

## Part 4: Causality

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## Lesson 31: Cause and Effect

### Introduction

With the acceptance of a multiplicity of existents, the question arises as to whether or not different existents have any relation to each other, and whether or not the existence of some of them depends on the existence of others. If there is such a relation, how many kinds of dependence are there? What are the principles and characteristics of each of them?

However, if someone does not accept the real multiplicity of existents as is the apparent view of some, then there is no room for discussion about existential relations among various existents, and likewise there would be no call for discussion of the various kinds of existence and existents.

In the previous discussion, we indicated that the proof of a special gradation in existence depends upon a principle which must be established in the discussion of cause and effect. Now the time has arrived for

us to pay heed to the problems of cause and effect and to establish the mentioned principles. However, before delving into these matters some explanation must be given about the concepts of cause and effect and how the mind becomes acquainted with them.

## The Concepts of Cause and Effect

In philosophical terminology, the word 'cause' is used in a general and in a specific sense. The general concept of cause is applied to an existent upon which the realization of another existent depends, even if it is not sufficient for this realization. The specific concept is applied to an existent which is sufficient for the realization of another existent.

In other words, in its general sense, a cause is an existent without which realization of another existent is impossible. In its specific sense, a cause is an existent whose existence requires the realization of another existent.

It is noteworthy that the first sense is more general than the second, because it includes conditions and prerequisites and other incomplete causes, unlike the second sense. The explanation of complete and incomplete causes, as well as other kinds of causes, will follow. We should take note of the point that a dependent existent (i.e. an effect) is called an effect solely with respect to its aspect of dependence and in relation to the existent upon which it is dependent, not with respect to any other aspect nor in relation to any other existent.

Likewise, something is called a cause in virtue of that very aspect in which another existent depends upon it and in relation to that very existent, not with respect to any aspect or any existent.

For example, heat is an effect with respect to the aspect of its dependence on fire, and in relation to its own cause, not with respect to other aspects. And fire is called a cause with respect to the aspect in which it is a source of heat and in relation to that very heat which it produces, not with respect to another aspect.

Therefore, there is no incompatibility between a certain existent's being a cause in relation to one thing and an effect in relation to something else. And there is even no incompatibility between heat being the effect of a specific fire and being the cause of the occurrence of another fire. Likewise, there is no incompatibility between an existent's having other aspects to be explained in terms of other concepts in addition to the aspects of cause or effect.

For example, in addition to the aspect of causality, fire possesses other aspects, which are referred to by means of the concepts of substance, body, changeable, etc., none of which is the same as its aspect of causality.

## The Ways in which the Mind becomes acquainted with these Concepts

With the explanations which has been given of cause and effect it has become clear that these concepts are not whatish concepts or primary intelligibles, and it is not true that in the external world we have an existent whose whatness is being a cause or effect.

Likewise, the above concepts are not secondary logical intelligibles, for they become attributes of entified existents, and in technical terms, their characterization (ittisaf) is external. Hence, these concepts are secondary philosophical intelligibles, and the best proof of this is that in order to abstract these concepts one must compare two existents and take into consideration the aspect of the dependence of one of them on the other.

Until this is done, these concepts will not be abstracted. Thus, if one sees fire thousands of times but does not compare it with the heat it produces, and does not consider the relation between them, he will be unable to relate the concept of cause to fire and the concept of effect to heat.

Now the question arises as to how our minds basically become acquainted with these concepts and discover such a relation among existents.

Many Western philosophers have imagined that the concepts of cause and effect are obtained by observing the regular simultaneity or succession of two phenomena, that is, when we see that fire and heat always occur together or successively, we abstract the concepts of cause and effect from them, and in truth the content of these two concepts is nothing more than the regular simultaneity or succession of the two phenomena.

However, this speculation is incorrect, because in many cases two phenomena regularly occur together or successively while neither is to be counted as the cause of the other. For example, the light and heat of an electric lamp always appear together, and day and night always occur successively, but neither of them is the cause of the appearance of the other. [1](#)

It may be said that when a phenomenon is subjected to repeated experiments, and it is seen that it does not occur without another existent, in this way the concepts of cause and effect are abstracted from them. However, we know that prior to beginning an experiment, experimenters believe that there is a causal relation among phenomena, and their purpose for performing the experiment is to discover specific causes and effects, and to find out what is the cause of the appearance of some phenomenon.

So, the question arises as to how, prior to performing the experiment, they found out about the concepts of cause and effect. How did they know that such a relation exists among existents, so as to set out to discover a specific relation of cause and effect?

It seems that man discovers this relation for the first time within himself through presentational knowledge. For example, mental actions, decisions, and the acquisition of concepts and mental images are considered to be cases of things one does oneself, and that their existence depends on one's own existence, while one's own existence does not depend on them. By means of such considerations the concepts of cause and effect are abstracted and then generalized to other existents.

## Types of Cause

The dependence of one existent upon another, takes various forms. For example, the appearance of a chair, on the one hand, is dependent on the wood of which it is made, while on the other hand, it depends on the carpenter who makes it, on the knowledge and skill of the carpenter, and on his motivation for making it.

Corresponding to these, various kinds of cause may be distinguished. Since the principles of all causes are not the same, it is necessary to mention the types of cause and the terminology appropriate to them before discussing the laws of causality and the principles of cause and effect, so that when we turn to related problems mistakes are not made.

Cause in its general sense, that is, an existent upon which another existent is somehow dependent, may be classified in various ways, of which the following are the most important:

**Complete and Incomplete Causes:** A cause may either be such that it is sufficient for the realization of the effect, or such that it is not sufficient for the realization of the effect even though that effect cannot be realized without it. The former sort of cause is called a 'complete cause' and the existence of its effect depends on nothing other than it. In other words, given the existence of the complete cause, the existence of its effect is necessary. The latter sort of cause is called an 'incomplete cause' and one or more things must be added to it before its effect becomes necessary.

**Simple and Compound Causes:** From another point of view, causes can be divided into the simple and the compound. Simple causes are those such as things which are completely immaterial, such as God the Exalted, and intelligible substances (whose existence must be proven at the appropriate place). Compound causes are those as material causes which have different parts.

**Immediate and Mediate Causes:** From another point of view, causes can be divided into the immediate and the mediate. For example, the influence of a man on the movement of his own hand may be considered to be immediate, while his influence on the movement of the pen in his hand may be considered through one intermediary, and his influence on his writing as being through two intermediaries, and on the impressions produced in the mind of the reader as through several intermediaries.

**Irreplaceable and Replaceable Causes:** Sometimes the cause of the appearance of an effect is the

existence of a definite existent, and the supposed effect cannot come into existence save by means of that specific cause itself. In this case the above mentioned cause is called an irreplaceable cause.

Sometimes an effect may be brought into existence by one of several interchangeable things, so that the existence of one of them necessitates its appearance, such as heat, which sometimes occurs as a result of the electric current in a wire, sometimes as the result of motion, and sometimes as a result of a chemical reaction, and in this case it is called a replaceable cause.

**Internal and External Causes:** Sometimes the cause is such that its effect is united with it and remains interior to the existence of the effect, such as the elements which remain interior to the existence of a plant or an animal. This is called an interior cause. Sometimes the cause will be external to the existence of its effect, such as the existence of a craftsman who is external to the existence of his handiwork. This is called an external cause.

**Real and Preparatory Causes:** Sometimes the concept of cause is applied to an existent upon which the existence of an effect is really dependent, so that the separation of the effect from it is impossible, such as the causality of the self for the will and mental forms which cannot be realized or maintained apart from the self. These are called real causes.

Sometimes the concept of cause is applied to an existent which prepares the way for the appearance of its effect, although the existence of the effect does not have a real and inseparable dependence on it, as in the case of the relation of a father to his son. This is called the preparatory cause or preliminary (mu'idd).

**Exigent Causes and Conditions:** Sometimes the appearance of an effect as the result of a cause depends on the existence of a specific state and quality, in which case the cause itself is called an exigent, and the necessary state and quality are called conditions. Sometimes a thing is called a condition when it brings about the above mentioned state, as the non-being of an obstacle to an effect is called an absence condition (shart- e 'adami).

Conditions are also divided into two groups: one is the condition of the agency of the agent, that is, something without which the agent is unable to perform his action, and in fact, it perfects his agency, such as the influence of knowledge on the voluntary actions of man. The other is the condition of the capability of the recipient, that is, something which must be realized in matter in order to receive a new perfection from the agent, such as the need for a fetus to satisfy some conditions in order to receive a spirit.

**Material, Formal, Efficient and Final Causes:** Another famous categorization which is based on induction, divides causes into four groups: One is the material or elemental cause, which is the ground for the appearance of the effect and remains interior to it, such as the elements composing a plant.

The second is the formal cause, which means the form and activity which appears in the matter, and

which becomes the source of the new effects in it, such as the vegetative form. These two types of cause are internal causes, and together they compose the existence of the effect. The third type is the efficient cause (or active cause) by means of which the effect is brought about, such as someone who creates a form in matter.

The fourth type of cause is the final cause, which is the motivation of the agent for the performance of the action, such as the aim which a person takes into consideration for his own voluntary actions and performs the action for the purpose of achieving that aim. These two last types of cause are considered external causes.

It is obvious that the material cause and the formal cause are particular to material effects, composed of matter and form, and it is fundamentally problematic to apply [the concept of] cause to them.

It should be noted that the efficient cause may be described by means of two terms: one is the natural agent, which in the natural sciences is known as the efficient cause, and what is meant by it is the source of motion and change in bodies. And another is the divine agent, which is to be discussed under theology. What is meant by it is an existent which brings the effect into existence and gives it being.

The only example of it is to be found among nonmaterial objects, because natural functions are only the source of motion and change in things, and there is no natural existent which brings another existent from nothingness into being.

Among the divine creative agents, there is an agent which itself is in no need of a creator, which is called the True Agent (Fa‘il-e Haqq), and the example of it is confined to the sacred divine essence.

Another point which must be mentioned at the end of this lesson is that all of the divisions of cause with the exception of the last are rational (‘aqli) and yield mutually exclusive pairs of terms, one positive and one negative. All of them may be stated as ‘mutually exclusive disjunctions’ (qadhiyyah munfasilah haqiqiyyah).<sup>2</sup> However, the exegent and condition are really two special types of incomplete cause, and should not be considered as independent types of cause.

<sup>1</sup>. In this regard there will be a further explanation in Lesson Thirty-Five

<sup>2</sup>. A qadhiyyah haqiqiyyah (literally, a verity proposition) is to be contrasted with a qadhiyyah kharijiyyah (an external proposition). The latter depends for its truth on the existence of the referent of its subject in the external world while the former does not so depend. A qadhiyyah munfasilah is a disjunctive proposition, so a qadhiyyah munfasilah haqiqiyyah is a disjunctive proposition whose truth is independent of conditions in the external world, so that it becomes necessary that one or the other of its disjuncts be true.

# Lesson 32: The Principle of Causation

## The Importance of the Principle of Causation

As was explained earlier,<sup>1</sup> the discovery of causal relations among phenomena forms the axis of all scientific efforts, and the principle of causality, as a universal and general principle, is a pillar of all sciences which deal with the laws of real objects.

On the other hand, every scientific law owes its universality and definiteness to the rational and philosophical laws of causation and without them no universal and definite law of any science could be established. This is one of the most important ways in which science is in need of philosophy.

Some of those who deny rationalism and rational principles independent of experience, or who basically do not believe that philosophical and metaphysical problems have any scientific or definitive value, try to prove the validity of the principle of causality by way of experience.

However, as has been repeatedly indicated, these sorts of efforts are useless and sterile. In order to establish the real existence of a thing outside the self one must rely upon the principle of causation, and without it there is no way to establish things, and there will always exist room for doubt as to whether there exist things beyond perceptions and mental images which are subjected to experience.

Furthermore, the establishment of a correspondence between perceptions and external things (after accepting them), requires subsidiary laws of causation, and as long as these laws have not been established, there will be room for doubt as to whether our mental phenomena and perceptions correspond to things in the external world, so that we may come to know of external things by means of these laws.

Finally, if there is doubt about the laws of causation, then one cannot establish the universality and definiteness of the results of experience, and the attempt to establish the laws of causation by means of experience involves circular reasoning, that is, the universality of the results of experience is based on the laws of causation, and this presupposes that we wish to establish these laws by means of generalization upon the results of experience and their universality.

