical contradiction between this theory and the principle of freewill.
- Method of philosophical solution of the above-mentioned contradiction according to Sadra and the theory of necessity.

1. Short Explanation Of The Theory Of Necessity

According to the theory of asalat al-wujud (principality of existence) everything in our mind has two concepts: The concept of Nature or Quiddity, and the concept of Existence,(e.g. we can say: water is

water and water is being, and because it is water we conceive it as a nature, and because it is being we conceive it as an existence) but in reality (in the world beyond our mind) we know that is not but one of two: either the concept of nature (e.g. water) or its being (e.g. its existence).

Sadra approved that in contrast with these two concepts in our mind that is nothing in reality (in the world beyond our mind) but the existence, and the concept of nature (e.g. water) is just a concocted mental imagination, he concluded that the principality and reality is exclusively for the existence. According to that natures (quiddities) are conventions of our mind and what is really there is just “being” or “existence”.¹

In other words, among all concepts and mental images, the only concept that can describe the external world and can genuinely represent the reality outside our mind is the concepts of “being”. Therefore, the key to know the universal laws and rules that can govern the universe is the universal principle of asalat al-wujud (The reality or the principality of existence). The general structure of philosophical knowledge of the world is based on this principle, from which the universal philosophical laws governing the world have to be derived.

The most important philosophical principles of cosmology derived from asalat al-wujud are as follows:

A. Unmixed graduation (hierarchical structure) of being (tashkikul wujud)

According to asalat al-wujud, the differences that we understand among things in the world are all rooted in their “being” and can have no root other than the reality of being. Therefore, all things in the world differ in “being”, just as they share ‘being’.

The reality of being [in contrast to the concept of being] is a reality that admits differences and multiplicity of types, and every type of being is a level of being which is different from other beings in intensity or weakness, and unlimitedness or limitedness.

Different types of being differ from each other in that one is weaker, that is, more dependent and more needy of causes and conditions to be existed and the other is more intense, that is, more independent and less needy. The differences of being in degrees of dependence on and need for the other which is the same as the difference in weakness and intensity is the source for all differences and varieties in the world.

The peak and the most intense being is the self-independent being, which is absolutely free from need, that is, the eternal self-necessary being. The self-necessary being has no need for any cause or condition and is the absolute being and enjoys the ultimate existential actuality. All other levels of being are manifestations of self-necessary being, on whom they entirely depend. Despite its total dependence on the self-necessary being, the first being created by the self-necessary being has no need to other levels of being and therefore in relation to other levels of being enjoys independence, freedom from need and absoluteness.

Other levels of being depend for their existence on self-necessary being and on the first creatures as well, since through it the grace of being extends hierarchically to other levels. Thus, the highest being is the completely actual independent absolute self-necessary being and the lowest is the being that has nothing other than potentiality of being – Which is actually yet to be created–.

In his *Mabda' wa Ma'aad*, Mulla, Sadra says:

‘And beings do not differ in their essence except in intensity and weakness, perfection and imperfection, priority and post priority. But they subordinately differ because of those notions that are subordinate to them, i.e. their different natures (He means that according to the theory of primality of existence *Asalatul-Wujud* beings are not but existence, therefore there is no any essential deferent between them. Nevertheless they are subordinately deferent by their natures i.e. their notions’ (1976, p. 194).

Also in the discussion in potentiality and actuality in his *Al-asfar al-Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah*, Mulla Sadra says:

‘Surely the thing, which is liable to movement, is potential either in this aspect or in all aspects, and the mover is actual either in this aspect or in all aspects. Inevitably, those aspects of actuality will end in something, which is actual in all aspects; otherwise it would lead to vicious circle or infinite regress. Similarly, those aspects of potentiality will end in something, which is potential in all aspects except in being potential, since it has this potentially in actuality and this is what makes it distinguishable from absolute nothingness. So it is proved that there are two sides for the being: one side is the first real and the absolute being, May His name be glorified, and the other side is the *materia prima*. The former is absolutely good and the latter is bad and has nothing good except subordinately. It is subordinately good; because it is the potentiality for all beings, in contrast nothingness, which is absolutely bad’ [2](#).

B. Independent being and dependent being

According to what was said earlier, the difference among beings is the difference in levels and degrees of existence starting with the self-necessary being and ending with the potential being.

Reflection on the reality of “being” leads to the conclusion that apart from self-necessary being which itself is “the reality of being” and the peak of hierarchy of beings, other levels of beings have no reality other than belonging and relation to self-necessary being. Anything apart from the divine essence is nothing other than relation and belonging to him.

Therefore, the universe of being consists in an independent and self-necessary being; other levels of being are His manifestations and belongings. Manifestations and belonging of necessary being or levels of dependent beings have no being without relation to the necessary being. If someone thinks that in addition to the source of the being which is the self-necessary there are or may be other things that have reality more than belonging and relation to self-necessary being he has made a mistake and has not understood the reality of being and *asalat al-wujud*.

