

Retribution

Reward Of Deeds

One of the issues that ought to be touched upon in any discussion on Divine justice is the issue of the compensation for deeds in the hereafter. Resurrection and the judgement of good and evil deeds—rewarding good-doers and punishing evildoers—are in themselves manifestations of Divine justice. One of the standard proofs presented for the validity of resurrection is that since God is all-wise and all-just, He does not abandon human deeds without reckoning and reward or punishment.

The Leader of the Faithful, Ali (a) says:

It is possible that God grants respite to the oppressor but He never abandons him without punishment; He awaits him on his path of crossing, and will block him much like a bone stuck in the throat. [1](#)

Our aim in this section is not to establish the validity of resurrection through God's justice. On the contrary, our present discussion will address the objection and argument raised against Divine justice as regards the manner of punishment and retribution in the hereafter. It is claimed that the punishment in the hereafter, as it has been described to us, is contrary to Divine Justice! It is said that in the retribution of the hereafter, there is no correspondence between the crime and its punishment, and hence the retribution is meted out unjustly.

In this argument, the matter of retribution which is otherwise an evidence for Divine Justice, is presented as an objection against it, and as being contrary to wisdom. The idea which is at the root of the objection is that in the legislation of retributive laws, there ought to be a correspondence between the crime and retribution. For instance, if someone were to dump litter on a thoroughfare, justice demands that punitive action be taken against him. There is no doubt that the penalty for such an offence cannot be a heavy punishment, like execution or life imprisonment. Based on the principle of correspondence between crime and punishment, the penalty for such an offence can be say a maximum of a week's imprisonment, and if such an offender is judged in a kangaroo court and punished by way of a firing squad, it would constitute injustice. To punish offences is necessary for justice, but if the principle of correspondence between crime and punishment is not observed, punishment would in itself be an act of

injustice.

Sins like backbiting, lying, adultery, and manslaughter, are crimes which demand punishment, but are the punishments specified for them in the hereafter not excessive? The Qur'an specifies the punishment for manslaughter as an eternity in hell-fire. For backbiting, it is narrated that it constitutes the condiment for mongrels of hellfire.² Severe and unbearable punishments have been mentioned for other sins as well—chastisements which are qualitatively extremely intense and quantitatively very long. The objection is how does this incongruity be reconciled with Divine Justice?

In order to respond to this objection, we must discuss different types of punishments and point out the type that exists in the hereafter. This requires that we first study the order governing the realm of the hereafter and delineate the differences between it and the created order on the basis of what can be gleaned from reliable Islamic sources and logical proofs.

Differences Between The Two Worlds

Do the same physical laws, rules and principles which govern this world also operate in the hereafter? Are there any differences between the life of this world and the hereafter? Is the realm of the hereafter the same as that of this world, the only difference being that one comes after the other in time?

Certainly, there are differences between the two worlds though there might be certain similarities; the existence of differences is definite.

These realms are two orders, two worlds, and two types of life with different laws. But do not be quick to judge, I do not mean to say that Divine Justice applies to this world but is not part of the laws of the hereafter—hence injustice is acceptable there but not here. No, this is not what I mean and I wish to say something else altogether, so bear with me.

There is no easy and accessible paradigm to demonstrate the differences between these two types of life, since every paradigm that we may cite will be of this world and governed by earthly laws. But as an approximation we can use the analogy of life inside and outside a womb. We have used this example in another place and for another purpose.

The foetus in the womb has one type of life and after birth acquires another type of life. A common factor between these two lives is that in both there is nutrition, but the method of nutrition of the foetus differs from that of the newborn after birth. The foetus in the womb lives a vegetative life and takes nutrients from the mother's blood through the umbilical cord, much like a plant which absorbs nutrients from the soil through its roots. Both the lungs and intestines of the foetus are non-functional, but the moment it comes into this world its whole system of life is overhauled. It enters another realm and a different set of rules govern its new life in this "changed" world. In this world, it cannot survive even for a moment with the patterns and functions of its previous life. Here it must breathe and feed through its mouth. Before

birth, if food were to have entered its intestines, and if air were to have filled its lungs, it would have died. But, now it is the opposite. Now, if even for a few moments air is kept from entering its lungs and food is prevented from reaching its intestines, it will suffer death. After birth, if someone wished to continue the previous life pattern for the newborn, for instance by placing him in an incubator and after closing his oral and nasal tracts provide him with blood through the umbilical cord, it would not be possible. The life pattern of the baby has changed altogether, and he must live by a new pattern and in a new system.

The world hereafter in relation to this world is similar to the example given above. The life pattern in the hereafter is different from that in this world. There is life in both, but not identical. The life there has specific rules and laws different from those of this world. In other words, this world and the hereafter are two different worlds and two realms of existence. In order to understand these differences, we must refer to the descriptions narrated in our sacred sources.

We will mention some of them in what follows:

A. Constancy And Change

There is change and motion in this world. The child becomes an adolescent, matures, grows senile, and finally dies. In this world, the young get old, the old pass away; but in the world of hereafter, there is no senility and old age, not even death prevails there. There is a world of eternity, and here is a world of ephemerality; there is a world of constancy and permanence, whereas here is a world of change and annihilation.