In other words, the use of experience is possible only in case the existence of things as subjects of experience is established and the results of experience are also definitely known. And both of these are dependent upon the acceptance of the principle of causality, before setting out to experiment, for if an experimenter does not believe in the principle of causality, and he seeks to establish this by means of an experiment, he will not be able to ascertain the real existence of things experimented, for it is in the light of this principle that we ascertain the existence of a cause (an external thing) by means of the existence

of its effect (a perceptual phenomenon), as was explained in Lesson Twenty- Three.

Furthermore, unless it is established with the help of the laws of causation that the causes of various changing perceptual phenomena indicating different dimensions and shapes correspond to material things, one will not be able to know definitely and certainly the attributes and characteristics of the objects of experience, so that one may be able to make judgments about the results of experiences related to them.

Moreover, the utmost that can be ascertained through sense experience are merely simultaneity or the regular succession of two phenomena in the realm of experience. However, we know that simultaneity or the succession of phenomena is more general than causality, and by means of them the causal relation cannot be established.

Finally, the problem remains that no matter how many times a sense experience is repeated, it cannot refute the possibility of an uncaused effect; that is, there will always remain the possibility that in the case of something not yet experienced the effect will occur without the cause, or while the cause exists, its effect does not occur, i.e., sense experience is insufficient to establish the universal and exigent relation between two phenomena, let alone establish the universal laws of causality regarding all causes and effects.

Hence, someone like Hume, who considers causality to amount to the simultaneity or succession of two phenomena, will be unable to escape from such doubts and misgivings, and for this reason this sort of philosophical problem has been declared to be unsolvable. Likewise, those who have inclinations toward positivism and who restrict themselves to the input of the senses cannot establish any universal and definite laws in any of the sciences.

Therefore, it is necessary to provide further explanation of the purport of the principle of causality, its value and its validity.

## **The Purport of the Principle of Causation**

By the principle of causation is meant those propositions which denote the need of the effect for a cause, and they imply that an effect will not occur without a cause. This matter can be expounded as a 'verity proposition' (qadhiyyah haqiqiyyah) in the following form: Every effect needs a cause.

The purport of this is that whenever an effect occurs in the external world, it will be in need of a cause, and there is no existent which can be characterized as an effect and which has come into existence without a cause. So, the existence of an effect indicates that it has been brought into existence by a cause.

This is an analytic proposition, and the concept of its predicate is obtained from the concept of its subject, for the concept of being an effect, as has been explained, consists in being an existent whose

existence is dependent upon another existent of which it is in need. Hence, the concept of the subject (effect) includes the meaning of need and dependency on a cause which constitutes the predicate of the above-mentioned proposition.

Thus, it is one of the primary self-evident propositions (*badihiyyat awwaliyyah*) and has no need for any sort of reason or proof, and merely imagining the subject and predicate is sufficient for affirming this proposition.

However, this proposition does not denote the existence of an effect in the external world, and on the basis of it one cannot establish that in the world of being there exists an existent which is in need of a cause, for a verity proposition (*qadhiyyah haqiqiyyah*) is considered to be a conditional proposition, and by itself it is not capable of establishing the existence of its subject in the external world, and it denotes no more than that if an existent with the characteristic of being an effect occurs, then it cannot but have a cause.

This principle can be presented in another way, such that it denotes the existence of an instance of the subject in the external world, as in the following form: Effects which exist in the external world are in need of causes.

This can also be considered to be a self-evident proposition, for it may be analyzed into two propositions, the first of which is the same as that mentioned above, and which is a primary self-evident proposition, and another proposition, which denotes the existence of an effect in the external world and which can be obtained by means of presentational knowledge of internal effects, that is to say, it is a self-evident proposition acquired through consciousness.

However, this proposition is unable to determine which are the instances of being an effect, and it merely denotes that there are existents in the external world which are termed 'effects' and that they are in need of causes. But which of the existents in the external world are to be termed and qualified this way, is not to be obtained from this proposition.

In any case, the recognition of instances of causes and effects is not self-evident, except for those comprehended through knowledge by presence. The others require proof. First, the characteristics of cause and effect should be determined, and with the application of these to existents in the external world the instances of cause and effect may be recognized.

Some of the Western philosophers who have not properly understood the purport of the principle of causation have imagined that its purport is that every existent is in need of a cause. Thus, according to their own speculations they have objected to the proof of the existence of God, the Exalted, based on the principle of causality.

They have objected that according to the above mentioned principle, God should also have a creator! They have overlooked the fact that the subject of the principle of causation is not simply 'existent,' but is

‘an existent effect,’ and since God, the Exalted, is not an effect, He is in no need of a cause or creator.

## **The Criterion of the Need for a Cause**

Islamic philosophers have expounded a topic under the rubric ‘the criterion of the need for a cause,’ the conclusion of which is the determination of the subject of the principle of causality, the outcome of which is as follows.

If the subject of this proposition were simply ‘existent,’ this would mean that an existent in so far as it is an existent is in need of a cause, and this would imply that every existent needs a cause. However, not only is this not self-evident, but there is no reason for it, and moreover, we have a proof against it, for the proofs for the existence of God, the Exalted, signify that there also exists an existent which is not in need of a cause. So, the subject of the above mentioned proposition must be qualified. Now we must see what this qualification is.

The mutakalimin (Muslim scholastic theologians) have imagined that the qualification is ‘huduth’ (the property of having come into existence), that is, every existent which is hadith, and which at one time did not exist and afterward came into existence, will be in need of a cause.

So, being qadim (eternal) is considered to be confined to God, the Exalted. They argued that if an existent had existed from eternity (azali) and had no previous condition of nothingness, then it would not be in need of another existent to bring it into existence.

Contrary to them, the philosophers believed that the qualification for the subject of the noted proposition is contingency (imkan), that is, every existent which essentially has the possibility of non-being, such that the supposition of its non-being is not impossible, is in need of a cause. The shortness of length of its life will not make it needless of a cause, rather the longer its life the more it will be in need of a cause, and if it is supposed that its life is infinite, then its need for a cause will also be infinite. Thus, it is not intellectually impossible for an existent which is an effect to be eternal.

However, it is to be noted that the contingency which serves to qualify the subject and is the criterion for needing a cause is the attribute of a whatness. According to the philosophers, it is the whatness which in and of itself requires no relation to existence or nothingness. In other words, its relation to existence and nothingness is equal, and there must be something else to bring it out of the state of equilibrium. This thing is the cause. For this reason, the criterion for the need for a cause is regarded to be essential contingency.

However, this position is homogeneous with the fundamentality of whatness, and one who accepts the fundamentality of existence would do better to rest his philosophical discussions on existence. This is why Sadr al-Muta’allihin (Mulla Sadra) claimed that the criterion of the need of an effect for a cause is the mode of its existence; in other words the criterion for the need of some existents for a self-sufficient

and needless existence is their ontological poverty and innate dependence.

So, the subject of the above mentioned proposition will be 'impoverished existent' (mawjud-e faqir) or 'dependent existent.' When we take into consideration the levels of gradation of existence, in which each weaker level is dependent on a stronger level, we may take the subject of the proposition to be 'the weak existent' and the criterion of the need for a cause to be the weakness of the level of existence.

By attending to the exposition of Sadr al-Muta'allihin it is found, firstly, that the causal relation is to be sought in either the existence of the cause or the existence of the effect rather than in their whatnesses. This is a corollary of the position of the fundamentality of existence. This is contrary to the position of one who imagines that the cause brings about the whatness of the effect, or that the cause attributes existence to the whatness of the effect, or in technical terms, the making (ja'l) is related to whatness or to the attribution of whatness to existence.

Both of these positions are based on the fundamentality of whatness, and with the invalidity of this position, there is no place for such views.

Secondly, being an effect and the dependency of an effect are essential to its existence. The dependent existence will never be independent and without need of a cause. In other words, the existence of the effect is itself the very dependence on and relation to the cause which provides being. On this basis entified existence may be divided into two parts: the independent and the relational. This is the exquisite subject which we mentioned previously, and it is one of the most valuable fruits of the transcendent philosophy (of Mulla Sadra).

This requires further explanation.

[1.](#) See Lesson Nine.

## Lesson 33: The Causal Relation

### The Reality of the Causal Relation

When it is said that "the cause provides the effect with existence," the mind associates this with someone who gives something to another who receives it. In this process there are three essences and two actions (fi'l).

In other words five existents are assumed: one is the essence of the cause which is the provider of existence, another essence is the effect which is the receiver of the existence, the third is that very existence which is obtained by the effect from the cause, the fourth is the action of giving which is

related to the cause, and the fifth is the action of receiving which is ascribed to the effect.

In truth, in the external world there is nothing but the entity of the cause and the entity of the effect. Moreover, to be precise, it cannot be said that the cause provides existence for the whatness, for whatnesses are respectival (i'tibari) and prior to the occurrence of the effect, its whatness does not have existence even in a figurative or accidental sense.

Likewise the concepts of giving and receiving are nothing more than mental images, and if giving existence, or creating, were a real entified thing, then it would be yet another effect and it would depend on another causal relation between the action and its agent, and another giving [of existence] would be established, and so on infinitely.

Also, in the case of an effect which has not yet occurred, there is no receiver to receive anything, and after its occurrence, its receiving of existence from a cause would also be meaningless. Hence, in the case of the creation of an effect, there is no real entified existence other than the existence of the cause and the existence of the effect.

Now, the following question may be posed. What form does the causal relation take between the existence of the cause and the existence of the effect? After the occurrence of the effect, or simultaneous with it, is there something else by the name of the cause-effect relation? Or does such a thing exist prior to its occurrence? Or is it fundamentally a mere mental concept which never has an instance in the external world? Someone who imagines that the reality of causation consists in the succession or simultaneity of two phenomena will consider causality to be a mental concept.

He will hold that there are no instances of causality except for the relation (idhafah) of simultaneity or immediate succession (a relation which is considered to be one of the nine categories of accidents).

However, there are problems with the interpretation of causality in terms of the relation of simultaneity or succession, some of which have been indicated, and to these we should add the following: No relation ever has any entified reality, and therefore, the interpretation of causality as a kind of relation is really a denial of causality as a entified objective relation, such as ventured by Hume and his followers.

Assuming that relations generally or that this particular relation is entified and based on its two terms, there is still no instance of it prior to the existence of the effect, for something which depends on two terms and is parasitic on them cannot occur without the two terms mentioned above.

If it is supposed that the relation comes into existence after or simultaneous with the occurrence of the effect, this implies that the effect in its essence has no relation with the cause, and is connected with it merely by means of an external relation, as if the above mentioned relation were a rope binding them together.

Furthermore, if this relation were a entified thing, this thing would inevitably be an effect, and the

question about the quality of its relation to its cause would be repeated, and there would have to be an infinitude of causal relations!

Hence, none of the mentioned assumptions is correct. In truth, the existence of the effect is a ray radiated by the existence of the cause, as well as the relation itself and its very dependence, and the concept of possession or relation is abstracted from its essence, and in technical terms it is said that the existence of the effect is an illuminative relation (*idhafah ishraqiyyah*) of the existence of the cause, not a relation to be considered as belonging to one of the categories abstracted by recurring relations between two things.

In this way, existence may be divided into two parts, one relational and one independent. Every effect in relation to its creating cause is relational and dependent. Every cause in relation to the effect it creates is independent, however much it may itself be the effect of another existent, and in relation to that, it will be relational and dependent.

The absolutely independent is a cause which is not the effect of the existence of anything. This is the same topic which was used to establish the specific gradation of existence.

## **Knowledge of the Causal Relation**

The causal relation, as analyzed and studied here, is specific to the creating cause and its effect, and does not include preparatory or material causes. At this point, two questions may be raised, one about how one can know the above-mentioned relation between creative agents and their effects, and the other about how one can prove causal relations among physical things which are preparatory causes and effects.

Earlier it was indicated that man discovers some of the instances of cause and effect within himself by means of knowledge by presence, and when he considers the direct actions of the self, and compares such things as willing and the acquiring of mental concepts with his self, and he finds them to be dependent on the self, he abstracts the concept of cause and applies it to the self and he abstracts the concept of effect and applies this to the actions of the self.

So, he observes, for example, that his willing to do some deed depends upon specific cases of conceptual (*tasawwuri*) and propositional (*tasdiqi*) knowledge, and until such cognitions are realized, the act of willing is not produced by the self.