The being which essentially and by itself deserves existence is the self-necessary being which is the reality of being itself. From this necessary being, another being emerges which is His Amr (command) and is nothing other than relation to and dependence on him. This relational (dependent) and command-based being is just one, since it is originated by the Absolute One, it is not more than one (“and our command is not but single” – the Qur’an, chapter.54, verse.50), and since Divine grace is infinite and all relational (dependent) beings are simply relation (dependence), they have infinite degrees, each degree belongs to the upper one, and all of them (all degrees of relational (dependent) beings) are belonging and have pure relation to the One necessary being. Mulla Sadra says:

‘O, you who are seeking for the truth! The truth has appeared from this account that you have heard: the reality of being because of its simplicity and having no nature, no constituent and no limiting part, is the necessary being itself that appropriates ultimate and infinite perfection, since every other level of being lower than that level in intensity is not absolute reality of being.’ [3](#)

Else where he says:

‘Therefore, the effect by itself, since it is effect, has no reality other than pertaining and dependence and has no meaning other than being effect and subordinate, without having an essence subject to these meanings, as the absolutely originating cause has no essence and reality other than being the principle and source of everything and all relations and dependence go back to him.

So if it is proved that the chain of beings –including both causes and effects– originates from an essence which is a simple luminous primary existential reality free from multiplicity, deficiency, contingency, short coming and unclarity, free from anything accidental or additional to Him, internally or externally, and it is also proved that He is gracious by Himself and luminous by His reality and illuminating heavens and earth by His entity and the source of the universe of creation and command by His existence, the conclusion is that all beings have the same origin and are of the same kind which is reality and the rest is his affairs. He is the essence and the rest is His names and attributes. He is the principle and the rest is His states and affairs. He is the being and the rest is His aspects and features.’ [4](#)

C. Cause and effect

From what has been said before, the concepts of causation, cause and effect become clear. Cause is an independent being which has no need for its effect, originating and necessitating the effect. Effect is a totally dependent being which is nothing other than relation to and dependence on its cause and has no identity (i.e. independent reality) other than this. Causality is not apart from the essence of the effect and the cause. The essence of cause in the context of influence and origination is its causality and the effect itself is nothing other than causality in the context of receptivity.

In a mental analysis, there are three concepts:

1. The cause, i.e. the originator

2. The effect, i.e. the originated

3. The causality, i.e. the origination.

These three concepts can only be separated by a mental assumption or metaphor. They are not separable from each other even in the mind and with an intellectual analysis, except in an intellectual metaphor. In another word: these three concepts are not separable from each other. Any separation is an intellectual construction for the purposes of understanding and not a statement about their reality.

Cause, causality and effect are interrelated concepts that are not detachable from each other neither in reality nor in our understanding. Mulla Sadra says:

‘The effect by itself is a simple thing like the cause by itself and that is when the attention is limited to them. When we abstract the cause from whatever does not bear on its causation and influence, that is, when the cause is considered as such and when we abstract the effect from whatever does not bear on its cause it becomes clear and certain that what is called as effect has no reality other than the reality of its originating cause so the intellect cannot refer to the entity of effect disregarding the entity of its originator.

Therefore, the effect by itself has no reality in its cause except that it is dependent and relational and has no meaning other than being an effect a-subordinate without having an essence exposed to those meanings, just as in the case of the absolute originating cause being principle, source, origin and followed is the same as its essence.’ [5](#)

Causality in the way explained above implies certain principles and rules, whose denial would be equal to the denial of the principle of causality itself. The first principle implies that there is a necessary relation between cause and effect and that the cause necessitates the effect. Mulla Sadra says:

‘Having proved that nothing contingent comes into existence without something making its existence outweighing its nothingness and does not become annihilated without something making its nothingness outweighing its existence, so both sides have to be preponderated by an external cause, now we say: that preponderator will not be preponderator unless its preponderance reaches the level of necessity.

Therefore, unlike what most theologians have thought if the preponderance caused by an external cause does not reach the level of necessity it will not be sufficient for the existence of the contingent, because as long as the contingent conveys both possibilities it will not exist. Is this not the case that if its existence is not made necessary by something else both its existence and non-existence would be possible, so no side is determined and it would still need something to preponderate either existence or non-existence.’ [6](#)

In this way, Mulla Sadra takes the principle of necessitation of effect as being a result of the principle of causality itself and consequently its denial to be identical with the denial of causality, because the

principle of causality is based on need of the contingent for a cause that puts an end to the state of equality of both existence and non-existence, and as long as the cause does not necessitate its effect, it has not removed the state of equality.

Principles such as (impossibility of separation of the effect from its cause) and (necessity of resemblance of cause and its effect in their generic reality) are some other important principles derived from the principle of causality.

On the basis of *asalat al-wujud*, to conclude the above-mentioned principles from the principle of causality is more obvious and more decisive. For example, to draw the necessary relation between cause and effect from the principle of causality on the basis of *asalat ul-wujud* a little reflection is enough to understand the concept of causality and necessity of originating effect by cause.

According to *asalat al-wujud* necessity is an inevitable implication of 'being' and all its levels, states and belongings. The essence of the first cause and whatever is created by it is being and necessity. The reality is nothing but the existence and the existed things are one of the two: either the essence of the existence itself that is the necessary existence, which is both self-subsistent, and the first cause, or the dependent existence, which is the dependence itself.

