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> Shias' Interpretation of the Conception of Intermediacy

The Second Spurious Argument: Constraint and Free Will

Some people find a problem with the Shias in that they believe neither in constraint nor in free will but that they adopt an interpretation in between and that they refute the Ash'arite concept of constraint.

The Answer

The Ash'arites from among the Sunnis, believed in constraint and the Mu'tazilites, also Sunni, believed in free will. The Shias, following their Imams (a), adopted an intermediary position between the two. First of all, we will try to refute constraint and free will by resorting to Qur'anic verses, then we will investigate those traditions that have come from our Imams (a) negating the two of them and establishing the intermediary position between the two.

Quranic Verses that reject constraint

The First Kind

The verses that attribute good and bad deeds to the person himself such as the following Suras; al-Isra' 15, Yunus 108, and az-Zumar 41: Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright, and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray.

Say if I err, I err only against my own soul. (Qur'an 34:40).

There are a great number of verses in a similar vein.

The Second Kind

There are verses that hold the Divine Precinct of Lordship (i.e as Provider and Guide) to be above injustice. For example when Allah says, Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom."

(4:40). There are forty such verses.

The Third Kind

There are some verses showing that Allah tests His servants whether they choose faith and obedience or choose disbelief and disobedience. Allah says,

Who created death and life that He may try you, which of you is best in deeds. (Qur'an 67:2)

There are nearly sixty-seven verses having this meaning.

The Fourth Kind

There are some verses calling people to faith, guidance, supplication, piety and the like, and that Allah, no doubt, likes people to do these things. He says:

So that they should believe in the meeting of their Lord. (Qur'an 6: 154)

That you may warn a people, to whom no warner has come before you, that they may follow the right direction. (Qur'an 32:3)

And that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious. (Qur'an 9: 122)

Then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves. (Qur'an 6:42)

Thus does Allah make clear His communications for men that they may guard against evil. (Qur'an 2: 187)

There are seventy-nine verses conveying such a meaning.

The Fifth Kind

There are some verses showing that Allah's reward and punishment are a requital of what people have earned out of their deeds. Allah says,

Then every soul shall be paid back in full what it has earned and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. (Qur'an 2:281) (Qur'an 3: 161)

That every soul may be rewarded for what it has earned and they shall not be wronged. (Qur'an 45:22)

Every soul is held in pledge for what it earns. (Qur'an 74:38)

And whoever commits a sin, he only commits it against his own soul. (Qur'an 4:111)

Thus, it is that their recompense is Hell, because they disbelieved and held My communications and My apostles in mockery. (Qur'an 18:106)

And for those who disbelieved in their Lord is the punishment of Hell, and evil is the resort (Qur'an 67:6)

But as to those who are careful of (their duty to) their Lord, they shall have gardens beneath which rivers flow. (Qur'an 3:198)

Their reward with their Lord is gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow. (Qur'an 98:8)

There are many other verses with such a meaning in the Holy Qur'an.

The Sixth Kind

There are verses that censure and rebuke the disbelievers and the corrupt, and this would not be correct unless they possessed freedom of choice in their actions. Allah says, How do you deny Allah and you were dead and He gave you life. (Qur'an 2:28)

But how do you disbelieve while it is you to whom the communications of Allah are recited, and among you is His Apostle. (Qur'an 3:101)

How, then, will you guard yourselves, if you disbelieve, on the Day which makes children gray-headed. (Qur'an 73:17)

Why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allah, and Allah is a witness of what you do. (Qur'an 3:98)

Will they still believe in the falsehood and disbelieve in the favor of Allah? (Qur'an 29:67)

Were not My communications recited to you but you used to reject them? (Qur'an 23:105)

The Seventh Kind

There are some verses showing that people themselves are responsible for disbelief and belief, obedience and disobedience. Allah says,

And Musa said If you are ungrateful, you and those on Earth all together, most surely, Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praised. (Qur'an 14:8)

and whoever disbelieves in the communications of Allah then surely Allah is quick in reckoning. (Qur'an 3:19)

Shall We treat those who believe and do good like the mischief-makers in the earth? (Qur'an 38:28)

And he who obeys Allah and His Apostle, and fears Allah, and is careful of (his duty to Him), such are those that will achieve. (Qur'an 24:52)

this was because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limit. (Qur'an 5:78)

We have mentioned these verses only as examples. Those verses that ascribe actions to the servant are indeed much more than these.

The Eighth Kind

There are verses showing that Allah gives people the option to choose between belief and disbelief, obedience and disobedience. Allah says:

So let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve. (Qur'an 18:29)

The Ninth Kind

There are verses urging the doing of good before opportunities pass by. Allah says,

And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord. (Qur'an 3:133)

The Tenth Kind

There are some verses showing that people should ask for help from Allah. Allah says,

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help (Qur'an 1:5)

This means that man is the performer of his deeds and

Allah assists him in his good actions.

The Eleventh Kind

There are some verses that include asking Allah for forgiveness. Allah says,

Our Lord! We have been unjust to ourselves, and if Thou forgive us not, and have (not) mercy on us, we shall certainly be of the losers" (Qur'an 7:23)

The Twelfth Kind

There are some verses which indicate that the confession of the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection shows that they themselves were responsible for disbelief and disobedience. Allah says,

They said: we were not of those who prayed, and we used not to feed the poor, and we used to enter into discourse with those who entered into vain discourses. (Qur'an 74:43-45)

The Thirteenth Kind

There are verses showing that the disbelievers, on the Day of Resurrection, would wish that they could come back to the life of the world to be pious. Allah says,

Send me back my Lord, in order that I do good. (Qur'an 23:99-100)

Verses that refute Free Will

Some verses ascribe creational guidance to Allah the Almighty. There is seventy-eight such verses. Allah says,

These are they whom Allah has guided; therefore, follow their guidance. (Qur'an 6:90)

Such verses show that the source of guidance is Allah, praise be to Him, but there are others showing that man has freedom of choice included in his guidance. Allah says,

so let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve. (Qur'an 18:29)

Whoever disbelieves, he shall be responsible for his disbelief, and whoever does good, they prepare (good) for their own souls. (30:44)

Allah's being the source of guidance means that He has given man the ability of perception, made the way of guidance and knowledge easy for him, and protected him against the delusions of the devils among jinn and humankind. Were it not for this, man would be a disbeliever and disobedient. Thus, Allah is worthier of man's good deeds than man himself.