By observing this sort of dependency which exists between knowledge and willing, the concepts of cause and effect may be further expanded so that the concept of effect may be applied to everything which has some sort of dependence upon another. Likewise, the concept of cause is generalized to everything on which something else depends in some manner. In this way, the general concepts of cause and effect take shape.

In other words, the finding of instances of cause and effect disposes the self to abstract universal concepts from them so as to include similar individuals, which is characteristic of universal concepts, as was explained in the discussion of epistemology.

For example, the concept of cause which is abstracted from the self is not in respect of its specific existence, and not in respect of its being itself, but because another existent depends upon it. So, any existent which is like this will be an instance of the concept of cause, whether it is material or immaterial, contingent or necessary.

Likewise, the concept of effect, which is abstracted from willing or any other phenomenon, is not so because it possesses a specific existence or whatness, but rather because it is dependent upon another existent. Hence it is applied to any other thing which has some sort of dependence, whether it is material or immaterial, substance or accident.

Therefore, cognition of one or more instances is sufficient for abstracting a universal concept, but the cognition of a universal concept is not sufficient for recognizing its instances. Hence, in order to know the instances which are not known by means of knowledge by presence, standards and criteria must be found.

Furthermore, the causal relation pertaining to the creating cause which is abstracted from the essence of its effect, and the existence of the effect which is considered to be identical with the illuminative relation (idhafah ishraqiyyah), must be established beyond the self by means of an argument. That is, the question may be raised about how the existence of the self is relational and dependent in relation to another existent. How is it that the existences of the entire world emerged from another existent, and how do we know that it is not independent in itself? Such questions may be repeated regarding preparatory relations. First, how is it to be established that among material existents there are causal relations? Second, how can one establish a relation of dependence between one material phenomenon and another?

Considering the fact that creating causes cannot be found among material things, the knowledge of such causes and such causal relations beyond the realm of presentational knowledge will only be possible by intellectual methods. Empirical methods provide no way toward metaphysics. One cannot expect to be able to know creative causes by means of experimentation, the alteration of conditions, and controlling variables.

Since, moreover, it is not possible to exclude immaterial existents, so that their effects could be known by means of their elimination and inclusion and changing conditions, the only way for the establishment of the rational properties of such causes and effects is through pure rational proofs, and by means of them to determine the instances of each of them. This is contrary to the case of material causes and effects, which can be known to some extent by empirical methods.

In conclusion, there are, on the whole, three ways to knowledge of causal relations: first, through

presentational knowledge for cases in the realm of the self and psychological phenomena; second, through pure rational proofs for cases of supernatural causes; and third, rational proofs based on empirical premises for cases of material causes and effects.

## **Distinguishing Features of Cause and Effect**

The ancient philosophers did not discuss the character of knowledge of cause and effect as an independent subject. The only thing which we have obtained from their expositions is that the first cause, a cause which is not also an effect, has no whatness, contrary to objects which do have whatnesses.

Since a whatness in and of itself has no relation to existence and nothingness, it naturally will need a cause to bring it out of its state of equilibrium. In other words, every existent which has a whatness and from which a whatish concept may be abstracted will be contingent and in need of a cause.

However, this exposition, in addition to being appropriate only for the fundamentality of whatness, is ineffective and fails to resolve our difficulties, for it is only able to establish whether contingents are effects, and it fails to present any standard for the recognition of the causation of some things with respect to others.

However, on the basis of the principles established by Sadr al- Muta'allihin, one can obtain a very clear standard for the recognition of the creative cause and its effect. These principles are: the fundamentality of existence, the relativity of the effect in relation to the creative cause, and the gradation of the planes of existence.

On the basis of these threefold principles each of which has been established in the appropriate place, it follows that every effect is at a weaker level than its creative cause, and its cause, in turn, is at a weaker level than a more perfect existent which is its creative cause, until we reach an existent which has no weakness, failure, deficiency or limitations, and it will be infinitely perfect, so that it will no longer be the effect of something.

Hence, the distinguishing feature of being an effect is the weakness of the level of existence in relation to another existent, and conversely, the distinguishing feature of being a cause is the strength and intensity of the level of existence in relation to an effect, in accordance with which the distinguishing feature of the absolute cause is the infinite intensity and perfection of existence.

Even if we cannot recognize creative causes and effects individually, we can understand that every creative cause is more perfect than its effect, and in relation to its creative cause it is more deficient, and wherever there is weakness and existential limitation, the being of an effect will be established. Since in the natural world there does not exist any infinite existent, all corporeal existents will be effects of the supernatural.

It may be said that what has been obtained from the mentioned principles is that everywhere we have

two existents, one of which is the emanation of the other and is considered to be a stage of the emanating existence, it will be its effect. But the question is how can we establish that there is an existent more perfect than material existents, such that these existents are to be considered a weaker level of the more perfect existent, so that they would be effects of it?

The answer to this question is to be obtained from the principle indicated earlier, according to which being an effect is essential to the existence of the effect and is inviolable. So, it is not the case that two assumptions are involved in the realization of an existent: one that it is the effect of a more perfect existent, and the other that it is independent and without need of a cause for its occurrence. But if something has the possibility of being an effect, it is certain to be an effect.

And whenever there is an existent such that a more perfect existent than it can be imagined, it will have the possibility of being an effect, and hence it is certain to be an effect and it will no longer have the possibility of not being an effect, for if the possibility of not being an effect were also supposed, this would mean that essentially it does not require being or not being an effect.

That is, if it were an effect, its being an effect would not be essential, while in the previous discussion it became clear that being an effect is essential to the existence of the effect. Thus, something which is capable of being an effect, that is, for which one can suppose a more perfect existent, will have to be an effect.

At the end of this lesson we should note that the weakness of the level of existence has some indicators by means of which one can recognize that an existent is an effect, and among these are limitations in time and place, limitations in a thing's effects, changeability, moveability and destructibility.

## **Lesson 34: The Causal Relation among Material Things**

### **The Cause of Belief in the Causal Relation among Material Things**

Sometimes it is said that the knowledge of the causal relation among all existents, including material existents, is an innate (fitri) knowledge with which the human intellect has been fashioned, and on the basis of which specific causes and effects are determined. However, as has been discussed in the lessons on epistemology, no acquired knowledge can be proven to be innate, and assuming that it occurs, there would be no guarantee of its correspondence with reality.

However, as has been mentioned in Lesson Twenty–Three, some knowledge is near to being self–evident (*bidahat*), and in a sense can be considered to be ‘innate’, such as knowledge of the existence of material realities, which really has its source in a hidden or semi–conscious reasoning. The knowledge of the existence of the causal relation and the dependence of some material existents on others is also of this sort.

The closer we get to the beginning of infancy, the more unconscious reasoning becomes, until it becomes similar to the instinctive perceptions of animals. To the extent that man’s consciousness develops, reasoning becomes more manifestly conscious, until it takes the form of logical reasoning.

For example, when a child hears a sound simultaneously with the collision of two objects, he vaguely understands the dependence of the appearance of the noise on the collision. When he witnesses the lighting of a lamp along with the flipping of a switch, he understands there to be another dependence of the same sort. In brief, his soul becomes thus disposed to understand the existence of the causal relation among material phenomena. However, he is not able to understand this relation in the form of a logical proposition or to express it in exact terms.

Eventually he develops sufficient powers of mental analysis to understand this subject in the form of a logical proposition, and to expound the hidden foundational reasoning in the form of a logical proof. Of course, it is possible that at the beginning of this process one will use a concept which is not sufficiently precise, or one will present an argument which from a logical point of view is fallacious.

For example, one might speculate that everything depends upon something else, or that every existent appears in a specific time and place. However, these unfortunate generalizations and other inadequacies in the interpretation of percepts and reasonings, are effects of the weakness of the analytic powers of the mind, and to the extent that one develops and strengthens the above–mentioned powers by means of logical exercises and philosophical analysis one will make fewer such mistakes.

In any case, as we have explained repeatedly, the firmest foundation for belief in the existence of the causal relation is knowledge by presence. The discovery of instances of causes and effects within the self is considered to be the sturdiest basis for the abstraction of the universal concepts of cause and effect and prepares the ground for the conscious understanding of the principle of causation as a self–evident (*badihi*) proposition.

However, since material instances of cause and effect cannot be known through knowledge by presence, and on the other hand, as mentioned above, since it is unacceptable to consider the belief in the causal relation among material things to be innate, there is no alternative but to consider the source of such beliefs to lie in a kind of reasoning, which, at its inception was semi–conscious and spontaneous, and gradually takes the form of clear logical reasoning.

Since this belief is close to being self–evident it may be called, in a sense, innate. In order to evaluate this belief one must first state this proposition in an exact form, and then give a logical explanation of it.

## An Evaluation of the Above-mentioned Belief

The causal relation among material things may be stated in several forms. One is: “Material existents are dependent upon one another.” This proposition, which is called ‘unquantified’ (muhmalah) in logic, does not indicate the universality or particularity of this relation. That is, it does not mean that all material things have this relation with one another, or that only some of them have such a relation.

It is certain that there exists a causal relation among some of them, and really, it is evaluated as a particular affirmative proposition, the contradictory of a universal negative proposition, the absolute negation of causation among material things, which view is associated with the Ash‘arites.

The second form is: “All material existents have a causal relation with another material existent.” This means that no material existent is to be found which is neither a cause nor an effect of another material existent. This leaves open the possibility that one or more material existents are merely causes for some phenomena and that they themselves are not the effects of other material existents (although they may be the effects of supernatural causes), the possibility also is left open that they are merely effects of material causes, and that they themselves are not causes of other material phenomena.

The third form is: “Every material existent has a material cause,” and the fourth form is: “Every material existent is the cause of another material existent and is the effect of another material existent.” An implication of the third proposition is a backward stretching infinite regress of material causes. An implication of the fourth proposition is an infinite regress in both directions.

Among these propositions, the first is certain and close to being self-evident, and it is the one which may be called innate. However, regarding the other propositions, they have been more or less in dispute and subject to differences of opinion which are presented in detailed philosophical texts under various topics.

Just as the principle of the existence of material things is not self-evident and needs to be proven, the existence of the causal relation among material things is also not self-evident. The warrant for this belief is not at the same level as the belief in the universal principle of causation, in the form of a verity proposition (qadhiyyah haqiqiyyah), nor is it on the level of the belief in the existence of the causal relation for the totality of existents, some of whose instances are known through knowledge by presence.

Rather, its logical warrant is at the level of speculative certainties (nazariyyat yaqini), which on the one hand are based on the self-evident principle of causality, and on the other hand are based on empirical premises.

That is, after the real existence of material existents is established, and idealistic doubts are refuted, then with the help of experiences which establish that some material phenomena do not occur without some others, it may be concluded that the causal relation in its general sense, that is, absolute dependency (not a dependency that is absolute), holds among material existents, and that the material

existent, in addition to having a need for a creative cause at the core of its being, is also such that its changes and alterations depend on the fulfillment of various conditions which are provided by other material existents, conditions which, in reality, serve to prepare matter for the acquisition of new existential perfections, even if the previous perfection must then be abandoned.

## The Way to the Knowledge of Material Causes

As was indicated, there are many ways with regard to the absolute knowledge of causes and effects, but the way to the knowledge of material causes and effects is limited to empirical proof, that is, proof in which empirical premises have also been employed.

It is sometimes imagined that the repeated observation of two successive phenomena is reason for the first phenomenon to be the cause of the second. That is, empirical premises are used for the establishment of the causation of one material existent for another, in the form: "This phenomenon repeatedly comes into existence following another phenomenon." Then another premise must be added: "For every two existents which occur in this form, the first is the cause of the second." The conclusion obtained is that in the case experienced, the first phenomenon is the cause of the second phenomenon.

However, as has been shown time and time again, succession or simultaneity are more general than causation, and cannot be considered to be decisive reasons for causation, that is, the major premise of this syllogism is not certain, and therefore neither can its conclusion be certain.

Logicians, when discussing the validity of empirical propositions, have said that the mutual implication (talazum) of two phenomena, either constantly or in most cases, indicates the causal relation between them, for persistent or nearly persistent simultaneity cannot be accidental.

