

Place of Reason in Religion

This is one of the most important distinctions between the Sunnis on one side, and the Ithna'asharis on the other. To be more exact, I should have used the word Ash'arites, in place of Sunnis. But all the Sunnis nowadays are Ash'arites. Mu'tazilites have become extinct long ago, though some of the great scholars of the recent times like Justice Amir 'Ali were Mu'tazilites.

Anyhow, the Shi'ahs say that irrespective of religious commandments, there is real merit or demerit in different courses of actions, and it is because a certain thing is good that God orders it, and because the other is bad that He forbids it.

The Sunnis deny this conception. They say that nothing is good or evil in itself. Only what God has commanded us is good and what He has forbidden us is evil. If a thing is forbidden by God it is bad; then if God cancels the first order, and allows it, it will become good, after being bad.

In other words, the Shi'ahs say that God has forbidden us to tell a lie because it is bad; the Sunnis say that lying has become bad because God has forbidden it.

The Shi'ahs recognize the relation of cause with effect. The Sunnis deny it. They say that there is no cause except Allah. And it is just a habit of Allah that whenever, for example, we drink water He quenches our thirst. Based upon the above difference of attitude about the position of reason in religion are the following differences:—

The Shi'ahs say that God never acts without purpose or aimlessly. All His actions are based on wisdom and intelligent purpose. The proof being because it is not commendable, rationally, to act without purpose. The Sunnis on the other hand, because of their denouncement of rational merit or demerit, say that it is quite possible for God to act aimlessly.

It follows that, according to the Shi'ahs, God does nothing which has inherent demerit in it. The Sunnis deny this.

The Shi'ah say that all actions of Allah are intended for the benefit of His creatures. Because He Himself has no need; and if His actions become devoid of benefits for His creation also, they will become

aimless, which is rationally not commendable. The Sunnis deny this, because of their stand about rational merit or demerit.

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