Man's deviation has originated from the negative application of his free will. Even with the delusions of the Devil and many things else, he still has a free will. Allah has given him the ability of belief and disbelief and the ability of perception, and has made the signs and evidence of guidance and Divine Unity at his disposal and plain for him to see. Allah therefore, does not cause man's deviation, although He, the Almighty, has irresistible power over His servant.

Allah says, If He pleased, He would guide all of Mankind. Allah can force Mankind to accept guidance willingly or unwillingly, but since He has made the way and the means to guidance easy, and has made Man free to choose between guidance and deviation, He has given man a great favor. If he chooses deviation and rejects guidance, then he would stand accused.

An example of the aforementioned idea is that of an individual who gave a poor man some money to buy bread, but the latter bought some poison instead, drank it and killed himself. The giver is not to be

blamed, for he bestowed a favor upon him in order that he spend the money in his benefit and not for his destruction.

Some Qur'anic verses show that none except Allah possesses power and capability, praise be to Him. He says,

There is no power save in Allah. (Qur'an 18:39)

There is no contradiction at all between this meaning and man's freedom of choice and power to do whatever he likes, because in the face of the Divine power and Lordship he is completely impotent, having no authority over good or bad for himself.

Taking into consideration that Allah has given man power and ability, man's very power is a manifestation of Allah's power, thus eliminating the inconsistency between the establishment of power in man and the meaning of His words when The Most High says, "There is no power save in Allah." A very large number of verses attest to this meaning. Allah says,

... so let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve. (Qur'an 18:29)

Whoever disbelieves, he shall be responsible for his disbelief, and whoever does good, prepare (good) for their own souls. (Qur'an 30:44)

... and whoever is grateful, he is grateful only for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Honored. (Qur'an 27:40)

Some verses show that benefit and harm are in the hands of Allah exclusively. Allah says,

Say: I do not control any benefit or harm for my own soul except as Allah pleases. (Qur'an 7:188)

... so let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve. (Qur'an 18:29)

... and had your Lord pleased they would not have done it. (Qur'an 6:112)

... and if Allah had pleased, they would not have done it (Qur'an 6:137)

From these verses, we notice that Allah has given man the ability to believe if he wants, or to disbelieve if he wants. If Allah wants to prevent man from that freedom of choice, He will deprive him of ability and make him unable to do what he wants. Later on, we will prove that this is one aspect of the Shias' concept of intermediacy.

Shias' Interpretation of the Conception of Intermediacy

Despite their variety, the two groups of Qur'anic verses mentioned above show that man's actions have two aspects. One aspect concerns man himself, in that he has the option and the will to do whatever he

wants. This is clear from the many Qur'anic verses that show that man is responsible for his deeds. The other aspect concerns Allah. The verses that ascribe guidance and deviation to Allah are numerous and clear, however, the manner in which these two aspects relate to each other, as has been gathered from the Qur'anic text, is based upon one of three opinions:

First: Man's existence, and all his actions, whether from his body or his soul, has its source in the Creator, Exalted and Elevated is His Might. He has given man the ability to do good or bad and to choose the good that takes him to the elevated stations of the Highest Ones whose ranks cannot be attained without freedom of will.

Thus, if man is the cause of his actions, and Allah is the cause of man's existence, his abilities, and his will to do or not to do, then Allah is a remote cause of man's actions.

Second: The power of the Maker encompasses the actions of man. Thus If He wants to prevent man from choosing certain actions or to let him act in other ways He can, He says,

If He pleased, He would guide you all. (Qur'an 6: 149)

Allah has created people to try them. He (Elevated is His Might) says,

Who created death and life that He may try you, which of you is best in deeds. (Qur'an 67:2)

Thus He does not prevent them from exercising their choice in thinking and belief, rather, He has placed it within the sphere of their will. He says,

... so let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve. (Qur'an 18:29)

In short, the actions of man are related to Allah in so far as there is no prevention or opposition to what man chooses to do.

Third: Lusts and instincts that mislead and delude man are from Allah (Exalted is He). Allah has given man the ability to do good or bad deeds so as to try him in this worldly life.

Since lusts and instincts are from Allah, deviating is from Allah, despite the fact that man goes astray willingly and of his own free volition. What Allah says about the idols in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (a) confirms this although Allah does not want people to deviate. He (Exalted is He) says,

My Lord! Surely, they have led many men astray. (Qur'an 14:36)

The people deviated on their own. The idols were just sculptures having no sense and they could not lead people astray, for they had no will.

In summary, the conditions for the actions of man are a part of the sufficient cause of his actions, which is from Allah (Exalted is He).

Another proof confirming the Shia concept of intermediacy between constraint and free will is when Allah says,

... and you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah Who smote. (Qur'an 8: 17)

This verse clearly ascribes the smiting to man himself for Allah says, when you smote,” at the same time it includes the opposite for Allah also says and you did not smite” this negates the ascription of the act to man thus proving the concept of intermediacy.

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