

The Actions of God

A. God Can Do No Wrong

The Shi'ahs believe that God does nothing which is rationally wrong or evil. ¹ I do not use this phrase in the sense that "King makes no mistake." Because "King makes no mistake" actually means that he does nothing at all; he just signs whatever is passed by the parliament. So this tribute is based upon inaction. But "God does no wrong" means that in spite of being active and Omnipotent, God can still not do anything wrong or evil. Why?

Anyone who commits wrong or injustice does so because of one or more of the following reasons:

- either he does not know that it is wrong;
- or he needs something which cannot be obtained without wrongdoing;
- or he had been compelled by somebody else to commit that wrong.

But God is Omniscient and All-Knowing; He is free from want and is not in need of anything; and He is Omnipotent and nobody can compel Him to do anything. So logically it is impossible for God to do any injustice or wrong.

The Asha'irah, on the other hand, say that there is no such thing as rational good or evil. Therefore, they say that "whatever God does is good, because there is nothing bad for Him or compulsory for Him." ² 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz Dehlawi, a famous Sunni scholar, writes, "It is the *madhhab* of Ahlu's-Sunnah that nothing is evil for Him; that the things which, if done by human beings or Shaytan, are called evil and for which they are blamed and accursed, are not evil if done by Almighty Allah." ³

B. God Does Nothing Without Purpose

The Shi'ahs say that God never acts without purpose or aim because rationally it is not commendable to act without purpose. All His actions are based on wisdom and intelligent purpose, though we may not

know them. "The Imamiyyah says that Almighty Allah does not do anything aimlessly, but does it because of a purpose and aim." [4](#)

The Asha'irah, because of their rejection of rational merit and demerit, say that it is quite right for God to act aimlessly. "It is the *rnadh-hab* of the Asha'irah that the actions of Allah are not caused by any purpose; and they say that it is not permissible to say that His actions are caused by aims ...

And He does whatever He wishes, and orders whatever He wills; if He wants to put all His creatures for ever in the Fire (of Hell), He is the Ruler and authority; and sin (of the creatures) have nothing to do with this matter. The effective cause (*of all things*) is He." [5](#)

C. Can We Know All The Reasons for God's Actions?

As I just said, God does nothing without reason. There must be a reason for everything which is created by God. However, it is not necessary that we should know the reason of His each and every action. We believe that every work of God is such that if we are made aware of its reasons, we would readily admit that it was the very right thing to do. We often feel perturbed by some incidents or by some problems because we do not know the real purpose behind them.

An illustration can be found in the Qur'an where the meeting of Prophet Musa and another man (who had more knowledge than Musa) is described. The learned man had allowed Musa to accompany him on the condition that "ask me not concerning anything till I myself mention it unto thee." Here is the whole episode:

The stranger: "Lo! You cannot bear patience with me. How can you have patience in that of which you have not got a comprehensive knowledge?"

Musa: "Allah willing, you shall find me patient and I shall not disobey you in any matter."

Then they proceeded in a boat. When they were in the boat, the learned man made a hole in it. Musa objected to it, and was reminded of the condition. Then the learned man slew a lad. Upon this Musa could not contain himself and condemned him in severe words. Again he was reminded of his promise not to ask questions.

Then they came to a township where they were refused food. There they found a wall on the point of falling in ruin, and the learned man repaired it. Musa said, "If you had wished, you might certainly have taken a recompense for it." Upon this third argument, the learned man told Musa: "This is the parting between you and me."

But before parting, he explained the reasons for his actions: "As for the boat, it belonged to the poor people working on the river; and I wished to mar it, for there was a king behind them who is taking every good boat by force.

"As for the lad, his parents were pious persons, and we feared lest he should oppress them by rebellion and disbelief; and we intended that their Lord should change him for them with one better in purity and nearer to mercy.

"And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town and there was a treasure [under the wall] belonging to them; and their father had been righteous. So their Lord intended that they should come to their full strength and should bring forth their treasure, as a mercy from their Lord, and I did not do it upon my command." (18:66–82)

I hope this example will suffice to explain our point of view about the actions of God.