Dependence on the self-subsistence is the essence of effect and also causation, influence generosity and graciousness of the first cause is its essence, so the necessity of the existence of the effect is the same as the essence on the one hand, and the same as the essence of the cause on the other hand. According to this fact, cause necessarily and essentially requires creation of effect and effect also necessarily and essentially requires dependence on cause and creation by cause. Thus, the principle of necessity of creation of effect by cause is a necessary and inevitable result of the principle of causality.⁷

Another important philosophical law, which is derived in the light of causality from *asalat al-wujud*, is the problem of (criterion of need for a cause). This problem is one of the supreme problems discussed in Islamic philosophy and is exclusive to Islamic philosophy. Muslim theologians take non-eternity (*huduth*) as the criterion of need for cause, that is, they believe the reason for having need for a cause is non-being and then coming to be. Since the existence is preceded by non-existence, there must be a cause that led to this transition from nothingness into being.

Muslim philosophers prior to Mulla Sadra developed strong arguments against the theory of theologians and proved that the non-eternity cannot be the reason for need, because it is possible to suppose a being which is eternal and at the same time in need of cause on which it eternally depends.

Philosophers before Sadra held that the criterion is the contingency. In another words, the main reason for having need for a cause is the fact that the being by itself possesses no necessity for existence and no necessity for non-existence and has equal relation to both existence and non-existence.

This logically results in the necessary relation of effect to cause, because as mentioned above as long as the main reason of need for cause is contingency (non- necessity of existence and non- necessity of

non-existence), what the cause of existence has to grant the effect is necessity of existence and what the cause of nothingness has to grant is the necessity of nothingness.

Mulla Sadra in his excellent studies viewed the theory of his predecessors imperfect and appropriate for the universe of natures. In his studies, he proved that when we consider the relation between nature of something and existence or non-existence the view of previous philosophers is true, because nature of a contingent being has equal relation to both existence and non-existence and none of them is necessary for it. Therefore, to become existent and non-existent it needs a cause that grants necessity of existence or necessity of non-existence to it.

However, according to *asalat ul-wujud* and subjectivity of nature, what is created by the cause is the existence of effect. Existence has no equal relation to existence and non-existence, so the view of previous philosophers cannot be true. Therefore, the criterion of need of being of effect for cause is not the equal relation of existence and non-existence to the existence of effect or contingency. The criterion is (existential poverty) or in other words (dependence or relationality of existence). If we reflect on the existence of effect we will find it dependent and subordinate. This dependence and non-self subsistence have made the effect in need of the cause. Therefore, need for cause is the same as the essence of effect and identified with its existence.

As mentioned earlier, the essential dependence of effect on its cause results in the necessary relation between cause and effect. According to this philosophical analysis, the essence of effect is inseparable result and outcome of the essence of cause and impossibility of separation of effect from cause is another expression of (necessitation of effect) by cause.

2. An Account of Hypothesis of Philosophical Contradiction Between The Theory of Necessity and Freewill

Early theologians and modern *usooliyyoon* who seriously oppose the theory of necessity or necessitation of effect by cause or in other words the necessary relation of cause and effect take this theory in conflict with freewill and believe that even if we accept its truth in respect of non-voluntary causes, it cannot be accepted in respect of voluntary causes, because voluntariness of an act in voluntary causes contradicts necessity of that act and since voluntariness of acts in voluntary causes is admitted necessity of effect in voluntary causes must be wrong.

To explain the alleged philosophical contradiction between the theory of necessity and freedom or free-will in the case of voluntary agents we will clarify the main point of contradiction analysing briefly two sides of the alleged conflict:

A. Causality

If we limit the principle of causality to need of effect in its existence for a cause and consider the effect as something that depends in its existence on the originator there seems no contradiction between

causality and freewill, because in the first sight it seems possible to have something dependent on something else without any necessary relation between them. This means that cause would have equal relation to existence and non-existence of its effect and effect would remain contingent and unnecessary. This type of relation between voluntary cause and effect is in accordance with the viewpoint of early theologians and modern usooliyyoon. In this way, there would be no contradiction between causality of a voluntary agent and his freedom and free will.

However, as discussed earlier, causality in the way presented by philosophers such as Mulla Sadra cannot be limited to the existential relation between cause and effect. It rather involves necessary relation as well. Existence and necessity of the effect are not separable. Cause cannot bring the effect into existence without necessitating it; otherwise it would lead to groundless preponderance and we know that impossibility of such preponderance is the basis of the principle of causality.

The core of the alleged conflict between causality and freewill is the very necessitation of effect by cause. It has been assumed that if the existence of effect is preceded by necessity of existence there would remain no place for freewill. In other words, freewill or freedom is only possible when the effect has the possibility of both being originated and not originated by the cause. Necessitation of effect is equal to determinism. And contingency and freewill in one side and necessity and determinism in another side are not separable from each other.

B. Freewill

There are three elements involved in every voluntary (free) act:

1. Prerequisites of willing the act
2. Willing the act
3. The act itself

There are two relations between these three: the relation between 1 and 2 and between 2 and 3.

It is usually assumed that after the completion of all factors bearing on the existence of voluntary act its existence becomes necessary as soon as the agent wills it. Thus, there is a necessary relation between willing the act and the act itself.

Not only there is not conflict between this necessary relation (between act and will of the agent) and freewill, but also there can be no freewill without this necessary relation. To suppose that there can be will of agent and all requisites without having the act would contradict the free-will and power of the agent. For the same reason, it seems that the dispute between philosophers and modern usooliyyoon (and also some early theologians) mostly concerns the first relation, i.e. the relation between prerequisites of willing the act and willing the issuance of act from the voluntary agent and not the relation between act and the will.