Regarding this statement it must be said that, first of all, this proposition implies that something accidental cannot be persistent or nearly persistent, or in technical terms, that compulsion (qasr) which occurs persistently or nearly persistently is impossible. Secondly, it is nearly impossible to establish the persistent or nearly persistent mutual implication of two phenomena, and no experimenter can claim that he has subjected most occurrences of two phenomena to experiment.

Likewise, another principle is sometimes employed to complement this proof, that two similar things will have similar effects. ("Judgment regarding similar cases of what is permissible or impermissible is one.") Therefore, regarding cases of experimentation, if one observes the occurrence of a phenomenon under certain conditions, one will know that in other conditions which are exactly the same, the above phenomenon will also occur.

In this way the causal relation between [the conditions and the phenomenon] is discovered. However, this principle is not of very much practical efficiency, for the establishment of the complete similarity of two circumstances is no easy task.

It thus seems that the only way to utilize experience in order to establish definitively the causal relation between two given phenomena is to control the conditions for the occurrence of one phenomenon and to observe which of the controlled elements and conditions when changed alters this phenomenon, and with the existence of which conditions the phenomenon remains the same.

For example, if in the controlled environment of the laboratory one observes that only with the connection of two given wires, a light bulb is lit, and that it goes out when they are disconnected, one may conclude that the above connection is the condition for the appearance of light in the bulb (transforming the electrical energy into light).

If the conditions are precisely controlled, the performance of an experiment a single time will be sufficient. However, since the precise control of the conditions is no easy task, in order to be sure, the experiment is often performed repeatedly.

However, at the same time, it is extremely difficult to establish that the effective cause of the appearance of a phenomenon is the very factors identified in the experimental environment and that no other unidentified and unperceived factor exists. Even more difficult than this is to establish that it is the only factor and is irreplaceable, for there is always the possibility that under other conditions the given phenomenon will occur by means of other factors.

Newer and newer discoveries in physics and chemistry confirm this possibility. This is why empirical conclusions will never have the value of the self-evident, and basically cannot produce redoubled certainty (certain beliefs whose contrary is impossible). Hence, the achievements of the empirical sciences will never have the value of the conclusions of pure rational proofs.

We should note that the existence of the mentioned possibilities which prevent the acquisition of redoubled certainty in relation to the principles of the empirical sciences is of no harm for the certainty of the causal relation among material existents, for with simple experiments it can be established that by excluding one phenomenon, another phenomenon will be eliminated. This shows that the first phenomenon is a kind of incomplete cause of the second.

For example, with the setting of the sun, the sky becomes dark; and with the absence of water, trees become dry. Thousands of other examples can be observed repeatedly in the daily lives of men. What is difficult is to determine precisely all the factors and conditions which have an effect on the occurrence of a material phenomenon.

If one were able to precisely determine all of them, this would not imply a denial of the influence of a supernatural agent, for the performance of an experiment in the case of such an agent is not possible. The existence or nonexistence of a supernatural agent can only be established with pure rational proof.

# Lesson 35: The Dependence of the Effect on the Cause

## The Mutual Implication of Cause and Effect

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

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

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

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

Some scholastic theologians have imagined that this principle applies specifically to involuntary causes which do not act out of a will, and that in cases of free agents, however, after the occurrence of all the parts of the cause there is still room for the volition and choice of the agent.

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

The conclusion is that every cause, complete or incomplete, has relative necessity (wujub bil-qiyas) in relation to its effect, and similarly every effect has relative necessity in relation to its complete cause, and

these two points may be together referred to as ‘the rule of mutual implication of cause and effect.’

## The Simultaneity of Cause and Effect

From the principle of the mutual implication of cause and effect other principles may be derived, among which is the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect, which may be described as follows.

Whenever an effect is a temporal existent and at least one of the parts of its complete cause is also temporal, the cause and effect will occur simultaneously, and the occurrence of the complete cause will have no temporal distance from the effect.

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the temporal priority of the effect to any cause, whether complete or incomplete, is impossible, for this would imply that the effect would not be in need of the above-mentioned cause at the moment it takes place, and that the existence of the cause in relation to the effect is not necessary. It is obvious that this principle is specific to temporal existents.

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

The only case to which the principle of succession applies is that of incomplete temporal causes, for

which their temporal priority to their effects is possible, such as the occurrence of a person prior to the performance of a task.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This principle has long been a topic of discussion among philosophers and theologians. The

philosophers have always emphasized that the persistence of an effect is also in need of a cause. They have reasoned that the criterion of the need for a cause by an effect is the effect's whatish contingency, and the whatness of the effect can never be divested of this property. Therefore, it will always be in need of a cause.

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

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

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

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

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

However, this position, as was indicated earlier, is in conformity with the fundamentality of whatness, and with regard to the fundamentality of existence the criterion for the need for a cause must be sought in the existential characteristics of the effect, that is, as was stated by Sadr al-Muta'allihin, the criterion for the need of an effect for a cause is essential poverty (faqr-e dhati) and dependence, in other words, the weakness of its existential level which is inseparable from it.

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

This may be further explained as follows. The building which persists after the death of its builder has a

set of real causes, including: the existence–giving cause, internal causes (matter and form), conditions for the existence of the building, such as the arrangement of the building materials in a specific shape and configuration, and a lack of impediments which could result in the separation of these materials. As long as this set of causes persists, the building will also persist.

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

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

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

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

Moreover, it has become clear that preparatory agents of this kind, which are really accidental agents, are not considered to be parts of the complete cause, and the complete cause is composed of the existence–giving agent, internal causes, and conditions of existence and nonexistence.

## **Lesson 36: The Relations of Cause and Effect**

## The Homogeneity (Sinkhiyyah) of Cause and Effect

Undoubtedly, not just any effect comes into existence with any cause. Even among successive or simultaneous phenomena there is not always a causal relation. Causation is rather a specific relation among certain existents. In other words, between the cause and effect there must exist a specific relation, which can be termed the homogeneity (sinkhiyyah) of cause and effect. This principle is also an intuitive proposition which is close to being self-evident, which may be demonstrated by the simplest of internal and external experiences.

However, there is a difference between homogeneity and the relation which is necessary between cause and effect in cases of existence-giving causes on the one hand and material and preparatory causes on the other.

In the first case, the characteristics of this homogeneity can be established by rational proof, and its demonstration is as follows: Since the existence of the effect is emanated by the existence-giving cause, which can be put roughly by saying that it gives existence to its own effect, it itself must have that existence which it can then give to its effect.

If it did not possess that, it could not grant or emanate it (one who gives something cannot lack it). Noting that granting existence to an effect does not diminish the granter of anything, it becomes clear that it possesses the above-mentioned existence in a more complete form, such that the existence of the effect can be considered its radiance and luminescence.

So, the homogeneity between the existence-giving cause and its effect means that this cause has the perfection of the effect in a more perfect form. If a cause in its own essence did not possess a kind of existential perfection, it would never be able to grant this perfection to its effect.

In other words, every effect is produced by its cause which has the perfection of its effect in a more perfect form. This subject becomes clearer with regard to the relational nature of the effect with respect to its existence-giving cause and the special gradation between them, which were established in the previous chapters.

Homogeneity does not exist between material or preparatory causes and their effects, for such causes do not grant or emanate existence. Their influence is limited to alterations in the existence of their effects. With regard to the fact that not just anything can bring about any kind of change, it is summarily obtained that some sort of relation and homogeneity is also necessary between such causes and effects.

However, the characteristics of this sort of homogeneity cannot be established by rational proof, rather, it is only through experience that one can discern what sort of things can be the source of what changes, and under what conditions and with the aid of what things these changes are produced.

For example, reason, by means of conceptual analysis, would never be able to discover whether water is simple or is composed of other elements, and if the latter, of what and how many elements it is composed. What conditions are necessary for such a composition? Are these supposed conditions replaceable or not?

Hence, it is only by means of experience that it is possible to establish that water is composed in a special way of two elements, oxygen and hydrogen, that this composition requires a certain temperature and pressure and that an electrical current can speed the process of composition.

## The Removal of a Doubt

We have stated that it follows from a rational proof that every existence-giving cause must possess the perfection of its effect, for it is absurd to suppose that the granter lacks that which it grants to another.

With regard to this topic, the following problem may be raised, that an implication of this principle is that existence-giving agents have material existences and their perfections, while an existence-giving agent can only be an immaterial existent which does not have matter or the specific attributes of matter. So how can something emanate that which it itself does not possess?

The answer to this problem is that what is meant by possessing the perfection of an effect is having a more perfect and higher level than the existence of the effect, such that the existence of the effect is considered to be the radiance of the cause, not that the limits of the existence of the effect are exactly preserved in the cause, and not that the cause has the same whatness as the effect.

It is clear that the greater perfection of the existence of the cause than the level of the existence of the effect is not compatible with their whatish unity. One can never abstract a single whatness from two existents which have specific gradation, one of which is considered a plane of the existence of the other and its radiance, because what it means for two existents to have a single whatness is that their existential limits correspond to one another.

This is impossible in the case of two levels of existence one of which is more perfect than the other, having fewer limitations and imperfections. However, lacking the whatness of the effect and the limits of its existence does not mean lacking its existential perfection. That which is necessary in the case of the existence-giving cause is having the existential perfections of the effect in a more perfect and higher form, not possessing its imperfections and limitations.

If the concept of a body and its implications, such as being spatial and temporal, being capable of movement and change, are not true of God, the Exalted, and completely immaterial things, this is because the above-mentioned concepts imply the imperfections and limitations of material existents rather than their perfections.

It should be noted that the solution to this problem became possible by virtue of the fundamentality of

existence, and that on the basis of the fundamentality of whatness there would be no correct solution for it, because an implication of the fundamentality of whatness is that that which is in fact emanated from the cause is the external whatness of the effect, and according to this principle the cause must be in possession of this whatness.

It cannot be said that the cause has the whatness of the effect in a more perfect form, for such graduation, especially the specific graduation among whatnesses, is meaningless. As was mentioned in Lesson Twenty-Eight, all immaterial whatnesses, especially simple whatnesses, are disparate from one another. Furthermore, the supposition of a whatness in the case of God, the Exalted, is incorrect.

## **Unity of an Effect for Unity of a Cause**

According to a well-known philosophical principle, from a single cause nothing can be produced but a single effect, (“The one produces nothing other than the one”). However, there are disagreements about the purport of this principle and the cases to which it applies. Among these disagreements is whether by unity of cause is meant individual unity or unity of kind, and whether by unity of cause is meant complete simplicity.

For example, there is the meaning chosen by Sadr al-Muta'allihin in his “Journey of the Soul” in the *Asfar*, on the basis of which the above-mentioned principle is considered to be specific to the sacred divine essence in the existence of whose essence there is not even analytic complexity, such that the immediate effect of it can only be one existent, and other creatures must be produced by means of one or several intermediaries from this first effect.

Other philosophers have understood this principle to cover other cases more or less as well. Likewise, regarding the concept of ‘production’ (*sudur*) there are also differences, such as whether it is true of all causal relations, even conditions and preparatory causes, or whether it is restricted to efficient causes, or whether it is limited to existence-giving causes.

In other words, can it be said on the basis of the principle that a preparatory agent cannot have more than one effect, that one condition will have no more than one consequence, and that one natural agent will have no more than one action? In order to determine the cases to which this principle applies, one should examine carefully the reasons in support of it to discover why it is required.

Philosophers have given different kinds of reasons for this principle, but the most clear and at the same time firmest of these is a reason which originates in the principle of homogeneity between cause and effect, which may be expressed as follows: According to the principle of the homogeneity of cause and effect, the cause must possess that which it gives to the effect in a more perfect form.

Now, if it is supposed that the cause possesses just one *sinkh* (root) of existential perfection (i.e., a homogeneity making factor between cause and effect), naturally its effect will possess a lower level of

that perfection, not another perfection. If we suppose that two different effects are produced from one such cause, then, according to the mentioned principle, the cause must possess two roots of perfection, while it was assumed that it only possesses one root of existential perfections.

Several conclusions may be derived from a careful study of this argument.

1. This principle is specific to existence-giving causes, since, as was mentioned, this feature, that the cause must possess the perfection of its effect, is specific to existence-giving causes.

Therefore, on the basis of this principle one cannot establish that natural agents, that is the reasons for changes and alterations in material things, each have a single effect, or that, for example, there is only one thing which is the condition for the effect of an agent, or that there is only one thing which is the preparatory condition for a capability. For example, heat is a condition for various chemical actions and reactions, and heat itself comes into existence by means of various natural factors.