B. Pure And Tainted Life

The second difference is that in this world, life and death are mixed with each other, whereas the next world is purely life. Here there are inanimate and animate beings, each of which transforms to the other. The matter which is our body now and is alive was once dead and inanimate, and sometime in the future will again lose its life and revert to the inanimate state. In this world life and death are interwoven, unlike the next world; there it is pure life; the earth of the hereafter, its minerals and pebbles, its trees and fruits, all have life, even its fire is conscious and active.

The Holy Qur'an states:

وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ

...but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life. (Qur'an, 29:64)

The hereafter is a living entity, it is alive and animate.

The bodies and organs of this world have no perception or sensation, but in the hereafter, even the nails

and skin have perception and will speak. During the resurrection, mouths will be sealed and every organ shall report by itself the acts it had performed.

The tongue shall not be asked as it could hide the truth by lying. Every member of the body will become articulate there, listing the acts it performed.

The Holy Qur'an states:

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

Today We shall seal their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness concerning what they used to earn. (Qur'an, 36:65)

Another verse refers to the dialogue and argument that takes place between men and their limbs and members of their bodies. After the eyes, ears, and other parts of the body bear witness against the sinners, they will say:

وَقَالُوا لَجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا ۚ قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

They will say to their skins, 'Why did you bear witness against us?' They will say, 'We were given speech by Allah. (Qur'an, 41:21)

Indeed, the life in the hereafter is pure, unadulterated by death, with no trace of senility, aging, death, and annihilation; in the hereafter only, eternity governs supreme.

C. Sowing And Reaping

The third difference between this world and the hereafter is that here is the place of sowing and planting the seeds, and there is the place of reaping and benefiting from the produce. In the hereafter there is no scope for the performance of deeds, nor for their preparation—there is nothing but results and produce. Just like the day when examination results are announced. If the student pleads to be given respite to study at the hour of the exam, or if he asks to be tested at the time that the results are being announced, then the only answer he will hear is that the time for examination has finished, and now is the time for awarding grades. The reason prophets exhort: “O people! Engage in virtuous deeds and prepare provisions for your next abode,” is that the time for acting and performing deeds is limited.

The Leader of the Faithful, Ali (a) says:

وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا حِسَابَ وَغَدًا حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٍ

Today is (the time for) action, not reckoning; Tomorrow (will be the time) for reckoning, not action.[3](#)

And in another place he states:

عِبَادَ اللَّهِ، الْآنَ فَاعْلَمُوا، وَالْأَلْسُنُ مُطْلَقَةٌ وَالْأَبْدَانُ صَحِيحَةٌ وَالْأَعْضَاءُ لَدَنَةٌ وَالْمُنْقَلَبُ فَسِيحٌ

O servants of God! You must perform deeds now. Since, the tongues are free, the bodies healthy, the limbs obedient, and the opportunity abundant. [4](#)

Implying that the body is your means to perform deeds and actions, before it is taken from you and disintegrates, work with it, and do things which will be beneficial to you. When the time has elapsed, and the soul separates from the body by the omnipotent Lord's command, then it will be too late to act. At that time, whatever request you may make to return to perform any virtuous act, the only answer you will hear is: "Impossible." If it were possible for a fruit already separated from its tree to return back to the tree and regain its former position to ripen and sweeten as a fruit, then it would have been possible to return to this world, but the law of creation is otherwise.

What a beautiful statement has been spoken by the holy messenger of God (s) in this regard:

الدُّنْيَا مَزْرَعَةُ الْآخِرَةِ

The world is a plantation for the hereafter.[5](#)

In this narration, the totality of man's existence has been compared to the annual cycle, wherein each of the world and the hereafter has been compared to one of two seasons, the world being the sowing season and the hereafter being the harvest season.

D. Individual And Collective Destiny

The fourth difference we are aware of between the systems of this world and hereafter is that the destinies in this world are to a large extent collective, but in the hereafter, everyone has a unique destiny. The purport is that worldly life is social, and social life is governed by unity and cooperation; the virtuous acts of good people affect the felicity of others, and the evil acts of wicked people have certain effects on society. It is for this very reason that there exists the idea of "shared responsibilities." The members of a society, like the limbs and organs of a body, must more or less endure each other's wrongs and stresses. Any problem in one limb, causes disease in other limbs; for instance, if the liver does not function well, it affects other organs in a harmful way.

It is due to the fact that individuals of a society have a collective destiny that it behoves them to restrain others when they want to commit sins. The Holy Prophet (s) explained the effect of sin on a community

by way of a parable: A group of people had gone aboard a boat and set sail. One of the passengers began drilling a hole in the boat from where he was seated. The others refrained from restraining him with the excuse that he was only drilling on his part of the boat, and in conclusion the whole boat sank and its passengers drowned. But if they had restrained and stopped him, they would have saved themselves as well as the individual who did the deed.

In this world all colours are painted with a single brush. Dry tinder and green branches both either burn together in the fire or are saved from it. Likewise, in a society where there are both good-doers and evildoers, sometimes the evildoers benefit from the positive effects of the good, and sometimes innocent individuals have to suffer the negative consequences of the evildoers.

