

The World View of Tawhid

Every path and philosophy of life is based on a belief, outlook, and value system vis-à-vis being or on an explanation and analysis of the world. The kind of conception that a school of thought presents of the world and of being, the manner in which it contemplates it, is considered the intellectual foundation and support of that school. This foundation and support is termed the worldview. All religions, customs, schools of thought, and social philosophies rest on a worldview. A school's aims, methods, musts and must nots all result necessarily from its worldview.

The *hukama'* divide wisdom into theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. Theoretical wisdom is the realisation of being as it is, and practical wisdom is the realisation of the practice of life as it should be. What should be derives logically from what is, especially what is as primary philosophy and metaphysics are charged with explaining it.

World Feeling versus World Knowledge

The term “worldview” contains the idea of sight, but we must not fall into the error of interpreting worldview as world feeling. Worldview means world knowledge or cosmology; it relates to the well-known question of knowledge, which is an exclusively human property, as opposed to feeling, which man shares with other animals. Therefore, world knowledge is exclusive to man and is a function of his reflection and intellection.

Many animals are more advanced than man from the standpoint of world feeling; they are furnished with certain senses that man lacks (for instance, it is said that some flying creatures have a sort of radar, a sense that man lacks, or that, although some animals have a sense in common with man, it is much better developed in them—such as the eagle's eyesight, the dog's or the ant's sense of smell, and the mouse's hearing). Man's superiority over other animals lies in his knowledge of the world, that is, in a kind of insight into the world. The animals feel the world, but man explains it as well.

What is knowledge? What connection is there between feeling and knowledge? What elements other than sense enter into knowledge? Where do those elements come from and how do they enter the

mind? What is the mechanism of the act of knowing? By what standard are valid and invalid knowledge distinguished? These are a series of questions that go to make up an independent essay.¹ What is certain is that sensing a thing is different from knowing it. Everyone sees a stage, a play, and everyone sees it in the same way; yet only a few individuals will explain it, and sometimes they will explain it variously.

Three Worldviews

Worldviews or schemes of world knowledge (the ways man defines or explains the world) generally fall into three classes: scientific, philosophic, and religious.

Scientific Worldview

Science is based on two things: hypothesis and experiment. In the scientist's mind, to discover and explain a phenomenon, one first forms a hypothesis, and then one subjects it to concrete experiment, in the laboratory. If the experiment supports the hypothesis, it becomes an accepted scientific principle. As long as no more comprehensive hypothesis, better supported by experimentation, appears, that scientific principle retains its standing. The more comprehensive hypothesis with its advent clears the field for itself.

Science thus engages in discovering causes and effects: Through concrete experiments, it discovers a thing's cause or effect; then it pursues the cause of that cause or the effect of that effect. It continues this course of discovery as far as possible.

The work of science, in being based on concrete experiments, has advantages and shortcomings. The greatest advantage of scientific research is that it is exact, precise, and discriminating. Science is able to give man thousands of data about some slight being; it can fill a book with knowledge about a leaf. Because it acquaints man with the special laws of every being, it enables man to control and dominate that being. Thus, it brings about industry and technology.

But precisely because of these qualities, the compass of science is also limited to experiment. It advances as far as can be subjected to experiment. But can one bring all of being in all its aspects within the confines of experiment? Science in practice pursues causes and effects to a certain limit and then reaches a point where it must say, "I don't know."

Science is like a powerful searchlight in the long winter night, illuminating a certain area without disclosing anything beyond its border. Can one determine by experiment whether the universe has a beginning and an end or is limitless in time? Or does the scientist, on reaching this point, consciously or unconsciously mount the pinions of philosophy in order to express an opinion?

From the standpoint of science, the universe is like an old book the first and last pages of which have been lost. Neither the beginning nor the end is known. Thus, the worldview of science is a knowledge of

the part, not of the whole. Our science acquaints us with the situation of some parts of the universe, not with the shape, mien, and character of the whole universe. The scientist's worldview is like the knowledge about the elephant gained by those who touched it in the dark, The one who felt the elephant's ear supposed the animal to be shaped like a fan; the one who felt its leg supposed it to be shaped like a column; and the one who felt its back supposed it to be shaped like a throne.

Another shortcoming of the scientific worldview as a basis for an ideology is that science is unstable and unenduring from a theoretical standpoint, that is, from the standpoint of presenting reality as it is or of attracting faith to the nature of the reality of being. From the viewpoint of science, the face of the world changes from day to day because science is based on hypothesis and experiment, not on rational and self-evident first principles. Hypothesis and experiment have a provisional value; so the scientific worldview is shaky and inconsistent and cannot serve as a foundation for faith. Faith demands a firmer, an unshakeable foundation, a foundation characterised by eternity.

The scientific worldview, in accordance with the limitations that the tools of science (hypothesis and experiment) have inevitably brought about for science, falls short of answering a series of basic cosmological questions that an ideology is obliged to answer decisively, such as: Where did the universe come from? Where is it going? How are we situated within the totality of being? Does the universe have a beginning and an end in time or in space? Is being in its totality right or a mistake, true or vain, beautiful or ugly? Do inevitable and immutable norms preside over the universe, or does no immutable norm exist? Is being in its totality a single living, conscious entity, or is it dead and unconscious, man's existence being an aberration, an accident? Can that which exists cease to exist?