Modern usooliyyoon and some early theologians believe that if relation between willing the act in the voluntary agent and its prerequisites is necessary there would be no free-will and it would result in absolute determinism.

In any case, the debate between the philosophers and their opponents on the necessary relation of cause and effect can be conceived in both aspects of the relation of a voluntary act to its prerequisites, i.e. the relation of the essence of act and will of the agent and the relation of will of the agent and prerequisites of its existence.

Among modern usooliyyoon, Mirza Na'ini (d.1935, 1355 A.H) distinguished four main elements in a voluntary act:

1. Prerequisites of will
2. Will (iradah)
3. Decision (ikhtiyar)
4. Essence of the act

He meant by ikhtiyar (decision) the instant movement of the soul towards the act (the embarking of the soul on the act) and took it as a result of iradah, will⁸.

Mirza Na'ini takes the first two elements to be involuntary subject to the necessary relation of cause and effect, but he takes the third element, i.e. ikhtiyar which sits in between will and the act to be outside the domain of cause-effect necessity. He takes this to be the key point in voluntariness of act. ⁹

In any case, for Muslim philosophers, especially for Mulla Sadra, the relation of a voluntary act to its prerequisites (iradah (will) or ikhtiyar) and the relation of iradah (will) to its prerequisites is a relation of necessity and the principle of necessary relation of cause and effect is exceptionless. Mulla Sadra says:

'The criterion for willingness (voluntariness) is to have the will as the cause for the act or non-act. And surely a willing agent is the one that if he wills he act and if he does not will he does not act, even if the will [itself] is necessitated by itself or by the other or is impossible by itself or by the other'. ¹⁰

Modern usooliyyoon believe that the relation between voluntary act and its prerequisites is by no means a necessary and determined one and that the cause-effect necessity does not include the relation between the voluntary act and its prerequisites. Therefore, even if all prerequisites of a voluntary act were available the act still would not be necessary to be issued by the voluntary agent and it still remains contingent. This contingency or the possibility of acting and not acting or the equal relation of the agent to act and non-act is the core of will and voluntariness in a voluntary agent.

Na'ini says:

'If you say: is the fourth idea on which you built al-amr bayn al-amrayn (the state between two states) and the negation of determinism and made it something between the will and the movement of the muscles contingent or necessary? No way to the last one, and on the first is its cause voluntary or non-voluntary? The first one results in infinite series, and the second one results in determinism. I would say: No doubt, it is created and contingent, but it is the ikhtiyar itself, an act of the soul and the soul itself bears on its existence, so there is no need for a necessitating cause whose effect is never detached from it, because causality of this type is only there for non-voluntary acts'¹¹

Some modern usooliyyoon have noticed a problem here and tried to solve it. The problem is that if after completion of all prerequisites of a voluntary act including the will itself the act still remains unnecessary (i.e. possible to be or not to be) it would imply denial of power and will of the agents since the will of the agent would have no role in the emergence of the act and origination of the act falls out of agent's power. Therefore, if ikhtiyar is taken to mean contingency and unnecessary of existence and non-existence it would imply negation of ikhtiyar.

To respond to this problem usooliyyoon have distinguished between two types of necessity:

- a. The necessity prior to ikhtiyar, i.e. the necessity which is source of decision or in other words necessity of cause of ikhtiyar.
- b. Necessity after ikhtiyar, i.e. the necessity whose source is ikhtiyar or in other words the necessary relation between ikhtiyar itself and its effect: the voluntary act. They maintain that the former is logically in conflict with ikhtiyar and they reject it (i.e. the necessity prior to ikhtiyar) but not only they accept the latter, but also they take it to be necessary, because there will be no ikhtiyar without it and there is no conflict between necessity which is caused by ikhtiyar and the ikhtiyar itself.

3. Philosophical Solution Of Contradiction Between (Necessitating Causation) And (Free-Will) According To Sadra And The Theory Of Necessity

The solution relies on three main points:

- a. To distinguish between necessity and determinism and between contingency and free-will. According to Sadra, critics of the theory of necessity have failed to distinguish between ikhtiyar (free-will) and contingency or between determinism and necessity and therefore they have thought that necessary relation of cause and effect would lead to determinism, so to deny determinism which is against our intuition and rational arguments one has to deny the theory of necessity. However, necessity does not imply determinism and has no conflict with ikhtiyar (free-will), just as contingency does not mean ikhtiyar (free-will) and entails not voluntariness of the act.

Necessity and contingency are two mental concepts that are abstracted by mind from the relation between the thing and existence, while determinism and free-will are two real qualities attributable to the act and existing outside of the mind.

Acts of a voluntary agent are characterised as necessary whether or not they are voluntary, because if the voluntary agent is a self-necessary existent (i.e. God) his acts also are necessary and if he is self-contingent he and his acts are necessary by the other. Therefore, voluntariness does not imply contingency, just as necessity does not imply determinism.

b. The reality of free-will and freedom consists in choosing out of consent and not under an external force imposing a disagreeable choice. Accordingly, every act arising from agent's consent that is not chosen because of an imposing external factor is a free and voluntary act. Therefore, the main criterion for voluntariness is not contingency or possibility; rather it is the consent of the agent and lack of an imposing external factor.