2. This principle is not limited to a single individual, for the above reason also includes unity of kind, and if we suppose that one kind of existence-giving cause has several individuals, and that they all possess one root of existential perfection, then naturally, their effects will all be of one kind.

3. This principle is limited to causes which possess only one root of perfection. However, if an existent has several kinds of existential perfection, or all existential perfections in a simple form, that is, if its existence possesses the above perfections with that same unity and simplicity, then this argument will not cover it.

Therefore, the above-mentioned principle does not establish anything more than the principle of the homogeneity between an existence-giving cause and its effect. The unity of the first thing produced cannot be established merely on the basis of this principle, although there is another way to establish this, which will be presented at the appropriate point.

## **Unity of Cause for Unity of Effect**

Another well-known principle is that a single effect cannot be produced by more than a single cause, (“The one is not produced by other than the one”).

Regarding this principle, despite differences, all philosophers agree that a single effect can be produced from a compound cause. So, what is meant by the unity of the cause in the above principle is not simplicity and lack of composition.

Furthermore, the production of an effect by several vertical causes, such that each of them is the cause of another, is undeniable. In other words: neither the multiplicity of mediated effects, each of which is the effect of another, nor the multiplicity of mediated causes is contrary to the above principle.

On the other hand, all philosophers agree that an individual effect will have no more than one complete cause; in technical terms, the conjunction of several complete causes for a single effect is impossible, for if all these causes were effective, then necessarily numerous effects would be brought into existence by them, so the effect would not be one.

If some of these causes were not effective, this would be contrary to the principle of the mutual implication of cause and effect or the relative necessity (*wujub bil-qiyas*) of the effect with respect to its complete cause.

That over which differences arise regarding this principle is whether one kind of effect must always be produced by one kind of cause, or whether it is possible that some individual cases of a kind of effect may be produced by one kind of cause, while other individual cases of the same kind of effect are produced by another kind of cause.

It is here that most people who consider this principle to include unities of kind as well as individual unities, explicitly state that several kinds of causes may effect the appearance of a single type of effect, such as heat, which is sometimes the effect of the radiance of the sun, sometimes of the burning of fire, and sometimes the effect of motion and friction.

However, with regard to what was said about the principle of homogeneity, the existence of the effect may be produced only by a cause which possesses that same *sinkh* (root), an existential perfection at a higher level [than that exhibited by the effect]. An effect will never be produced by an existence-giving cause which lacks the *sinkh* (root) which is the perfection of the effect.

Therefore, in the case of an existence-giving cause and its effect it must be said that not only is it impossible for an individual effect to be produced by two or more individual existence-giving causes, but a single type of effect also cannot be brought into existence by two or more types of existence-giving causes.

But in the case of material or preparatory causes, since there is no rational proof for the quality of their homogeneity with their effects, it cannot be established that one kind of effect must have one kind of cause. It is rationally possible that several kinds of material or preparatory causes should have a single kind of effect, as the number of conditions and their determinations cannot be established by rational proof, and all of them depend on experience.

## **Lesson 37: The Principles of Cause and Effect**

## Some Points regarding Cause and Effect

A correct conception of the meaning of cause and effect is sufficient for knowing that no existent can be the cause of its own existence, for the meaning of causality rests upon the fact that an existent depends upon the existence of another, so that with regard to the dependence of one upon the other, the concepts of cause and effect are abstracted from them, that is, this is a primary self-evident proposition, and needs no argument.

Sometimes among the discussions of the philosophers one encounters statements which may lead to such misconceptions as that an existent may be the cause of its own existence. For example, regarding God, the Exalted, it has been said, "The existence of the Necessary Existent is required by its own essence." Even regarding the expression 'the Necessary Existent by Itself,' which is used in comparison to 'the necessary existent by another,' it is possible that this may be misconstrued in such a way that just as in the case of the necessary existent by another, the 'other' is the cause, so too, in the case of the Necessary Existent by Itself, It Itself is the cause.

The truth is that this kind of discussion is the result of the limits of language, and the intent is never to establish a causal relation between the Sacred Divine Essence and Its Own Existence, but rather what is meant is to deny the ascription of being any sort of effect to that Exalted Being.

In order to make this more comprehensible, an example from ordinary (Farsi) language may be mentioned. If someone is asked, "With whose permission did you do this deed?" And he replies, "I did it with my own permission." Here it is not meant that he actually gave himself permission, but that it did not require anyone's permission. The expression 'by itself' and 'a requirement of essence' is really used by the speaker in order to deny causality, not for proving the causality of the essence.

Another point at which confusion arises is that at which philosophers consider matter and form to be causes for compound bodies, while there is really no difference or multiplicity between them, that is, a body is nothing but the conjunction of matter and form, and this implies the unity of cause and effect.

This problem is presented in philosophical texts, and it is answered in the following way. That to which causation is attributed are matter and form themselves, and that to which being an effect is attributed is the conjunction of them, under the condition that they are joined and have a compound structure, that is, if matter and form are viewed apart from being conjoined and being compounded, each of them may be considered a cause of the 'whole.'

Whenever they are considered under the condition of being joined, compounded and in the form of a whole, we call it the effect of its parts, for the existence of the whole depends on the existence of its parts.

This answer returns us to the point that the difference between cause and effect is relative to our

perspective and respect (i'tibar), while the causal relation is a matter of fact and is independent of respects (although in another sense in regard to whatish concepts, it is called respectful (i'tibari)).

The truth is that the application of [the concept of] cause to matter and form, and the application of [the concept of] effect to the conjunction of them is not free from imprecision, as was previously indicated.

And if a body which is apt to take a new form is allowably called the material cause for the succeeding existent, this is because it prepares the grounds for the latter's appearance.

Another point may be made with regard to the fundamentality of existence. Since the causal relation really holds between two existences, it is clear that the whatness of something cannot be considered the cause of its existence, for whatness in itself has no reality such that it could really be the cause of something.

Likewise, a whatness cannot be considered the cause of another whatness. It is possible that it will be said that philosophers have divided causes into two types: causes of whatnesses and causes of existence.

An example of the first type is the causation of line and surface for the whatness of a triangle, and the causation of matter and form for the whatness of body. An example of the second type is the causation of the existence of fire for the existence of heat. Thus it is known that in their view there exists a kind of causal relation among whatnesses.

But this kind of discussion must be considered to be due to a looseness of the language, that is, just as, with regard to objective existence and the external world, the causal relation holds between existents, and the external existence of the effect depends upon the external existence of the cause, such a relation can also be imagined in the mental world, in the case that the conception of a whatness depends upon the conception of something else, as the conception of a triangle depends on the conception of line and surface. An implication of this looseness of language is that one cannot establish that the principles of real and entified causes and effects also apply to them.

A similar looseness also can be found in the case of secondary philosophical intelligibles, as when 'possibility' is considered to be 'the cause of need for a cause,' while neither possibility nor need are entified things, and between them it is meaningless to suppose that there is a real causal relation or influence in the external world. One of these cannot be considered the cause and the other the effect.

What is meant here is that by attending to the possibility of a whatness, the intellect is led to the recognition of this whatness's need for a cause, not that possibility, which is interpreted as the lack of necessity for existence or nonexistence, has a reality by means of which something else comes into existence called 'the need for a cause.'

We can conclude from this that the discussion of cause and effect which is presented as being one of the most basic philosophical discussions, in which specific principles for cause and effect are

propounded, must be restricted to causes and effects in the external world, and real relationships between them. If in other cases the expression 'causation' is employed, this is due to imprecision or looseness of language.

## The Impossibility of a Causal Circle

One of the topics which is presented pertaining to the causal relation is that it is impossible for any existent, with regard to the aspect in which it is the cause and influence of the appearance of another existent, should be, in that very aspect, the effect and in need of that other existent. In other words, no cause can be the effect of its own effect.

From another perspective, a cause cannot be the cause of its own cause. This may be put in yet another way by saying that it is impossible for an existent to be both cause and effect of another existent. This is the proposition of the impossibility of a circle of causes, which can be considered to be self-evident, or at least close to being self-evident.

If the subject and predicate of this proposition are properly understood, there will be no room for doubt about it, for the implication of being a cause is being without need and the implication of being an effect is being in need, and the conjunction of being without need and being in need in one aspect is a contradiction.

It is possible that in this field doubts may arise which result from lack of precision regarding the meaning of the subject and predicate, as is the case for many self-evident propositions. For example, one may imagine that if a man's own food is obtained only through farming, that if it were not for the products of his own farming, he would die of hunger. In this way, the above-mentioned products on the one hand would be the effects of farming and on the other hand would be the cause of it.

Hence the supposed farmer would be the cause of the cause of himself, and also the effect of the effect of himself! However, not only is the farmer not the real cause of the products of farming, and is merely a preparatory cause for them, and not only are the products of farming also not the cause of the existence of the farmer, but rather these products are only elements upon which the continuity of his life is dependent.

In other words, the existence of the farmer during the times of sowing and reaping, is a cause and not an effect, and later, it is an effect and not a cause. Likewise, the farm products, at the time of their growing, are effects, and not causes, but at the times of feeding the farmer, they are causes, and not effects. Hence being a cause and being an effect are not with regard to the same aspect. The only thing that can be said in this regard is that an existent at one time may be the preparatory cause for something which it will need in the future.

What is meant by an impossible circle is not this sort of relation; rather what is meant is that an existent

which in the same aspect in which it is the cause of the appearance of something else cannot be, in that same aspect of its being an effect, the effect of it and in need of it. In other words, it gives something to an effect which it needs from it in order to possess that same thing, and which must be obtained from this effect.

Another problem is that we see that heat causes the appearance of fire, while fire is also the cause of the heat. Hence, heat is the cause of the cause of itself. The solution to this problem is also clear, for the heat which is the cause of the fire is other than the heat which comes into existence as an effect of the fire.

Although these two heats may be one in kind, they are multiple with regard to their existence in the external world. What is meant by unity pertaining to this principle [of the impossibility of a circle of causes] is individual unity, not conceptual unity. In reality, this problem is a result of confusion between conceptual unity and the unity of instances, or is a result of confusion between two meanings of unity.

Other inconsequential problems have been presented by some materialists and Marxists, which need not be mentioned if attention is paid to the concepts of the principle [of the impossibility of a circle of causes] and the answers to the problems mentioned above.

## **The Impossibility of an Infinite Regress**

The literal meaning of regress (tasalsul) is cases following one another in a chain, whether the links in this chain are finite or infinite, and whether or not there is a causal relation among them. However, the technical meaning is restricted to cases in which one or both directions of the chain are infinite.

Philosophers consider an infinite regress to be impossible under two conditions: First is that among the links of the chain there should be a real ordering, such that each link should follow another in reality, not conventionally; the other is that all of the links should exist at the same time, not such that when one is destroyed another comes into existence following it. For this reason, an infinite sequence of events in time is not considered to be essentially impossible.

At the same time, in the common parlance of philosophy, an infinite regress is not restricted to causal regresses, and many reasons which are given for the impossibility of a regress include regresses in which there is no causal relation among the links, such as the proofs advanced against actual infinity (Burhan-e Musamatah, Burhan-e Tatbiq, and Burhan-e Sullami) which are mentioned in the detailed books of philosophy. In these proofs, some mathematical premises are employed, although there is dispute about them.

However, some proofs are specific to causal regresses, such as the proof given by Farabi known as Burhan- e Asadd Akhsar ('the firmest and most concise proof'), and it may be stated as follows: If it is supposed that each link in a chain of existents is dependent upon another, such that if a prior link does

not exist, the dependent link would also fail to occur, this implies that this regress as a whole is dependent on another existent, for it is supposed that all of its links have this feature (of being dependent on another), and there is no alternative but to suppose that there is an existent at the head of the chain which is not itself dependent on something else. Until that existent occurs, the links of the chain will not come into existence in succession.

Hence, such a chain cannot be infinite in the direction of its beginning. In other words, an infinite regress of causes is impossible. Similar to this is a proof which is founded on the basis of the principles established by Sadr al-Muta'allihin in his transcendent philosophy for the impossibility of a regress of existence-giving causes.

It may be presented as follows: According to the fundamentality of existence and the relatedness of the existence of the effect to the existence-giving cause, every effect in relation to its creative cause is just that relation and dependence itself. It has no independence of its own. If a given cause is an effect in relation to a prior cause, it will have that same state (of dependence) to the prior cause.