But the hereafter is not like this. There it is impossible for anyone to have any effect on another's deeds. Neither will a person enjoy the benefit of a good act if he had no role to play in it, nor will he suffer the punishment of the evil doers. The hereafter is an abode of separation and demarcation; it separates between good and evil, demarcates the good-doers from the evildoers. It declares to the sinners that:

وَأَمَّا زُورًا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ

And 'Get apart today, you guilty ones!' (Qur'an, 36:59)

In that world, father will be separated from son, and son from father; everyone will receive the reward for his own acts.

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

No bearer shall bear another's burden. (Qur'an, 6:64, 17: 15, 35: 18, 39:7, 53:38)

This difference stems from the fact that the hereafter is a realm of pure actualization, whereas this world is a realm of motion and change—that is, a realm of a combination between potency and act. Pure actualizations neither accept any effect from each other, nor do they combine with each other; but mixed actualizations both accept effects and do combine with one another. Hence, in the world, societies are formed which are a kind of combination and congregation of individual humans; while in the hereafter, society has no meaning. In this world if someone mingles with the virtuous, he gets influenced by their company; and if he mingles with the wicked, he becomes misguided.

Rumi says:[6](#)

Good and hateful qualities pass from bosoms into bosoms by a hidden way;[7](#)

Firdawsi says:[8](#)

If you pass the perfume seller's (shop), your vestments become all fragrant;

If you pass through (the shop of) the blacksmith; you will not get anything other than black.

But in the next world, if one were to eternally accompany the virtuous, one's station would never be elevated, and if one were to eternally accompany the sinners, one's station would not be demoted. There, being in the company and presence of each other is not effective and nothing has an effect on anything. In that realm, love and hate do not transfer from heart to heart. Therein neither sitting in the company of perfume sellers attracts the good scent, nor does accompanying the coal sellers attract black dust. In that world, there is no mutual exchange, neither natural exchange nor man-made exchange. These interactions and exchanges are specific to this world only.

Of course, the fact that the life in the hereafter is not collective does not imply that everyone will be isolated and lonely there, and that nobody will see anyone else or have anything to do with them. Rather the implication is that the interrelatedness, reciprocal influences, cooperation, and contradiction that exist here, as well as the spiritual, moral, and intellectual interactions which prevail and give shape to society do not exist there. In other words, a real combination of interacting individuals and destinies do not exist in the next world. But there is collectiveness and mutual existence in both heaven and hell, with this distinction that in the congregation: In of the virtuous, there is friendship, intimacy, warmth, and honesty. For the Qur'an says:

إِخْوَانًا عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ

they are (intimate like) brothers, (they will be reclining) on couches, facing one another (Qur'an, 15:47)

On the other hand, in the congregation of the evildoers there is nothing but disgust and enmity of each other.

كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعْنَتْ أُخْتَهَا

Every time that a nation enters (hell), it will curse its sister (nation) (Qur'an, 7:38)

and abuse toward one another

إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَحَقٌّ تَخَاصُمُ أَهْلِ النَّارِ

That is indeed a truth: the contentions of the inmates of the Fire (Qur'an, 38:64)

The Correlation Between The Two Worlds

From the above discussion, we came to understand the differences between the orders governing the two worlds. Now we will look into the basis of the inter-relationship between them.

There is no doubt in the fact that there is a relationship between this world and the hereafter. One might even call it a very intense affinity. The relationship of this world to the next is as two parts of one life, and two seasons of a year; in one season one must to sow and in the other season reap the harvest. To be precise, one is a sowing and the other is the produce itself—the first is the seed and the other the fruit. Hence, heaven and hell are created here. A narration has it:

أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ... قِيَعَانٌ يَفْقُ غَرْسُهَا سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Verily, heaven is an empty desert, with no plantations or farms; Verily the incantations of *subhan allah*, *al-hamdu lilillah*, *allahu akbar* and *la hawla wa la quwwata illah billah*, are recited here but planted there.⁹

In another narration, the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:¹⁰

On the night of ascension, I entered Paradise. I saw angels busy in construction, a brick of silver and a brick of gold, and at times they would stop constructing. I asked them, “Why do you work sometimes and stop at other times?” They replied, “We wait for construction materials (to arrive).” I enquired, “What are these construction materials?” They said, “A believer’s incantations which he recites in the world: *subhan allah*, *wal-hamdu lillah*, *wa la ilaha illallahu wallahu akbar*. Whenever they recite, we build, whenever they stop, we stop.”¹¹

In another narration, the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said,¹²

“Whoever recites *subhan allah*, God plants a tree for him in paradise, Whoever recites *alhamdu lillah*, God plants a tree for him in paradise, Whoever recites *la ilaha illa allah*, God plants a tree for him in paradise, Whoever recites *allahu akbar*, God plants a tree for him in paradise.” A man from Quraish remarked, “Hence our trees in paradise are plenty.” The Prophet cautioned, “Indeed, but be careful not to send fire to bum them up! And this is based on God's statement: 'O you who have faith! Obey God and obey the Apostle, and do not render your works void'”.¹³

Implying that in as much as you create trees in paradise by your good acts, so also you ignite the hell fire by your evil deeds; and it is possible for this fire to destroy your good efforts.