Mulla Sadra says:

'When the source of originating something is knowledge and will of the agent, whether knowledge and will are the same or different and whether knowledge and will are the same as the essence of the agent in the case of God or different in other cases, the agent is voluntary and the act is issued from the agent because of his will, knowledge and consent. Such agent is not called by the public or by the elite "involuntary agent". Neither its act is said to be issued out of determinism, though it is necessarily issued from the agent out of his will and knowledge'. [12](#)

What was mentioned above was concerning the criterion of voluntary (free) act. The criterion for qualifying a voluntary agent as a free agent is that whenever he wills he acts and whenever he does not will he does not act. According to this definition, it makes no difference whether the agent necessarily or unnecessarily wills, because truth of conditional proposition is compatible with the necessity of the condition or the conditioned. Therefore, although will of the agent is subject to the principle of necessary relation of cause and effect and its realisation or non-realisation is necessary, the agent is still voluntary and enjoys complete freedom.

When the voluntary killer fires a shot and kills a man we describe his action as a free action although his will or decision was necessitated by prerequisites, because the freedom of his action depends on his satisfaction and pleasure which is manifested through his will, and it does not contradict the necessity of will and its prerequisites.

Mulla Sadra rejects the theologians' definition of the free agent as the one who may act or not (possibility of alternative). This definition implies the possibility of voluntary act. He says:

'There are two well-known definitions for power, al-qudrah (freedom or willingness): First, possibility of act and its opposite, i.e. non-act, and second a state for the agent in which he acts if he wills and does not act if he does not will. The first interpretation belongs to theologians and the second to philosophers'. [13](#)

He also says:

‘The criterion for willingness (Freedom) is to have the will as the cause for the act or non-act. And surely a willing agent is the one that if he wills he acts and if he does not will he does not act, even if the will [itself] is necessitated by itself or by the other or is impossible by itself or by the other’. [14](#)

c. A voluntary act is one, the existence of which derives from the free-will of the agent but free-will itself is voluntary in essence, that by definition. Voluntariness of free-will is not separable from it, though the free-will may be caused by causes which are the origins of the necessity of its existence. In other words, the fact that ikhtiyar (free-will) itself is governed by the principle of necessary relation of cause and effect and its existence is necessitated by its cause does not turn it into non-ikhtiyar (non-freewill)...Ikhtiyar (free-will) is ikhtiyar (free-will) by definition, whatever its cause might be and however it is issued from its cause.

On the basis of the above three points, there is no conflict between free-will and the principle of necessity. Although the act of the voluntary agent is subject to the principle of necessity and the will of the agent becomes necessary after the completion of prerequisites, the act of the voluntary agent is free because it derives from his will.

Objections on the theory of necessity

a. This theory is counter-intuitive in feeling that both sides of the act even after the completion of all prerequisites are still equal to us as voluntary agents. We feel no necessity. This can be replied by saying that it is indeed an essential feature of ikhtiyar (free will) that at no stage the agent feels compelled or forced from outside, but this does not mean that his decisions are made arbitrarily and are not subject to any rational rules.

b. Saying that our feeling of equality between both sides of the act is indeed an essential feature of free will (ikhtiyar), doesn't solve the problem that is the contrast between free will and necessity, if our feeling of equality is right then both sides of act must be equal for us, but it is opposing the necessity of the action. On the other hand if the necessity is ruling our action then the equality of the both sides action or non-action is really incorrect.

c. If our will and decision and all prerequisites are subject to the principle of cause-effect necessity how can we justify Divine reward and punishment. This very known objection is asserted by Imam Fakhr Al Deen Al Razi [15](#)

The answer to this is that in any case our acts are voluntary and this is rationally enough to make Divine reward and punishment just. There is no evidence in our reason or conscience that demands ikhtiyar (free will) itself must be voluntary.

The other way to answer is to say that voluntariness of acts depends on their emergence from a voluntary agent (an agent that has ikhtiyar –freewill), but voluntariness of ikhtiyar (freewill) is essential and cannot be removed. Even if a superior cause originates ikhtiyar (free will) it cannot remove its

voluntariness. Thus, ikhtiyar (free will) is ikhtiyar (free will), even if it is necessarily brought into existence by its cause. The essence of ikhtiyar (free will) (like any other thing) neither can be given to it nor can it be negated. Therefore, a voluntary act is voluntary, though all its prerequisites are governed by the principle of causal necessity, and has all the characteristics of voluntary acts, such as appropriateness of reckoning and punishment.

But it can be said: although the agent does his action by his volition, since it is caused necessarily, the agent has no choice to do other option or alternative, then he is not really free and cannot be responsible for his act.

In other words, if the meaning of Ikhtiyar (free will) is selection of an option from other options facing the agent, where the selection takes place through the above cause using necessitation and causal necessitation, then the responsibility of the agent and the value of reward or punishment or appraisal or scolding will be of no use.

And if Ikhtiyar (free will) means only the prerequisites which enable the agent to choose one option among a variety of options without the special causal necessitation of a particular option (i.e. equal contingency of all options until the last instant before the existence of the act) then it entails abandoning the necessity and returning to other theories such as Na'ini or Sadr's who entirely denied the causal necessitation of act of voluntarian agent.