Thus, if a chain of causes and effects is assumed, each of whose causes is the effect of another cause, it will be a chain of relations and dependencies. It is self-evident that dependent existence cannot occur without the occurrence of an independent existence upon which the former depends. Thus, inevitably there must be an independent existence beyond this chain of relations and dependencies in the light of which all of them occur. Therefore, this series cannot be considered to be without a beginning and without an absolutely independent member.

The difference between these two proofs lies in the fact that the first proof covers all real causes (causes which must necessarily exist with their effects), while the second proof is restricted to existence-giving causes, and which also covers complete causes, as they include existence-giving causes.

## **Lesson 38: The Efficient Cause**

### **Introduction**

One of the most famous classifications of causes (perhaps stated for the first time by Aristotle) is that of efficient causes, final causes, material causes and formal causes, of which the first two types are called external causes and the latter two are called internal causes or 'causes of subsistence' ('ilal-e qawam), and from one perspective are called causes of whatness.

From the previous lessons it has become clear that the application (of the concept of) cause to the latter two types involves some imprecision. At the end of Lesson Thirty-One it was indicated that the material

and formal causes are the very matter and form of the bodies, which are called material and formal causes in relation to compound bodies and are called matter and form in relation to each other, and which are naturally specific to material things.

Since we will discuss matter and form later, [1](#) here discussion of them may be postponed. The section on Causality will be concluded with a discussion of efficient causes and final causes.

## The Efficient Cause and its Types

By the efficient cause is meant an existent by which another existent (the effect) is brought about, and in its general sense it also includes natural agents which have an effect on the movements and changes of bodies.

Ancient philosophers recognized two kinds of actions and influences in the world: one is willful action (fi'iradi) which is performed willfully by living existents which possess consciousness, actions such as movement and other properties which accord with the will of the agent, such as the voluntary (ikhtiyari) actions of man which occur in various forms; and the other kind is that of action done by existents without consciousness and without will which are monotonous and without variation.

The ancient philosophers held that there was a specific nature for each kind of corporeal existents which essentially had special requirements. For instance, each of the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, was considered to have a propensity for its own natural location and specific natural qualities, such that, for example, if their locations were changed by means of some external factor, their natural tendency would be to move toward their original locations. In this way they justified the falling of stones, the pouring of rain and the rising of the flames of fire. They thought of nature as the source of motion.

Later, in view of the fact that occasionally motions and influences of things occur contrary to their natural propensities, a third kind of action was established called 'constrained action' (fi'l qasri). For example, due to the blowing of the wind, dust may rise toward the sky. That was related to constrained nature of dust, and it was believed that dust, which is a kind of earth, rises toward the sky by constrained motion, and that it returns to the ground by natural motion. In such cases they believed that the motion would not persist ("the constrained is not persistent").

On the other hand, in view of the fact that it is possible for a willful agent to be forced to move contrary to his own will because of the domination of a more powerful agent, another kind of agent was posited by the name of 'coercive agent' (fa'il jabri), which is to a willful agent as constrained action is to a natural agent.

Islamic philosophers deeply pondered the issue of willful agents and at first divided them into two types: one is the intentional agent (fa'il bil-qasd) and the other is the providential agent (fa'il bil-'inayah). The basis of this division was observation of the difference between willful agents which sometimes need

motivation additional to their own whatnesses, such as man, who must be motivated in order to move of his own will from place to place.

This kind is called the intentional agent. Sometimes a willful agent does not require any motivation, and is called a providential agent. The agency of God, the Exalted, was considered to be of this second kind.

Later, the Illuminationists with greater precision established another kind of agent, the knowledgeable ('ilmi) and voluntary (ikhtiyari) agent, whose detailed knowledge of his action is the action itself, such as the detailed (tafsili) knowledge of a man of his own mental forms is identical with those very forms themselves, and prior to their occurrence the agent has no detailed knowledge of them, but merely has a summary (ijmali) knowledge which is identical with the essence of the agent.

It is not the case that in order to imagine something one needs to imagine previously what one imagines, and this agency (fa'iliyyah) is called agency by agreement (fa'iliyyah bil-ridha), and they consider divine agency to be of this kind.

Finally, Sadr al-Muta'allihin, under the inspiration of Qur'anic revelation and the sayings of the gnostics, established that there is another kind of knowledgeable agent. In this kind of agency the agent has detailed knowledge of the action at the station of his essence, and has that very knowledge as concise knowledge ('ilm ijmali) of its own essence.

This is called the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli). The agency of God is considered to be of this kind. In order to establish this sort of agency, he took advantage of the principles of his transcendent philosophy, especially of the special gradation and the possession by an existence-giving cause of the perfections of its own effects.

Likewise, noting that sometimes two agents along with one another are effective in the performance of an action, and the more remote agent performs the deed by means of the more proximate agent, Islamic philosophers established another kind of agency called subordinative agency (fa'iliyyah bil-taskhir), which may be conjoined with other kinds of agency. For example, the digestion of food, which is performed by means of bodily capacities, but which is under the dominion and direction of the soul, is called a subordinative action.

Then, on the basis of the principles of transcendent philosophy and in view of the fact that every cause with relation to its own existence-giving cause is pure relation, an even clearer instance of the subordinative agent is established, and an even firmer philosophical interpretation may be given of the relation of an action to numerous vertical agents, including the relation of the voluntary actions of man to man himself, and in turn to the higher sources (mabadi 'aliyyah), and to God, the Exalted.

In this way, as stated by Hakim Sabzavari, agents can be classified into eight types: natural agents (fa'il bil-tab'), constrained agents (fa'il bil-qasr), intentional agents (fa'il bil-qasd), compelled agents (fa'il bil-jabr), subordinate agents (fa'il bil-taskhir), providential agent (fa'il bil-'inayah), agent by agreement (fa'il

bil-ridha), and the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli).

## Points Regarding the Types of Agent

1. That which was said by the ancient philosophers regarding the natural and constrained agents depended upon the established principles of ancient physics, including the theory of the four elements and their propensities in relation to their natural loci and qualities: wet, dry, heat and cold, which we now know to be invalid.

But in any case, there is no doubt that corporeal existents influence one another, and that the appearance of material phenomena depends upon the obtaining of specific grounds and conditions. Therefore, the existence of material conditions and means for the realization of corporeal effects has been and will forever continue to be valid as a philosophical principle. It is not the job of philosophy to determine the specific means and natural agents for each phenomenon. These must be established by empirical methods in the various natural sciences.

By way of example, on the basis of modern scientific theory, spatial movement can be considered an essential requisite of light, and the forces of attraction and repulsion may be construed as agents of the compulsory movement of bodies. In this way, it is more appropriate to relate action to the compulsory force, and to consider the compelled bodies as merely passive, despite the fact that according to grammar they may be considered agents, and we know that the principles of philosophy do not follow the dictates of grammar.

2. The expression 'determination' (jabr) which is used as the opposite of 'freedom' (ikhtiyar) is sometimes seen as the antithesis of freedom and in this sense it is also applied to natural and constrained agents, but sometimes it is restricted to cases which have the capability for freedom.

The term 'determined' is used only for a voluntary agent which loses its own freedom in certain conditions under the influence of powerful external factors. The meaning of 'compelled agent' (fa'il bil-jabr) is this latter meaning. It is to be noted that losing freedom has various levels, for example, the action of someone who is coerced to do something under threat may be construed as 'compelled.'

Likewise, someone who in certain conditions has no alternative but to eat carrion to survive, is also considered to perform a 'compelled' action. But in cases of compulsion and emergency freedom is not entirely negated, but the scope of the freedom of the agent is limited in relation to ordinary circumstances.

Apparently, the sense of [the term] compelled agent used by the philosophers does not cover these cases, but they mean cases in which the freedom of the agent is totally negated. Thus it may be said that such an action is really produced by the one who forces, and its relation to the forced individual is passive, as was mentioned with regard to the case of constrained action.

3. Before the Islamic philosophers established various kinds of voluntary agents, including providential agent (fa'il bil-'inayah), agent by agreement (fa'il bil-ridha), and the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli), it was imagined that voluntary agency was limited to intentional agents.

Therefore, some of the mutakallimin have thought of the agency of God, the Exalted, as being intentional. Even after the Islamic philosophers came to view the divine realm as being free of agency of this kind, which implies deficiency and attributes of contingency, some of the mutakallimin condemned them as deniers of the freedom of the Lord.

The truth is that the highest level of freedom is restricted to the sacred divine essence, and its lowest level exists in intentional agents. In order to clarify this subject, it is necessary to explain something about will and freedom.

## Will and Freedom

The expressions, will and freedom has various applications which are more or less related to one another, but neglect of these differences is occasion for confusion and mistake. For this reason we will first indicate the cases in which each of them is used, then we will compare them with the types of agents.

### Will

The expression 'will' (iradah) has a general meaning which is roughly synonymous with desiring and favoring, and with this meaning it is also used with respect to God, the Exalted, as in the case of man it is recognized as a spiritual quality (the opposite of repugnance).

In this respect it is similar to knowledge ('ilm), which on the one hand includes the essential knowledge of the Divinity, and on the other hand includes the acquired knowledge of man, which is considered to be a spiritual quality. God willing, in the section on theology a further explanation of this will be given. It is to be noted that the expression [God's] 'revealed will' (iradah-ye tashri'i), which is applied to the voluntary actions of another agent, also is an instance of 'will' in its general meaning.

The second meaning of 'will' is that of deciding to perform some deed, and this depends upon the idea (tasawwur) of the deed and affirmation (tasdiq) of some benefit (including pleasure), and it is considered to be a 'real differentia' (fasl al-haqiqi) of animal (that which moves by will), and it is also considered a characteristic of the intentional agent.

There have been discussions of the true significance (haqiqat) of 'will' and many philosophers have considered it to be a kind of spiritual quality and the opposite of 'repugnance.' However it seems that 'will' in this sense is an action of the soul, and has no opposite, although with a certain amount of fudging the opposite of it can be considered to be a state of wonder or vacillation.

A more specific sense of 'will' is restricted to rational existents, and it means a decision which results from rational preference, and in this sense it is not used for animals. According to this meaning, a willful action is synonymous with a planned action, and is the opposite of an instinctive action or one done for pure enjoyment.

## Freedom

The term 'freedom' also has a general meaning which is the opposite of pure determinism, and it means that an intelligent agent performs a deed on the basis of his own desire without being forced by another agent.

The second meaning of 'freedom' is that an agent has two opposite inclinations and prefers one over the other, and in this meaning, it is equivalent to selection and choice, and it is a criterion for duty, reward and punishment.

The third meaning is the choice of a deed on the basis of the agent's internal inclination, and another person can never exert any influence on its performance. It is the opposite of 'compulsory action' which is performed under pressure or under the threat of another.

The fourth meaning is the choice of a deed which is not influenced by the limitations of one's possibilities or the straits in which the agent finds himself. It is the opposite of an 'urgent deed' which is performed under the influence of such limitations. According to this meaning, someone who in time of famine has no choice but to eat carrion in order to survive, does not act freely, even though he may be called free in some other sense.

Now, in view of the various meanings of will and freedom, we will review the types of cognitive agents.

The intentional agent (fa'il bil-qasd) can be considered an agent possessing all the three meanings of will, for his deed is favored, is decided upon, and the decision is made on the basis of rational preference. Only a group of intentional actions which are done for pure enjoyment will not be willful.

The intentional agent can also have freedom in all the four senses, although there are some types of intentional deeds which cannot be considered free in the second, third or fourth senses; however, all of them will be free in the first sense.

For example, breathing, which man has no inclination to abandon, is not free in the second sense. A forced deed will not be free in the third sense. Eating carrion in time of famine is not free in the fourth sense. Nevertheless, all of these actions are free in the first sense, for it is not the case that the freedom of the agent is totally negated.

With regard to the providential agent (fa'il bil-'inayah), the agent by agreement (fa'il bil-ridha), and the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli), these will be considered willful only in the first sense, for these

agents do not need to think or decide.

Likewise, they are considered to be free in the first, third, and fourth senses because they do not perform their deeds under compulsion, the pressure of external factors or conditions. It is only in the second sense that these agents cannot be considered free, for it is not necessary for them to choose between opposing motivations.