In another narration, the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ الْحَسَدَ لَيَأْكُلُ الْإِيمَانَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ النَّارُ الْحَطَبَ

Verily, envy consumes a person's faith like the fire consumes wood (and renders it into ash). [14](#)

From this we understand that hell, like heaven, is an empty desert; the fire and punishment are the embodiments of man's sins which are ignited and sent forth by man himself; serpents, scorpions, boiling water, and the food of hell (*zaqqum*), are all created from the wickedness and evil, in the same manner that houris, palaces, and the eternal pleasures of heaven are created from piety and virtuous acts. With regard to the inhabitants of hell fire, the Qur'an says:

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزِ أَلِيمٍ

for such is a painful punishment due to defilement (Qur'an, 34:5)

Three Types Of Retribution

The previous two discussions on 'the differences between the two worlds,' and the 'correlation between the two worlds,' were a preamble for the present discussion wherein we wish to study the various types of retribution. We want to prove in this section that the nature of retribution in the hereafter is different from the nature of retribution of this world, and that the answer to the objection of incongruity between crime and punishment depends on recognizing this difference. Punishments are of three types:

1. Conventional Punishments (warning and reprimand)
2. Punishments that have an existential and natural connection with sin (worldly consequence)
3. Punishments which are the very embodiment of the crime itself and inseparable from it (punishment of the hereafter or "Retribution")

Warning And Reprimand

The first type of punishment pertains to penalties and judicial measures legislated in human societies by either secular or religious authorities. The benefit of such measures is twofold. Firstly, they act as deterrents and prevent the repetition of the crime by the criminal himself or by others—for everybody fears being penalized. It is for this reason we can call such punishments "warnings." Secondly, they provide closure and relief to victims of the crime—this applying to the criminal cases of aggression and oppression against others.

The sense of revenge and wanting to get even is quite strong in humans. It appears that it was even stronger in earlier times and in more primitive societies. If criminals were not to be punished by law, a lot

of corruption and destruction in society would follow. This feeling still persists in man today, the only difference being that in civilized societies it is attenuated or more hidden. An oppressed human develops a psychological complex, which if not resolved, can possibly, consciously or unconsciously, lead a person to commit crime himself. But if the criminal is punished in front of the victim, the latter's complex is resolved and his psyche is cleansed from hatred and discomfort.

The penal code is necessary and essential to reform the criminal and ensure order in society; nothing else can replace it. With regards to the proposal of certain individuals who hold that as an alternative to punishment, the criminal should be reformed, or that instead of prisons we should have disciplinary facilities, is actually a fallacy. Reform and disciplinary facilities are definitely necessary and essential, and undoubtedly such corrective measures will reduce crime levels. Likewise, social inequities are one of the causes of crime, and establishing social, economic, and cultural safety nets will also reduce crime rates. But none of these can be a substitute for the other. Correctional measures and an equitable social order cannot become a substitute for penalty and punishment. By the same token, penalties and reprimands cannot take the place of proper rehabilitation and justice in society.

No matter how good the rehabilitation and how just the social system, one will still find that rebellious criminals exist and for whom the only deterrence is the application of punishment which at times may need to be quite severe.

The crime rate can be reduced to a large extent through the strengthening of faith, proper rehabilitation, social reform, and by eliminating causes of crimes. All of these reductive methods should be employed, but the essential fact remains that the unique role of punishment cannot be denied and that none of the other methods can produce its effects. Man has not yet succeeded, and perhaps will never succeed, to reform people purely through admonishment, instruction, and all other educational and corrective means. What's more, there is no hope in the foreseeable future that the present civilization and materialistic mode of living will create a situation where no crimes will be committed. The current civilization has not only failed to reduce crime rates, it has rather exacerbated and intensified the level of crime in many ways.

In olden times, theft used to take the form of petty theft, pick-pocketing, or highway robbery. But today it occurs in thousands of ways and forms, visible and invisible, overt and covert. Even the overt cases are not insignificant, for sometimes a whole ship or two is stolen from the seas in broad daylight.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, we are forced to conclude that human legislation of punishment and penalties is necessary and essential for human societies. But as was pointed out earlier, the legislators of the penal code need to maintain some form of congruity between the crime and punishment.

But an interesting point to note here is that such punishments cannot be envisaged in the hereafter. The reason is that, in that realm there is neither the question of deterrence from future crimes, nor of a need

for revenge. The hereafter is not a realm for performing deeds, such that man ought to be punished to deter him from further crimes. Nor is it the case that the Lord, God forbid, has any sense of revenge and spite that He needs to resolve a psychological complex through retaliation. Similarly, the issue of assuaging the hurt feelings of the oppressed is not relevant there—especially if that oppressed is a saint and beloved of God, and a locus of universal Divine mercy. By all the more reason, others who are not saints, would also prefer the goodness, grace, and forgiveness of that realm to a world of revenge and vindication.

Furthermore, not all punishments are for a violation of people's rights, such that one may argue that Divine justice demands that the oppressed person's heart should be won through a retaliation aimed at the oppressor. A large portion of punishments are related to polytheism, hypocritical display of worship, neglecting God's worship, etc. These are Divine rights and not people's rights; and in such cases none of the two effects and characteristics of worldly punishment would apply.

Worldly Consequences

The second type of punishments are those that have a causal relationship with the crime. That is to say, they are the direct effects and natural consequences of the crime. These penalties are called the 'consequence of deeds' or 'natural effects of sins.' Many sins produce undesirable natural consequences in this world for the sinner. For instance, alcoholism, in addition to its social harms, does psychological and physical harm to the addict. Alcoholism causes nervous breakdown, arterial occlusion, liver damages. Sexual indiscretion can cause gonorrhoea and syphilis.