The causal necessitation of the voluntary act results in the offender of the criminal behaviour being dominated by the previous determinant cause which necessitates his criminal act. If the previous cause had necessitated the will for good act in the offender, decent behaviour would have been the resultant of the causal necessitation.

Now, considering this fact, we are facing one of the following two ways to either accept the causal necessitation of voluntarian act whether bad or immoral or good or moral, in which case the praise or the scolding, if any, will be directed towards the above causes and that cause has created the will for good act or bad act through causal necessitation in the agent and not towards the present agent who had no role but the accomplishment of the act. The other way is to abandon the causal necessitation of the agent's will and believe in the issue of both 'to act' and 'not to act', which results in the equal contingency of both 'to act' and 'not to act', and thus one must think of justifying the issue of the act from the agent despite the equal possibilities of both 'to act' and 'not to act'.

Tabatabai's solution to the problem:

To solve the out-world confliction between causal law and freedom, Allamah Tabatabai suggests the distinction between 'relative necessity' and 'relative contingency'.

He says:

'The effect in comparison with its full {complete} cause is relative necessary. This relative necessity is the same as causal necessity. But the effect is not relative necessary in comparison with the partial

cause like solely agent cause, because the partial cause does not necessitate the effect. When only one part of cause (partial cause) is provided without the other parts of cause, the effect will not be existed, but if the other parts of cause joined it, then it would be existed and if the other parts did not join then the effect will not be existed. Consequently man as an agent is solely a part of cause for his action, then the relation between man and his act is contingent relation, not necessary; and because of this reason man feels himself as a free agent possessing free will.’^{[16](#)}

Therefore there is no conflict between necessitation of determined causal law and man’s free will, because the necessitation of causal law is between full cause and the effect, whilst the free will is related to the man who is the agent cause which is the partial cause not full cause. The philosophical problem of the conflict between the necessitation of causal law and the free will of man as an agent cause wouldn’t be solved by the above explanation because the problem is between the prior necessity which is the source of the agent’s will and his free will, whilst Tabatabai’s explanation focused on the later necessity which derived from the agent’s will. This suggestion does not imply further than the principle of ‘there is no conflict between necessity which is caused by free will (ekhtiar) and the free will (ekhtiar) itself’ but the main problem here is the confliction between agent’s free will on one hand and the prior necessity which derived from the preconditioned cause, on the other hand.

Mutahhari’s solution to the problem:

The Martyr Allamah Mutahhari, has suggested another route to resolve this complication. The summary of his theory is as follows:

There is a variety of chains of cause and effect, dominated by causal determinism. Man has the choice to select over a variety of chains of cause and effect. Man can place himself in the route of definite chain of cause and effect that will lead to good behaviour and consequently worldly prosperity and divine rewards. And he can also place himself in the route of a chain of cause and effect that will pull him towards bad behaviour, crime and misery, and consequently worldly desolation and divine punishment. Therefore despite the comprehensiveness of the determined causal law including the behaviour of man, it is not in contradiction with the Ikhtiyar (free will) and the will power of man, since man is facing a variety of choices and options and can mark a suitable destiny through choosing any of them.

Martyr Allamah Mutahhari says:

‘The difference between man and the fire that burns, the water that drowns, the plant that grows and even the animal that walks is that none of them can choose their act and characteristic from a variety. However man can choose. He is always facing a number of acts and ways and the certitude of an act or way is only dependent upon his personal decision.’^{[17](#)}

This saying of the Martyr Allamah Mutahhari is not instrumental in solving the conflicting issue due to the fact that the complication lies within the choice and Ikhtiyar (free will) of man. The question is: is the decision or the agent’s will issued by chance and without a determining cause? If this is so, then what does the comprehensiveness of determined causal law mean? And if the comprehensiveness of the

determined causal law and the preponderance without a preponderant is definite and without an exception, then man is alongside the chain of cause and effect and he is not free in what he chooses. In fact, it is a deterministic superior cause that will push man towards choosing an option and man cannot free himself from the deterministic influence of this superior cause and therefore, the freedom of man is nothing but a delusion.

From what was said, all the descriptions and justification introduced by all the major philosophers for the theory of necessitation to solve the conflict between 'freedom' and 'causality' is not enough since with regards to the comprehensiveness and unexceptionable law of the causal necessitation and its dominance over the voluntary act over all its preparations, there will not be any more justifications for the freedom and Ikhtiyar (freewill) of man. As a philosophical predicament the problem of the freedom of man is still awaiting an acceptable intellectual and philosophical justification that can explain the accountability of man and the intellectual decency of praise and reward over scolding and punishment and criminal offence.

B. The Theory Of Sovereignty

(In the interpretation of causality and its relation to free will)

Mirza Na'ini (d.1935, 1355 ah), one of the founders of modern principles of jurisprudence, was the first one to develop and defend this theory. According to an exposition of the lectures of Na'ini (Ajjwad al-Taqrirat), this theory can be traced back to Mirza Mohammad Taqi Isfahani (d.1832, 1248 ah) the author of Hidayat al-Mustarshidin (a commentary work on Maa'lam Al-Usul). After Na'ini, our greater master, the martyr Sadr, reconstructed this theory to meet the problems raised against the theory and, in an innovative way, developed it and called it "the theory of sovereignty". In what follows we will briefly present the ideas of Na'ini and then will focus on the theory of sovereignty (authority).