Thus, it has become clear that will, in the first sense, and freedom, in the first sense, are always equivalent in extension, but will in the second and third senses is more specific than freedom in the first, third, and fourth senses, for it does not apply to the providential agent (fa'il bil- 'inayah), the agent by agreement (fa'il bil-ridha), and the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli), and the opposite of freedom in the mentioned meanings can be applied to all these cases. In this way it becomes clear that the denial of will in the second and third senses with regard to God, the Exalted, or completely immaterial things, does not mean the denial of the freedom of such agents.

It has also become clear that will, in the sense of decision to perform a deed can be considered a free action, although, it is not a kind of intentional action, and is not based on the will and decision of another. Perhaps the soul in relation to the will may be considered an agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli).

Finally, the conclusion is obtained that the highest levels of freedom are restricted to God, the Exalted, for He is not only free from the influence of external factors, but is also free of opposing internal inclinations. Then, completely immaterial things have degrees of freedom, for they are only under the subordination of the Divine will, but there is no sort of pressure exerted upon them and they are not subject to internal conflicts, and they are not subject to the domination of one inclination over others.

However, the souls attached to matter, such as man, have the lowest level of freedom, and their wills can be shaped more or less under the influence of external factors. At the same time all of their free actions are not of the same level, and, for example, man's freedom in the creation of mental forms (which is a sort of action by agreement) is much more free and perfect than his freedom to perform physical deeds (which are intentional actions), for the latter deeds are in need of non-voluntary conditions.

1. In Lesson Forty-Six.

## **Lesson 39: The Final Cause**

## An Analysis regarding Free Actions

No free and willful deed (in the general senses of these terms) is performed without the consciousness and knowledge of the agent, regardless of whether this knowledge is the very essence of the agent, as in the case of the agent by self-disclosure (fa'il bil-tajalli), or whether this knowledge is the very action itself, as in the case of the agent by agreement (fa'il bil-ridha), or whether this knowledge is an implication of knowledge of the essence, as is believed in the case of the providential agent, or whether this knowledge is a separable accident of the essence, as in the case of the intentional agent.

Likewise there is no free and willful deed in relation to which the agent does not have some sort of affection (mahabbah), satisfaction, inclination and attraction, such that it is done with complete unwillingness, aversion and disgust. Even in the case of someone who takes bad tasting medicine with repugnance, or someone who decides to undergo surgery allowing a part of his body to be cut, the person who does these things does them because he has an interest in his own health, and his health is not to be obtained except through taking bitter medicines or cutting the infected part of the body. In this respect the taking of the medicine and the losing of one's hand are desired. This desire conquers the aversion to the bad taste and the discomfort of the loss of a limb.

The affection for and desire of a deed differ with the kinds of agents, and there are various concepts which are applied to them. Sometimes only the concept of affection is applicable, an affection which is the very essence of the agent, such as with the agent by self-disclosure.

Sometimes the concept of satisfaction (ridha) is applicable, such as with the agent by agreement (fa'il bil-ridha); sometimes the affection is an implication of the essence, as with the providential agent; and sometimes it is a kind of spiritual quality and is a separable accident of the essence, such as yearning (shawq), as with the intentional agent.

The most inclusive concept which includes all the cases is the concept of affection in the general sense. Its criterion is the perception of agreeability and the perfection of the beloved, and it may be termed desirability. Therefore, it may be said that a voluntary action depends on the agent's considering the action to be agreeable with his own essence, and for this reason he desires it and likes it.

At last sometimes a voluntary agent possesses all of its own perfections, and his affection pertains to an action in so far as it is an effect of his own perfection, as in the case of completely immaterial things. Sometimes its affection pertains to a perfection it lacks, and the action is performed in order to obtain and reach that perfection, as with animal and human souls whose own voluntary actions are for the sake of reaching a state which is agreeable with their essences, and they obtain pleasure and benefit from it.

The difference between these two sorts is that in the first case the affection for the existing perfection (kamal-e mawjud) is the source of the performance of the action. However, in the second case, the affection for the 'absent perfection' (kamal-e mafqud) and yearning to obtain it is the source of the

activity.

Also, in the first case, the existing perfection is the 'cause' of the performance of the action, and by no means may it be considered an effect, but in the second case the absent perfection is obtained by means of the action, and it may be considered a kind of effect of it. However, in both cases, the desire and affection for perfection is fundamental, and the desire and affection for the deed is subordinate.

## Perfection and Goodness

A point to be noted is that what is meant by perfection here is an ontological attribute which is agreeable with the essence of the agent, which is sometimes the source of the performance of a voluntary action, and sometimes it comes into existence as an effect of the action. A perfection which is obtained as an effect of a willful action is sometimes the ultimate perfection of the agent or a preliminary for reaching it.

In this respect it is called real goodness (khayr-e haqiqi) in philosophical terms. Sometimes it is merely agreeable with one of the faculties and powers of the agent, however much it may interfere with other perfections and its ultimate perfection, and, on balance harm the agent, and in this case it is called imagined goodness (khayr-e maznun).

For example, a natural result of eating food is perfection for the vegetative faculty, which is common to man, animals and plants. The pleasure which is obtained through it is perfection for the faculty which perceives it, and it is common between man and animals. Moreover, if the eating of food is for a righteous intention, and in order to obtain power for the performance of one's divine duty, this will bring about a human perfection. In this case it will be a means of obtaining real goodness, as well.

However, if it is merely for animal pleasure, especially if prohibited foods are used, this will merely cause the perfection of some of a person's faculties, and will do harm to his ultimate perfection. In conclusion, it will not yield the real perfection of man. Hence, it is called 'fancied goodness' or 'imagined goodness.'

Furthermore, the situations appropriate to the use of the expressions 'freedom' (ikhtiyar) and 'goodness' (khayr) have also become clear, for every voluntary agent performs only those deeds which are appropriate to his own perfection, and among the voluntary agents, intentional agents perform deeds which are means for achieving their own perfection and good, whether real or fancied, even if the supposed good is pleasure or escaping from pain and suffering.

It is possible that difficulties may be raised regarding the universality of this principle, for there may be people who are uninterested in worldly pleasures that at least perform some voluntary deeds for the good of others and pay no heed to their own good, and sometimes they even sacrifice their own lives for others.

So it cannot be said that generally, every intentional agent performs his deeds for his own good and to reach perfection!. The answer is that these sorts of deeds, whether they are performed due to the

influence of the arousing of emotions, or for the sake of achieving an eternal reward or the pleasure of God, ultimately lead to the good of the agent himself; that is, as a result of such self-sacrifice, he either satisfies his emotions, or he attains to spiritual and heavenly stations and divine pleasure. So, the fundamental motivation of the agent is the attainment of his own perfection and goodness, and service to others is really a means for obtaining perfection.

At the utmost sometimes man's motivations are effective in a conscious form, sometimes semi-consciously, and sometimes unconsciously. For example, in cases where the emotions are aroused, the attention of man is drawn to the interests and benefits of others, and he no longer pays conscious attention to his own good and perfection, but this does not mean that it has no relevance at all.

The reason is that if he is asked why you perform such an act of self-sacrifice. He will answer, "Because I care," or "Because this deed is virtuous and humane," or "Because it will bring a spiritual reward or will lead to divine pleasure." So, the fundamental motivation will be the satisfaction of one's emotions, or taking pleasure in service to others, or to attain human virtue and perfection, or to achieve a heavenly reward and divine pleasure and nearness to God, even if the agent pays no conscious attention to this inner motivation when performing his deed.

## The End and the Final Cause

From the explanation given regarding voluntary actions, it has become clear that such deeds in addition to being in need of an agent—their efficient cause being the essence of the agent—also depend on his knowledge and will. In the case of intentional agents, imagining such results of the intended deed as pleasure, benefit, goodness and perfection, inspires his yearning to perform it.

So, the decision to perform a deed depends on yearning pertaining primarily to the results of the deed, and secondarily to the deed itself. And the obtaining of this yearning is conditioned on the imagination of the deed and its results, and the affirmation of the desirability of the results. Since the result of the deed is primarily desired (as opposed to the deed itself which is secondarily desired), it is called the end (ghayah), and knowledge of and affection for it are called the final cause ('illat-e gha'i). On this basis, a kind of cause called the final cause is established for the performance of a voluntary action.

It is necessary here to mention several important points.

1. The establishment of the final cause for every voluntary action does not mean that there necessarily occur in the essence of the free agent such things as knowledge, yearning, and decision. In other words, it is not necessary that the final cause be other than the efficient cause and supplementary to it; rather, this difference is specific to intentional agents, the source of whose knowledge and yearning is additional to their essences.

However, for some voluntary agents it is possible that either summary or detailed knowledge of the deed

and its end, and also the primary affection for the end, as well as the secondary and subordinate affection for the action, be the very essence of the agent, or implications of it.

That which is necessary for all voluntary agents is knowledge and will in their general senses, whether they are identical with the essence or are additional to it, and whether the knowledge is presentational knowledge or acquired knowledge, and whether the will is the same as love of the essence, and consequently the same as the essence, or an action or a quality additional to the essence, and whether it is an implication of the essence, or a separable accident of it.

Hence the absence of a knowledge and will additional to the essence in some types of voluntary agents does not mean a negation of a final cause; rather it means the unity of the efficient cause and the final cause, as in complete immaterial existents, whose knowledge, affection, and other attributes of perfection are identical with their essence and are not other than the essence.

The identity of these attributes with the essence does not amount to a negation of knowledge, affection, power, life, and similar attributes.

2. Usually philosophers consider knowledge of the desired result or knowledge of the goodness of a deed to be its final cause, and sometimes they put this by saying that the imagination of the end or its mental existence is the final cause, and sometimes they also say that the whatness of the end which occurs with a mental existence before performing the deed is the final cause.

Likewise, they consider knowledge as the cause of the appearance of yearning, and say that knowledge brings about yearning. However, it seems that these expressions are not free of carelessness and it is best to call the final cause affection in its broadest sense, which in some cases appears in the form of agreeability and yearning, for it is the affection for goodness and perfection which drives the voluntary agent toward the performance of a deed, and knowledge is really a condition for its occurrence, not the creative cause of it.

It is clear that considering the whatness of the end as the final cause is not compatible with the fundamentality of existence, although this kind of expression can be found among the Peripatetics, who believe in the fundamentality of existence.

3. The requirement of the agent's knowledge of and affection for the result of a voluntary deed does not mean that the agent must have detailed awareness of the deed and its result, nor does it mean that the result of the deed must really be the true desire and the real perfection and goodness of the agent.

Rather, a summary attention would suffice, and an error in determining what is good does not take away from the fact that the action is voluntary nor does it deprive it of a final cause. Therefore, for one who becomes accustomed to performing a deed it is not necessary to pay detailed attention to the deed, the manner of performing it, or its results.

Rather, actions performed by habit also enjoy a kind of knowledge of desirability, and this amount of knowledge suffices for them to be voluntary. Likewise, the origin of actions which are performed on the assumption of achieving some desired result is in reality affection for goodness, even if the goodness is merely imaginary, or if due to the influence of obstacles the desired conclusion is not obtained.

In reality, the final cause for such sorts of deeds is the wish for a kind of pleasure and goodness and the hope of achieving them.

4. The expression 'end' has another meaning which is applied to the final destination of motion, and equivocation may lead to possible errors, especially since in cases in which deeds are performed gradually and with motion, the desired result is obtained when the motion comes to an end. Among the mistakes which it is possible to make by confusing these two terms is that one may imagine that the essential end of motion is the primary desired goal of the agent itself and the very point at which motion comes to an end.

Since this is the final destination of motion, it should be the primary desired goal of the agent, while it is possible that something which is simultaneous with motion's coming to an end, which may be considered the accidental end in relation to motion, is the real primary goal of the agent, and the agent's first intention pertains to that very thing.

For example, someone who moves in order to meet a friend has as his primary destination the meeting with his friend—or rather his basic aim is pleasure which he derives from seeing his friend—whereas the essential end of the motion is that very point at which motion comes to an end, and the end of the moving thing as such is also reaching this same point, and meeting his friend at that location is considered to be the accidental end of the motion, not to mention the pleasure or benefit he obtains by it.

5. In view of the causal relation, in its general sense, among phenomena of the world, it is possible that the end of an action may be a means to achieve something else. This may also be a means to achieve yet a third thing.

For example, it is possible that in order to acquire knowledge a person may set out for a center of learning, and he takes the obtaining of knowledge to be a preliminary for the performance of his divine duties, and takes the performance of his divine duties as a means for obtaining nearness to God, the Exalted, which is the final perfection of man.