These are natural effects of sin, not legal penalties, such that one could object that a correspondence between crime and punishment ought to be observed. If someone takes a deadly poison and ignores the advice of a well-wisher, he will die. Death is the natural consequence and direct effect of consuming poison. Such a careless individual will surely die, but it would be wrong for someone to argue that the poor fellow committed a crime of just say five minutes, so why should he have to suffer the penalty of death and lose his life? If someone is told not to jump off a cliff otherwise you will die, he has no right to object and say, "What is the relationship between my recklessness and such a severe punishment?" Here the laws of cause and effect apply. Falling off a cliff or consuming poison is the cause, and death its effect. That is the specific effect of the cause, and it cannot be otherwise.

The issue of congruity between crime and punishment is related to man-made punishments, wherein the relation between them and the crime is man-made, not natural and essential. But natural consequences are the results and necessary effects of actions. Now, as we mentioned in the second section of this book, everything in the universal causal chain has a special position and it is impossible for a real cause not to entail a real effect.

In the discussion on the differences between this world and the hereafter, we said that this world is the sowing ground, whereas the hereafter is the harvest. But at times, some deeds demonstrate their effects

in this very world. In other words, the sowed seeds get harvested here and now. Of course, this acquisition of the results of deeds and reaping the produce of sowed seeds is a type of Divine retribution, though it is not a complete retribution. The final and detailed reckoning and the total retribution will take place in the hereafter. This world is an abode of deeds, and at times retribution can be seen here, but the hereafter is an absolute abode for retribution and reckoning, there being no scope for deeds whatsoever.

In the majority of the cases actions pertaining to God's creation, whether they involve good and humanitarian service to mankind, or evil and harm to people, will be rewarded or punished here in this world, without the retribution of the hereafter being reduced in any way whatsoever.

Doing evil to one's parents will be punished in this world, especially if that evil entails, God forbid, killing one's parents. Even if a person's parents are sinners or disbelievers, there also evil towards them will not go unpunished.

The Abbasid caliph Muntasir killed his father Mutawakkil, and after a short period of time he was killed himself – this despite the fact that Mutawakkil himself was a very wicked and evil person. In his gatherings of fun and frolic, Mutawakkil used to ridicule the Leader of the Faithful Ali (a). He would have his stooges dress up like that eminent personality and imitate him in jest, and degrade him in their poetry. It is said that upon hearing his father abuse the holy lady Fatimah (sa), Muntasir asked an elder what the punishment for it was? He was told that the punishment is certain death, but beware, whosoever kills his father, his own life will be shortened. Muntasir said I do not care that my life is shortened if it is for the sake of obedience to God. He killed his father and thereafter survived for only seven months. [15](#)

Ali (a), with regard to the consequences in this world to kindness and service to mankind, says:

وقال (ع) : لَا يُزْهِدَنَّكَ فِي الْمَعْرُوفِ مَنْ لَا يَشْكُرُهُ لَكَ، فَقَدْ يَشْكُرُكَ عَلَيْهِ مَنْ لَا يَسْتَمْتِعُ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْهُ، وَقَدْ تُدْرِكُ مِنْ شُكْرِ الشَّاكِرِ أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا أَضَاعَ الْكَافِرُ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Sometimes you do an act of goodness to someone but he fails to appreciate it, (or perhaps is even ungrateful), but this should not discourage you from continuing doing good, for at times you will receive your reward multiple fold above your expectations, from someone to whom you had done no goodness at all. Anyway, the universe will pay you back—perhaps from a quarter you never expected it to come from.! [16](#)

Mawlana Rumi in regard to action and reaction says: [17](#)

This world is the mountain, and our action the shout: the echo of the shouts comes (back) to us. [18](#)

Another poet speaks about retribution and worldly consequences thus: [19](#)

I saw with my own eyes on the path, a chick taking the life of an ant.

It had not yet finished downing its prey, when another bird of prey finished it off.

So, if you do bad, do not feel safe from perils; for it is necessary for nature to punish.

Of course, we should never think that whenever an affliction befalls a person or a people, it is necessarily the consequence of their deeds; since afflictions in this world have other reasons too and we believe that in this world a certain degree of natural consequences also prevail.

Punishments Of The Hereafter

The retribution of the next world has a stronger existential connection with sins. The relationship of deeds to their retribution in the hereafter is neither of the first type--conventional or man-made, nor is it of the second type--concrete and natural; rather, it is something higher than these two. Here the principle of 'unity' and 'identity' operates. *i.e.* the reward or punishment which will be meted out to good-doers or evil doers in the hereafter will be an embodiment of the act itself.