Na'ini starts his argument with two common sense laws that both can be affirmed after a short reflection:

First Law: Will (iradah) of the free agent itself is not voluntary. Reflecting on the process of decision-making inside ourselves, we realise that after conceiving the act and affirming its benefit our will automatically comes into existence. Will is an inevitable outcome of conceiving the act and affirming its benefit. Na'ini says:

'Surely, all those qualities that belong to the soul such as will, conception and affirmation are not voluntary.'^{[18](#)}

In respect to God, it can be demonstrated that His will is not voluntary, because his essence is simple and free from any attribute accidental and additional to it. Therefore, 'will' can not be accidental to His essence, since it is in conflict with the simplicity of the essence. Will of God is identical with His essence and this implies that the Divine will is essential and it is self-evident that essential attributes are not

voluntary. We find in an exposition of Na'ini's lectures that:

'Surely the will that is the complete cause of the existence of the effects is the same as His essence, and self-evidently His essence, the Exalted and the Glorified is not voluntary for Him.' (Ibid)

Second Law: Human soul (mind) has complete sovereignty and authority upon its voluntary acts. In other words, man always feels very clearly that has complete power to make his decisions regarding his voluntary acts. Na'ini says:

'Surely, the soul has complete effect and authority on muscles without facing any obstacle in exercising its sovereignty.' (Ibid)

Na'ini concludes that there must be something between the will (iradah) and act. He calls this element "ikhtiyar" or "talab" [to seek]. Ikhtiyar is an act of soul that takes place after the formation of iradah (will) and its prerequisites. In this way, Na'ini argues for his position and adds that it is the only solution for the well-known objection of Fakhr al-Razi, who asserted that voluntariness of an act implies its involuntariness, since voluntariness of an act means to be caused by the will, but the will itself is determined by causes that produce it necessarily. Na'ini responds to this objection by saying that the voluntary act is not caused by the will; rather it is caused by something, which occurs between the will and act, i.e. ikhtiyar (or talab) [to seek]. Ikhtiyar is not caused by the will: it is originated from the essence of the soul (mind).

Na'ini believes that there is no necessary relation between ikhtiyar and the soul. Human soul in making ikhtiyar just needs some preponderating factor (the human soul alone is insufficient to make ikhtiyar). For this it would suffice that the agent pursues an end or goal in the act. [19](#)

There are many objections to Na'ini's theory. First, the difference between iradah (will) and ikhtiyar (to seek) is not clear. If the ikhtiyar can escape cause-effect necessity why cannot iradah do this?

Second, Na'ini has not solved the problem in relation to the Divine acts, because ikhtiyar also cannot be additional to His essence and according to Na'ini himself the Divine essence is not voluntary for God. Now the question is: Does Na'ini believe that Divine acts are not voluntary?! How does he then treat decisive and certain belief in His power and His willingness?

Third, is ikhtiyar or talab, which is the basis of Na'ini's theory on voluntariness of acts contingent or necessary? Na'ini does not accept its necessity and takes it to be contingent. Therefore, it must have equal relations to both existence and non-existence and according to the law of impossibility of preference without a preponderate; it would be impossible for ikhtiyar to exist. There is no solution for this problem in Na'ini's account.

Sadr and the theory of Sovereignty

The difficulties in Na'ini's theory led Sadr to reconstruct the theory and revive Na'ini's claim with a new argument. To develop his theory of sovereignty Sadr first mentions some premises:

First premise: Equal relation of act to existence and non-existence is a clear fact that no argument can disprove. Every one of us clearly feels that after the completion of all prerequisites he still may or may not act. This is something that we understand clearly by our intuition and no argument can bring it into question.

Second premise: Necessity of prerequisites of an act leads to denial of free-will (because it implies that the agent hasn't had any choice of his action) and philosophers' answers are not able to solve the problem. Their answers are just some linguistic justifications (such as saying that ikhtiyar means the agent's consent or that the voluntary agent is the one that acts whenever he is willing and does not act whenever he is willing to do so) that cannot solve the conflict between reality of necessity and reality of ikhtiyar.

Because the truth of this conditional proposition (the agent acts whenever he wants, and does not act whenever he doesn't want) doesn't lead to the freewill of the voluntary agent, what would that lead to is the deliverance of the agent's action or non-action from the necessary or determined influence of another factor, which is not concluded by the theory of (Necessary).[20](#)

Third premise: The principle of causality is not demonstrated (neither empirically nor rationally)[21](#).

So it cannot be said that it cannot have any exception, because it is rationally proved. This principle is indeed an intuitive and evident principle. To find the scope and extent of it we have to investigate its origins in our conscience (intuition).[22](#)

Based on the above premises, he argues that rationally any contingent being to come into existence needs an external factor. This factor can be either a cause that necessitates its existence or a voluntary agent that makes the act by his sovereignty. Having such an agent besides the act does rationally justify its existence. It is certain that the essential contingency does not suffice the existence of something. However, there might be something other than necessity that prefer the existence of a contingent being, such as sovereignty.

Definition of Sovereignty

Sovereignty or saltanah is an internal quality that we all understand. It is what we know by presence ('ilm hodhoori). To conceptualise it we can use the expression: 'The state that the agent could act or not act'. There is no necessity to act or not to act.