Such a person from the beginning has set the direction of his motion toward God, the Exalted, and his final cause is that same nearness to God, however many intermediate ends he may also have, each of which in its own turn is a means to a higher end. However, it is possible that a person's motivation for acquiring knowledge is merely to satisfy his instinct for curiosity.

In this case, the final cause will be that same motivation. It is possible that his primary intention is to reach wealth or worldly status through the employment of knowledge. Hence, the final end for each

person is that very thing which is taken into consideration from the outset, and he performs the deed in order to achieve it.

If his deed leads to some other result to which he paid no attention at all, or attention to which had no effect on the performance of the deed, then this will not be the final cause of his deed.

From this discussion several conclusions may be obtained, the most important of which are as follows.

a. For an action, it is possible that there be several aims in series, and the closer aim will be a means to the following, and so on to the final aim.

b. Whether the result of an action is the aim does not depend solely on the causal relation between the action and its result, rather it also depends upon the attention (the intention) of the agent. From this the importance of the role of intention in value-laden actions becomes clear.

c. It is not possible for the various aims of an action to be infinite, for the intermediate aims depend on the final aim in order for them to be aims at all, and their desirability takes shape in the shadow of its desirability.

Until the agent pays attention to a final desire, he cannot take other things to be means for reaching it, for it is assumed that their desirability depends on the desirability of the final end. If we suppose that each aim is a means for another aim, all of them will be dependent, and the supposition of dependent things without something on which to depend is self-contradictory and impossible. So, there is no alternative but that something must be primarily desired, in order for other things to become desirable due to it.

In the case of human actions the case is clear, for all humans within themselves find with knowledge by presence that every deed they perform is for a specific final end. Moreover, man does not have the power for imagination of and attention to infinite cases, so as to be able to possess an infinite chain of aims.

6. Another kind of multiplicity can be conceived regarding final causes, and that is that several motivations all together may be effective in the performance of the deed, and it is even possible that each of them would suffice for performing the deed even if the other motivations it were not present.

In other words, it is possible for an agent to perform a deed for several parallel aims, or as the saying goes, “to kill two birds with one stone.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the conjunction of two final causes for the performance of one action is not impossible, unlike the conjunction of two parallel complete efficient causes.

<sup>1</sup> The literal Persian is “to hit two targets with one stone.”

# Lesson 40: The Purposefulness of the Cosmos

## Introduction

The final cause, in the sense which has been explained, is specific to voluntary actions, but according to that which has been reported from Aristotle, it seems that he held that natural actions also have final causes, and those who followed the Peripatetics also accepted this, and they considered the denial of final causes for natural actions to be equal to regarding them as being accidental.

Contrary to the assertion that natural events are accidental, according to a view which has been attributed in various forms to Democritus, Empedocles, and Epicures, there is a final cause for all phenomena.

We shall first state the reported position of Aristotle and its criticism, then we will explain something about chance and accident, and finally we will state the correct meaning of the ‘purposefulness of the cosmos.’

## Aristotle’s View regarding the Final Cause

In the first book of the *Metaphysics*, after mentioning the views of the ancient philosophers regarding the cause of the appearance of phenomena, Aristotle asserts that none of them have precisely taken into consideration the final cause. Then with the analysis of motion and change of material existents, he concludes that every moving or changing existent is traveling toward an end which is its perfection, and the motion itself, which is a prelude for reaching the above-mentioned end, is considered to be its first perfection.

Hence, motion is defined as “the first perfection of a potential existent qua potential.”<sup>1</sup> He adds that every existent has its own specific perfection, and for this reason, every moving thing has a determinate end which it wants to reach. This perfection is sometimes the same form which it wants to take, such as the form of the oak tree for the acorn while it is in the process of germinating and growing.

Sometimes it is one of its accidents, such as a stone which is moving from the sky to the ground, in which case coming to rest on the ground is one of its accidents and perfections. In conclusion, every natural existent has a specific natural inclination toward a determinate end, which causes motion in the direction of that end and destination, and this is the same as the final cause for the occurrence of motion and the determination of its direction.

Aristotle considered the whole cosmos to be a single existent, whose nature includes all particular natures (such as mineral, vegetable and animal), and since its reaching its own perfection is due to a

specific proportion between particular natures, and specific qualities and quantities in the individuals of each of them, the natural inclination of the cosmos toward its own perfection causes the establishment of a special order and arrangement among its phenomena, each of which is considered to be one of its parts or members.

## Criticism

It seems that this position confuses two meanings of end (which were indicated in the previous lesson), and in any case, it is disputable in various respects.

1. Assuming that this position is correct, it can establish only the final cause of the motion and change of corporeal existents, not that of all effects whether material or immaterial, moving or at rest.
2. In view of the fact that natural agents are 'agents by nature' (fa'il bil-tab') and lack consciousness and will, relating 'natural inclination' to them will be no more than metaphorical, just as chemists consider some elements to have a 'tendency to form compounds.'

The assumption of the denial of consciousness and will to agents by nature and the establishment of true desire and inclination (which implies some sense of consciousness) for them is a self-contradictory assumption.

However, if 'natural inclination' is interpreted as 'direction of motion,' a direction required by the nature of the moving existent, and is considered to be an expression based on simile and metaphor, in this case, a fact by the name of 'final cause' will not have been established, and at the most the conclusion which can be obtained is that every motion which is required by the nature of the moving object, also has its direction determined by the requirements of its nature.

3. As will be stated in future sections, the fact that the end of motion is a perfection for all moving objects cannot be established in the sense that moving objects always become more perfect with their movement, so that one can interpret motion in the light of this as 'the first perfection,' for many motions and changes are declinings and decreasings, such as the shrinking motion of plants and animals, the declining process of which toward dryness and death begins after their having reached the end of their growth.

Likewise the coming to rest of a stone on the ground and the like cannot be considered to be perfections of minerals. Therefore, on the assumption that a correct meaning may be considered for the natural inclination of every existent towards its own perfection, declining motions and those which are not toward perfection will still lack final causes.

4. It is extremely difficult to establish the real unity of the natural cosmos and likewise to establish its natural desire for perfection and to explain the cause of the design and harmony of the parts of the cosmos in terms of such desire.

Similarly, the assumption of the existence of a universal soul for the cosmos and the existence of its spiritual yearning toward perfection is at the very least an ungrounded assumption, and thus far we have not found any proof to establish it. If a soul and spiritual yearning are to be established for the natural cosmos, then its motion must be understood as 'intentional' rather than 'natural,' and thus the existence of a final cause for its actions will not be a kind of final cause for natural actions.

## The Solution to Several Problems

Here, it is possible that several problems will come to mind: one is that if natural actions do not have final causes, then phenomena will be accidental, while belief in accidentality and chance is invalid.

Another is that with the denial of the final cause for natural phenomena an intellectual explanation cannot be given for the arrangement of the wonderful order and harmony which governs the cosmos. The third is that if among natural actions and their ends there existed no necessary relation, then no natural phenomenon would be predictable. For example, it would be rational to expect that from an acorn an olive tree may grow.

In order to answer the first problem, it is first necessary to explain something about chance and accident and their several meanings. When it is said that a certain event occurred by chance or by accident, it is possible that one may intend any of the following six meanings:

1. The supposed event has no efficient cause. It is self-evident that chance in this sense is impossible, but this has no relation to the problem under discussion.
2. It is not expected that the action should have been performed by such an agent, as it is said, "Such and such a virtuous person accidentally committed a great sin." This sort of chance is not impossible, and the truth of the matter is that in such cases excessive lust or anger dominated him, and in reality, his avoidance of sin is conditional upon the absence of such abnormal and rare states. In any case, in this sense as well, chance has no relation to the subject in question.
3. The willful agent performs the action without purpose, and an intentional deed takes place without a final cause. This supposition is also erroneous, for, as was explained in the previous lesson, the final cause does not always influence [the agent] consciously. In those cases in which it is imagined that an intentional action has been performed without a purpose, in reality there was a purpose but it was not completely conscious.
4. A willful agent has performed a deed for a specific objective, but it has a result which was not intended, as someone who digs a well in order to reach water, but by chance discovers a treasure. Such chance is not impossible, but this does not imply that an intentional action occurs without a final cause, because the final cause is that for which there is hope in the soul of the agent. However, the external fulfillment of that hope does not have any causal relation to the action, but rather is an effect which

results under certain conditions.

5. A phenomenon which is absolutely not intended by anyone. This is the same opinion advanced by materialists in relation to the appearance of this cosmos, but in the view of the theists, all the phenomena of the cosmos occur and will occur on the basis of Divine Will. This will be explained in the appropriate place.

6. A phenomenon which does not occur by the intention of the proximate natural agent. This is the subject at issue. This sort of chance (if one can call it chance at all) not only is not impossible, but, in view of the meaning of 'natural agent' and the acceptance of its existence, will be necessary.

Considering the various meanings of chance, it has become clear that the denial of intention and purpose for natural agents does not mean the acceptance of chance in an erroneous sense. Moreover, the answer to the second problem has now become clear as well, for the denial of intention and purpose for the universal nature of the cosmos (supposing that such a nature exists) or for particular natures—in Aristotelian terms—does not imply the denial of the purposefulness of the cosmos.

According to theists, all the agents of the cosmos, whether immaterial or material, are under the dominion of the Divine Will, and divine agency presides over all agencies, and thus, there is no motion or rest in the cosmos which is not in conformity to the ontological will [iradah–ye takwini, as opposed to iradah–ye tashri'i, the revealed will] of God, as will be explained in the section on theology, and in this way the design and harmony of the phenomena of the cosmos will be more clearly explained.

As to the third problem, it must be said that a constant or frequent occurrence of specific predictable results is due to the homogeneity between cause and effect, that is, acorns are homogeneous only with oak trees, not with other phenomena. Admission of the homogeneity between them does not mean the acceptance of something called 'natural inclination' in the acorn which we should consider as the final cause of the oak tree.

## **The Purposefulness of the Cosmos**

As was indicated, materialist philosophers consider all the phenomena of the cosmos (except for those which are brought about by means of man and animals) to be accidental and without purpose (in the fifth sense of chance mentioned above). However, theistic philosophers deem natural phenomena to be purposeful, as well, but they explain the purposefulness of the cosmos in various different ways, among which the main ways are as follows:

1. Aristotelians hold that for every nature there is specific inclination toward a determinate end which causes motion towards it, and likewise for the entire cosmos, they believe it has a nature whose inclination towards its own perfection causes the proportion, harmony and coherence of its particular kinds of phenomena. We have already criticized this theory and have recounted its difficulties.

2. A group of the Neoplatonists, followers of the school of Alexandria, and 'urafa (mystics or gnostics) held that for every existent there is a kind of consciousness and will, no matter how weak and faint.

In this way they responded to some of the difficulties which were raised regarding the Aristotelian theory. According to this theory, all the agents of the cosmos will be intentional agents, and the agent by nature and by compulsion must be omitted from among the kinds of agents, for the conjunction of the acceptance of the agent by nature and the establishment of consciousness and will for each agent (as is implied by their words) implies a contradiction.

Likewise, the establishment of consciousness for natural agents is not compatible with the necessity for the knower to be immaterial (as will be explained in the appropriate place). In any case, the least of the difficulties of this position is that this matter cannot be established by proof.

3. The third way is that natural agents are subordinated agents and beyond their agency there is an agency of a higher source and ultimately the agency of God, the Exalted. In this way, all events have a purpose and final cause, not within nature but in the essences of the supernatural agents, and that which occurs in the natural cosmos is the destination of motion, not final causes!

Basically, according to the theory of the fundamentality of existence, it must be said that natures in the sense of whatnesses are respectival and have no implications bearing upon ontological matters. Specific existents which are considered to be individuals with unconscious natures have no will or intention for their own perfection or for the perfection of the cosmos, nor do they have any intention for the lack of it.

Causal relations connect them with each other to such an extent that it has brought about this wonderful design, and in this sense, each of them has a share in the establishment of this design, but not in the sense of having an intention or will in relation to it, and not in the sense that the design is imposed on them by compulsion or force (jabri).

There are more precise discussions regarding the attribution of will and purpose to God, the Exalted, which, God willing, will be treated in the discussions of theology.

1. This definition will be explained in Lesson Fifty-Five.

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