The Holy Qur'an states:

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّحَضَّرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا

The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as for the evil, it has done, it will wish there were a far distance between it and itself. (Qur'an, 3:30)

In another place it declares:

وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا ۗ وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

They will find present whatever they had done, and your Lord does not wrong anyone. (Qur'an, 18:49)

In another place it asserts:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصُدُّ النَّاسُ أُمَّتَاتًا لِّبِرِّوَا أَعْمَالِهِمْ فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

On that day, mankind will issue forth in various groups to be shown their deeds. So, whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (Qur'an, 99:6-8)

In a verse which according to some commentators is the last verse to be revealed in the Qur'an, it is said:

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

And beware of a day in which you will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul shall be recompensed fully for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged. (Qur'an, 2:281)

The Holy Qur'an refers to those who unjustly abuse the property of orphans as follows:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا ۖ وَسَيَصْلُونَ سَعِيرًا

Indeed, those who consume the property of orphans wrongfully, only ingest fire into their bellies, and soon they will enter the Blaze. (Qur'an, 4: 10)

That is, consuming the property of orphans is actually consuming hell-fire, but since they are in this world, they fail to perceive it. Once the barrier of the body is removed by death, they will catch fire and burn.

The Holy Qur'an admonishes believers thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and let every soul consider what it sends ahead for Tomorrow, and be wary of Allah. (Qur'an, 59: 18)

It is an exceptionally stern and explicit tone, it commands thus: Everyone ought to consider what they have sent forth for their morrow. The message is about sending in advance meaning that you will get over there exactly what you send forth now from here. Hence, carefully observe what you send forth.

It is like the traveller who purchases some items and sends them in advance back to his hometown. Such a person must scrutinize and be careful, since when he returns from his journey and arrives back home, he will find exactly those things that he had previously packed and sent by post. It is not possible for a him to have sent one type of item and after returning home to find another type of item.

In this holy verse, the word *ittaqu allah* has been used twice between which there is a short phrase: *wal tandhur nafsun ma qaddamat lighadin*. Perhaps there is no similar verse in the Qur'an where after such a short gap the imperative of "God wariness" is repeated.

Again the holy Qur'an states:

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ
سُجِّرَتْ وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ وَإِذَا
الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ

When the sun is wound up, when the stars scatter, when the mountains are set moving, when the pregnant camels are neglected, when the wild beasts are mustered, when the seas are set afire, when the souls are assorted, when the girl buried-alive will be asked for what sin she was killed. When the (scrolls of the) scriptures are unrolled, when the sky is stripped off, when hell is set ablaze, when paradise is brought near, then a soul shall know what it has readied (for itself). (Qur'an, 81: 1-14)

That is, whatever man shall receive in that world, whether heavenly bounties or hellish punishment, all of it will be what he has readied and prepared for himself. The only thing is that in this world he is unable to perceive them, whereas in the hereafter he shall be fully conscious of them. This is the purport of many verses in the holy Qur'an--that on the Day of Resurrection God will inform you of what you did, implying that right now you are not fully aware of what you are doing, and it will only be on the Day of Resurrection that you shall be made aware of your deeds and fully conscious of your behaviour.

قُلْ إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ الَّذِي تَفِرُونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مَلَأَ قِيَامِكُمْ ۚ ثُمَّ تَرُدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

Say, 'The death that you flee will indeed encounter you. Then you will be returned to the Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, and He will inform you about what you used to do. (Qur'an, 62:8)

The retribution in the hereafter is the embodiment of the deeds done here. The rewards and punishments there are actually these very acts of goodness or evil and which will be revealed and manifested when the veils are lifted. The recitation of the Qur'an here, will become a beautiful entity there--a presence which will perpetually accompany the reciter. On the other hand, backbiting or hurting people will manifest as the gravy of the mongrels of hell.

In other words, our acts have an earthly dimension which is temporary and ephemeral--and that is the one which appears in this world as the spoken word or done deed; and they have another celestial dimension and appearance--which even "after" the deed is done, never disappears and is an inseparable effect and offspring of ours. Our deeds from that celestial dimension and unseen perspective are permanent, and one day we shall reach those deeds and will be able to perceive them in their celestial form and appearance. If they are beautiful and pleasing, it will be bounty and grace for us, and if they are ugly and unpleasant, it will be our fire and hell.

There is a narration that a woman of short stature received an audience with the Holy Prophet (s). After her departure, 'Aishah imitated her shortness with gestures. The Holy Prophet (s) said to her, "Pick your teeth". 'Aishah asked, "But have I eaten anything, O Prophet of God?" The Holy Prophet repeated, "Pick

your teeth.” 'Aishah used a toothpick and a piece of meat fell from her mouth.[20](#)

In reality, the Holy Prophet, by his control over the celestial realm, enabled 'Aishah to perceive in this world, the celestial and other-worldly reality of backbiting. The holy Qur'an explains backbiting thus:

وَلَا يَغْتَابَ بَعْضُكُمُ بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ

And do not backbite one another. Will any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. (Qur'an, 49: 12)

Qays ibn 'Asim was one of the companions of the Holy Prophet (s), He narrates that one day in the company of Bani Tamim, I entered the presence of the Holy Prophet (s), and I made the following request, “O Prophet of God! We live in the desert, and we rarely get an occasion to benefit from your presence, please admonish us.” The Holy Prophet (s) gave us useful advice, some of which is as follows:

You will inevitably have a companion who will never separate from you; He will be buried with you, such that you will be dead but he will be alive. If your companion is honourable, he will honour you; and if he is ignoble, he will abandon you to the events. The companion will be resurrected with you, and you will be responsible for him, so take care in the choice of companion—that he should be good. For if he is good, he will provide you comfort, otherwise he will cause you distress. That companion is your deeds.