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There is a saying in the Principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usulu 'l fiqh*) that, "Whatever is ordained by reason, is also ordained by the *shari'ah*; and whatever is ordained by the *shari'ah*, is ordained by reason." A layman often misunderstands this saying. He thinks that whatever we decide to be good must be confirmed by the *shari'ah* as good accordingly. It is not so.

The meaning of the above saying is that if we were to know the reason behind a certain law of the *shari'ah*, our intellect would certainly admit that the law is as it should have been.

And that all laws of the *shari'ah* are based upon wisdom.

D. Aslah, The Most Beneficial

We, the Shi'ahs, believe that all the actions of God are intended for the ultimate benefit of His creatures. *Aslah* means the most beneficial, and it is used by us to describe the actions of God.

This belief of ours is based on the following reasons: Firstly, He Himself has no need, and therefore whatever He does is for His creatures.

Secondly, if His actions became devoid of the creature's benefit, then they will become purposeless; and doing something purposeless, as explained earlier, is rationally not good. [6](#)

Maybe a man who is repairing his roof feels annoyed because of heavy torrents of rain, but rain is for the general benefit; and even the person who at this particular time feels annoyed by it, will derive benefit from it in the long run.

The Ash'arites deny that all God's actions are for the benefit of His creatures because they reject the concept of rational good or evil. [7](#)

Based on our belief in *aslah*, we believe that every instinct and desire in human beings has been created for some reasons. These instincts or desires should not be crushed but harnessed for the general

benefit of mankind.

For instance, sexual desire has been embodied in human nature by God Himself. To crush that instinct will be a protest against the Creator. It should not be, and cannot be, crushed; but, of course, its function should be regulated for the benefit of mankind.

And hence the necessity of marriage.

Likewise, fear and desire are natural instincts and should be utilized for human upliftment. A Muslim is taught not to fear anybody or anything except God, and not to desire anything in this world but to be anxious to receive the grace of God.

E. God's Promise (Wa`d) & Threat (Wa'id)

God has appointed a Day of Judgement. He has promised many rewards for good deeds and has threatened to punish for evil actions. There is a difference of opinion among Muslims whether or not God is obliged to fulfill His promises and threats.

1. The Mu'tazilah and the Kharijites say that it is compulsory for God to fulfill His promises and threats; that is, God cannot forgive evil actions of a man who dies without repentance (*tawbah*). [8](#)
2. The Asha'irah say that God is obliged to fulfill neither His promises nor His threats; that He may put pious believers (even the prophets) in Hell and put the Shaytan in Paradise.

This belief of theirs is based upon their belief that nothing is good or evil by itself; and only what God has commanded us to do is good and what He has forbidden is evil. According to them nothing has any inherent evil or good except what God orders or forbids. [9](#)

3. The Shi'ahs say that it is necessary for Allah to fulfill His promises of reward because not fulfilling a promise is against virtue and rationally evil; but it is not necessary for Him to fulfill His threats of punishment because forgiving the sinners has virtue in itself. So if He punishes, it will be His justice; and if He forgives, it will be His grace and mercy. [10](#)

[1.](#) Hilli, *Kashfu'l-Haqq*; also al-Hilli's al-Babu'l-Hadi 'Ashar (English translation by WM. Miller) p. 44

[2.](#) Fadl bin Ruzbahan, *Ibtalu Nahji'l-Batil*.

[3.](#) Dehlawi, A.A., *Tuhfa-e Ithna-'Ashariyyah*.

[4.](#) al-Hilli, *Kashf* and also his al-Babu'l-Hadi 'Ashr, p. 45.

[5.](#) Fadl, *op. cit*

[6.](#) al-Hilli, al-Babu'l-Hadi 'Ashar, p. 46.

[7.](#) an-Nasafi, N.D., al-'Aqa'id (with Sharh of at-Taftazani) p. 130; also see its translation E.E. Elder, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, p. 97; ash-Shahristani, al-Milal wa'n-Nihal, p. 129.

[8.](#) ash-Shahristani, *al Milal wa 'n Nihal*, pp. 68, 145, 154.

[9.](#) al-Ash'ari, *Kitabu'l-Luma*; p. 99. Also see ash-Shahristani, *al-Milal wa 'n-Nihal*, pp. 128-129.

[10.](#) as-Sadiq, *Risalatul-'I'tiqadat*, chp. 22, p. 69.

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