Sovereignty is similar to any of necessity and contingency from one aspect and different from each from

the other. Sovereignty is similar to necessity in being rationally enough to justify the existence of a contingent being and leaving no need to look for something else. The difference between sovereignty and necessity is that with necessity an act loses its equal relations to existence and non-existence and necessity of existence takes its place, while with sovereignty the contingency remains the same. Necessity consists in the fact that the agent has to act or not to act, but sovereignty means that the agent may or may not act.

In other word: With necessity after the completion of all prerequisites the agent has no choice to act or not to act and he has to do what the prerequisites result in, whereas with sovereignty despite the completion of all prerequisites the agent still remains having choice to act or not to act.

Sovereignty is similar to contingency in preserving the equal relations of the contingent to both existence and non-existence, but sovereignty is different from contingency in being rational and sufficient to justify the existence of a contingent being while with contingency the questions remains why it must come into existence.

Having known that the sovereignty of the agent may substitute necessity and suffice the existence of a voluntary act which is the question at issue, reflection on our intuition and the way voluntary acts are issued from us shows clearly that the relation between us and our voluntary acts is one of sovereignty and not necessity. We as voluntary agents find that we have sovereignty upon our acts. We clearly understand the fact that even in circumstances in which all prerequisites and conditions of a voluntary act exist, it is not necessary to act. What we find deep in ourselves is this sovereignty upon our acts. It is up to us to act or not to act and we are not compelled to do so.[23](#)

Evaluation

The theory of Na'ini as explained above seems to suffer fatal problems. It seems also that the martyr Sadr's theory of sovereignty despite its beauties and firmness still has very important problems. Of course, this does not mean that Sadra's theory of necessity is free from fundamental problems. In what follows, I will explain problems of both theories of Sadr and Sadra.

Objections on the Theory of Sovereignty

a. Granted that Sovereignty suffices the existence of the act, would that also suffice its non-existence as well? If so, the problem would be that it leads to having both the existence and non-existence of the act at the same time. And if not it would mean that the non-existence of the act must be impossible and its existence must be necessary, because non-sufficiency of sovereignty for non-existence and its sufficiency for existence damage the state of equality of existence and non-existence in the essence of the contingent and change contingency into the necessity of existence.

b. To interpret sovereignty as 'could act or not act, or may or may not act' is just a linguistic account that does not solve the real problem. In any case, with sovereignty the existence of the act as a contingent

effect either remains possible or becomes necessary. If it remains possible, the question still remains why will it exist? Why did not contingency suffice the existence of the act in the first place? If it becomes necessary the problem with the theory of necessity would repeat.

c. The principle of impossibility of preponderance without a preponderating factor has no exception because its reason has not any exception. The reason of this impossibility is that the essence of every contingent is lack of necessary existence or non-existence which is resulted in the essential equality of existence and non-existence. Therefore if the sovereignty prefers the existence of agent action it would entail its inequality which means the necessity of existence, and if it does not then the impossibility of preponderance with out a preponderating factor makes the existence of agent act impossible.

d. What is the meaning of (sufficiency) in saying that the sovereignty is sufficient for the existence of a voluntary act? Sadr, uses the expression 'could act or not act, or may or may not act'. If it means possibility of existence the problem is that this is something which has been already there, and if it means necessity the problem is that this is the same idea involved in the theory of necessity.

[1.](#) Misbah, 1984, pp. 94–95

[2.](#) (ND), Vol. 3, p. 40

[3.](#) (ND), Vol. 6, pp. 23–24

[4.](#) Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 300

[5.](#) Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 229–300

[6.](#) Ibid, Vol. 1, pp. 221–222

[7.](#) Ibid, Vol.2, pp. 229–300

[8.](#) This sequence would appear to be similar to that outlined by some European writers on theology:

A. Sufficient pre-requisites for the intention.

B. Articulation of the intention.

C. Sufficient circumstances to allow the intention to be effected.

D. Effecting of the intention (the act).

E. Consequence of effecting the act.

Human will would seem to be a major factor in the movement a to b and from c to d.

[9.](#) Al Khoei, 1933, p. 91

[10.](#) (ND), Vol. 6, p.319

[11.](#) Al Khoei, 1933, p. 91

[12.](#) (ND), Vol. 6, p. 332

[13.](#) Ibid, vol. 6, p. 307

[14.](#) Ibid, Vol. 6, p. 319

[15.](#) Al Razi, 1966, Vol. 1, p. 481

[16.](#) Tabatabai, 1998, pp. 156–158

[17.](#) Mutahhari, 1966 p.42

[18.](#) Al Khoei, 1933, Vol. 1, p. 91

[19.](#) Al khoei, 1933, Vol. 1, p. 92

[20.](#) Al Hashimi, 1997, Vol. 2, p. 32

[21.](#) In his book logical foundations of induction he criticised both empirical and rational demonstration of the principle of causality. He said: 'we suggest that if rationalism is to defend the causal principle as a priori, it should claim that the principle is an ultimate (initial) proposition in the mind, instead of saying it is logically deduced from ultimate (initial) principles' (1993, p. 48)

[22.](#) Al Hashimi, 1997, Vol. 2, p. 36 & Al Ha'iri handwriting, p. 418

[23.](#) Al Hashimi, 1997, Vol. 2, p. 37 & Al Ha'iri handwritings, pp.419–420

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