Qays ibn 'Asim said, “I would like your admonishments to be put into verse so as to make it easier to memorize them and treasure them as a source of pride for us. The Holy Prophet (s) instructed someone to summon Hassan ibn Thabit, but before Hassan could arrive, Qays who was enchanted by the guidance of the holy Prophet, himself composed the admonishment in the form of a poem and presented it to the holy Prophet. The poem was:

Choose for your behaviour a good companion, for a Man's escort in the grave is his action,

There is no option but to prepare, For the day when man shall be summoned

So, if you will preoccupy yourself with anything, let it not be in what displeases the Lord,

For man will not be accompanied after death, save by what he used to do,

Indeed, man is not but a guest amongst his people, he will tarry a little then depart.[21](#)

It is narrated in a tradition thus:

إِنَّمَا هِيَ أَعْمَالِكُمْ تَرُدُّ إِلَيْكُمْ

These punishments are your very actions and behaviors which are being returned to you. [22](#)

Hats off to Sa'di who composed such sublime verses:[23](#)

Every moment a breath of life is spent, If I consider, not much of it remains.

O thou, whose fifty years have elapsed in sleep, Wilt thou perhaps overtake them in these five days?

Shame on him who has gone and done no work. The drum of departure was beaten but he has not made his load.

Whoever had come had built a new edifice. He departed and left the place to another

Send provision for thy journey to thy tomb. Nobody will bring it after thee; send it before.

Life is snow, the sun is melting hot. Little remains, but the gentleman is slothful still.

O thou who hast gone empty handed to the bazar, r fear thou wilt not bring a towel filled.

Who eats the com he has sown while it is yet green, Must at harvest time glean the ears of it.[24](#)

Reminiscences Of A Teacher

I recall the incident of a dream whose narration will not be without benefit here. It pertains to my teacher, the late eminent scholar, Aqa Haj Mirza' Ali Aqa Shirazi (may God raise his station) who was one of the greatest men I saw in my life, a true and living example of an ascetic, worshipper, man of conviction, and a reminder of the pious predecessors about whom we had studied in history.

In the summer of the year twenty-one and twenty-two (solar hijri calendar) I travelled from Qum to Isfahan and was blessed with the opportunity to meet and benefit from that great personality. This first encounter later transformed into intense affection from my side, and a fatherly teacher's love from that great personality's side. The acquaintance developed to such an extent that later, when he visited Qum, he put up in our hostel-room and the great scholars of the Hawza 'Ilmiyyah, all of whom had great affection for him, used to come and visit him there.

In the year twenty when I visited Isfahan for the first time, my Isfahani classmate of eleven years who is currently a teacher and mujtahid at the Hawza 'Ilmiyyah in Qum, suggested that we attend the lectures of a great scholar who is teaching *Nahj al-Balagha* at Madrasah-i Sadr. This invitation was difficult for me to accept. I thought, what is the need to attend a lecture on *Nahj al-Balagha* for a senior seminary student who is studying *Kifayat ul-Usul*? He could study *Nahj al-Balagha* by himself and solve all the academic difficulties with the research tools of *istishab* and *bara'ah*.

Since it was a holiday and I had no other engagements and because the suggestion was made by

classmate, I accepted. I attended the lecture and soon discovered my great mistake. I discovered that I had not yet understood the *Nahj al-Balagha*, and not only did I feel the need for a teacher, but I came to admit that there weren't any appropriate teachers for the *Nahj al-Balagha*. Furthermore, in that lecture, I sensed I was face to face with a man of great piety and spirituality, who—in the language of us seminary students— “is one of those whom one ought to travel long distances to benefit from his presence” (*mimman yanbaghi an yushadd ilaihi rihaal*).

He was an embodiment of the *Nahj al-Balagha*—the admonishments of *Nahj al-Balagha* had penetrated the depths of his being. It was evident for me that the soul of this man was in contact and connected to the soul of the Leader of the Faithful (a). Truly, whenever I recount the past, my biggest spiritual treasure is having won the company of this great man—may the supreme pleasure of God be granted to him, and may he be resurrected in the company of his holy and pure Infallible Imams.

I have several anecdotes about this great man. One of them which relates to this discussion pertains to a dream which I will now relate.

One day during his lecture as tears were flowing down his white beard he narrated this dream, he said:

“I saw in a dream that my death has arrived; I saw dying in my dream the way it has been described to us; I saw myself separated from my body, and I observed my body being carried to the cemetery for burial. They carried me to the cemetery and buried me and left me. I was left alone and worried about what will befall me?! Suddenly I saw a white dog who entered the grave. In that state I felt that the dog is an embodiment of my hot temper which has come towards me. I became agitated. I was agitated when the Leader of martyrs arrived and told me: do not be worried, I will keep it away from you”²⁵

In this anecdote there is a reference to intercession which we shall, with God's help, discuss in the next section.

Summary

The response to the objection of correspondence (or lack thereof) between crime and punishment can be summarized in that the necessity of correspondence applies to social manmade penalties. Of course, in such penalties, the legislator has to keep in mind the correspondence between crime and punishment. But in punishments which have an existential and ontological relationship with the act—meaning that they are the actual effects and real consequences of the act—or in retributions which have a unitive and identical relationship with the crime—meaning that they are in reality the act itself, there remain no grounds to even speak of the presence or absence of correspondence.

Bertrand Russell, who objects how can there be a God who punishes us severely for very minor crimes, has failed to appreciate that the relationship between this world and the hereafter is not of the social man-made or conventional sort.

The likes of Russell are far from and unaware of Islamic truths and sciences. They are even unfamiliar with the basic Divine truths. The likes of Russell are only familiar with the Christian world, and have not the least awareness of Islamic philosophy, theology, mysticism, and the other Islamic sciences. In the eyes of a person with even the most minimal awareness of Islamic teachings, and of the philosophical tradition of the East, Russell is not even at the level of a primary school student.

Islam has trained eminent men who, while living in this world, were aware of the hereafter, and could experience realities which were beyond the comprehension of Russell and his ilk.

The students of the Qur'anic school learn this truth well, that the reward of the hereafter is the actual act in the world here, not something separate from the act. Mawlawi has a poem which expresses this truth and it is appropriate to quote it here as a lesson for one and all.

Rumi²⁶ says:

O thou that hast torn the coat of (many) Josephs, thou wilt arise from this heavy slumber (in the form of) a wolf.

Thy (evil) dispositions, one by one, having become wolves will tear thy limbs in wrath.

Wear, all the year round, (a garment) of that (cloth) which you are weaving; eat and drink, all the year round, of that (crop) which you are sowing.

If you are wounded by a thorn, you yourself have sown; and if you are (clad) in satin and silk, you yourself have spun.

When blows proceeded from your hand against the victim of injustice, they became a tree (in Hell): the *Zaqqum* grew from them.

Your words resembling snakes and scorpions have become snakes and scorpions and are seizing your tail (assailing you from behind).²⁷

* * * *

Rumi²⁸ also says:

The resurrection of the greedy vile eater of carrion (unlawful food) will be in the shape of a hog on the Day of Reckoning.

Adulteris (erit) foetor membri latentis; wine drinkers will have stinking mouths.

The hidden stench that was reaching (only) to (people's) hearts will become sensible and manifest at the Resurrection.

The being of Man is a jungle: be on our guard against this being, if you are of that (Divine) Breath.

In our being there are thousands of wolves and hogs; (there is) goodly and ungodly and fair and foul.

To the disposition that is preponderant belongs the decision (as to what you are): when the gold is more than the copper, it (the mixture) is gold.

The manner of acting that preponderates in your nature—in that same form you must needs rise (from the dead).²⁹

Congratulations are in order to the Qur'an for such students. If it was not for the Qur'an, Rumi, Hafiz, Sanai, Attar, Sa'di and their likes would not have come into existence. Persian talent flourished with the enlightenment of Islam and even this honour on its own is sufficient for Iran that it managed to comprehend the Islamic truth better than other peoples.

1. Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 96.
2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 188
3. Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 42
4. Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 187 or 196
5. Kunz al-Haqaiq, Chapter "Dal": 'Awali al-La'ali, p. 267
6. See Endnote 68
7. Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 294, vr. 1421
8. See Endnote 69
9. Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 5, p. 327.
10. See Endnote 70
11. Wasa'il al-Shiah, vol. 7, p. 189, tradition 9079.
12. See Endnote 71
13. Wasa'il al-Shiah, vol. 7, p. 187, tradition 9074.
14. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 307
15. Safinat ul Bihar, section wkl ((وكل, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 10, p. 296
16. Nahj al-Balagha, saying 195
17. See Endnote 72
18. Nicholson, vol. 1, p. 15, vr. 215
19. See Endnote 73
20. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, part 4, p. 188
21. Saduq, Khisal, section 3, number 93
22. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 3, p. 91.
23. See Endnote 74
24. Richard Francis Burton, The Golestan of Sa'di
25. Marhum Mirza Ali Agha Shirazi (may God raise his station) had a strong relationship and an intense devotion to the Holy Prophet and his holy progeny (divine peace and blessings be on them). This man despite being a jurisprudent (at the level of ijihad) philosopher, mystic, physician and literary master and in some fields, like ancient medicine and literature, was among the top experts, and taught the Canon of Abū Ali Sina, he was also amongst the servants of the holy court of he Lord of the Martyrs (a); he used to address from the pulpit and recite elegies. Few were those who would attend this pious sincere scholar's sermons and fail to be moved. During admonition and in struction on God and Hereafter the man himself would undergo a spiritual and internal upheaval; love for God and His prophet and progeny would fully pull him. With Divine remembrance he would be moved; he was embodiment of the divine verse:

“The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when God is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord” (Sura al-Anfal, v. 2)

When he would mention the Holy Prophet's (s) name or Leader of the Faithful (a) his tears would flow. One year the honorable Ayatullah Burujardi (may God raise his station) invited him home to address from the pulpit during the ten days of Ashura. His sermons were unique. Usually he would not speak other than Nahj al-Balagha. He would address from the pulpit in the honorable Ayatullah's home and the audience which was mainly theology scholars and students would be intensely moved to an extent that from the beginning till the end of his address one could only see tears flowing and shoulders shaking.

[26.](#) See Endnote 75

[27.](#) Nicholson, vol. 4, vrs. 3662–3, vol. 5, vr. 3181, vol. 3, vrs. 3444, 3471, and 3475.

[28.](#) See Endnote 76

[29.](#) Ibid, vol. 2, p. 294, vrs. 1413–9.

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