Can that which does not exist come into existence? Is the return of that which has lapsed from existence possible or impossible? Are the universe and history exactly repeatable, even after billions of years (the cyclical theory)? Does unity truly preside, or does multiplicity? Is the universe divisible into the material and the nonmaterial, and is the material universe a small part of the universe as a whole? Is the universe under guidance and seeing, or is it blind? Is the universe transacting with man? Does the universe respond in kind to man's good and evil? Does an enduring life exist after this transient one?

Science arrives at "I don't know" in trying to answer all these questions because it cannot subject them to experiment. Science answers limited, partial questions but is incapable of representing the totality of the universe.

An analogy will clarify this point. It is possible for an individual to be well acquainted with a neighbourhood or a quarter of Tehran. For instance, he may know South Tehran or some part of it in detail, such that he can sketch the streets, alleys, and even the houses of that area from memory. Someone else may know another neighbourhood, a third person, a third area, and soon. If we bring together everything they know, we shall know enough of Tehran, part by part.

But if we learn about Tehran in this way, shall we have learned about Tehran from every standpoint?

Can we gain a complete picture of Tehran? Is it circular? Is it square? Is it shaped like the leaf of a tree? Of what tree? What relationships do the neighbourhoods have with one another? Which bus lines connect how many neighbourhoods? Is Tehran as a whole beautiful or ugly?

If we want to inform ourselves on subjects such as these, if, for instance, we want to learn what the shape of Tehran is, or whether it is beautiful or ugly, we must board a plane and take in the whole city from above. In this sense, science is incapable of answering the most basic questions, as a worldview must; that is, it can form no general conceptions of the universe as a whole and of its form.

The importance of the scientific worldview lies in its practical, technical value, not in its theoretical value. What can serve as the support for an ideology is a theoretical value, not a practical one. The theoretical value of science lies in the reality of the universe being just as it is represented in the mirror of science. The practical and technical value of science lies in science's empowering man in his work and being fruitful, whether or not it represents reality. Today's industry and technology display the practical and technical value of science.

One of the remarkable things about science in today's world is that, to the extent that its practical and technical value increases, its theoretical value diminishes. Those on the sidelines suppose that the progress of science as an illumination of the human conscience and as a source of faith and certitude relative to reality (which is how science represents itself) is in direct proportion to the extent of irrefutable concrete progress, whereas the truth is just the opposite.²

An ideology requires a worldview that, first, answers the basic cosmological questions of relevance to the universe as a whole, not just to some certain part; second, provides a well-grounded, reliable, and eternally valid comprehension, not a provisional, transient one; and third, provides something of theoretical, not purely practical and technical value, something revealing reality. The scientific worldview, for all its advantages from other standpoints, fails to fulfil these three conditions.

Philosophical Worldview

Although the philosophical worldview lacks the exactitude and definition of the scientific worldview, it enjoys an assurance and has none of the instability of the scientific worldview. The reason for this is that it rests on a series of principles that are in the first place self-evident and undeniable to the mind, carried forward by demonstration and deduction, and in the second place general and comprehensive (in the language of philosophy, they relate to that by virtue of which the being is being). The worldview of philosophy answers those same questions on which ideologies rest. Philosophical thought discerns the mien of the universe as a whole.

The scientific worldview and the philosophical worldview both conduce to action, but in two different ways. The scientific worldview conduces to action by giving man the power and capacity to "change" and to "control" nature; it allows him to render nature subservient to his own desires. But the

philosophical worldview conduces to action and influences action by distinguishing the reasons for action and the criteria for human choice in life.

The philosophical worldview is influential in the way man encounters and responds to the universe. It fixes the attitude of man to the universe and shapes his outlook toward being and the universe. It gives man ideas or takes them away. It imparts meaning to his life or draws him into futility and emptiness. Thus, science is incapable but philosophy is capable of giving man a worldview as the foundation of an ideology.

Religious Worldview

If we regard every general viewpoint expressed toward being and the universe as philosophical, regardless of the source of that worldview (that is, syllogism, demonstration, and deduction or revelation received from the unseen world), we must regard the religious worldview as philosophical. The religious worldview and the philosophic worldview cover the same domain, by contrast with the scientific worldview.

But if we take into account the source of knowledge, we must certainly admit that the religious and the philosophical cosmologies are different in kind. In some religions, such as Islam, the religious cosmology within the religion has taken on a philosophical quality, that is, a rational quality. It relies on reason and deduction and adduces demonstrations in answering the questions that are raised. From this standpoint, the Islamic worldview is likewise a rational and philosophical worldview.

Among the advantages of the religious worldview (in addition to the two advantages it shares with the philosophical worldview – stability and eternity, and generality and comprehensiveness) is its sanctification of the bases of the worldview.

An ideology demands faith. For a school of thought to attract faith calls not only for a belief in that eternity and immutability of its principles, which the scientific worldview in particular lacks, but for a respect approaching reverence. Thus, a worldview becomes the basis of ideology and the foundation of belief when it takes on a religious character. A worldview can become the basis of an ideology when it has attained the firmness and breadth of philosophical thought as well as the holiness and sanctity of religious principles.

Criteria for a Worldview

The good, sublime worldview has the following characteristics:

1. It can be deduced and proven (is supported by reason and logic).
2. It gives meaning to life; it banishes from minds the idea that life is vain and futile, that all roads lead to vanity and nothingness.

3. It gives rise to ideals, enthusiasm, and aspiration.
4. It has the power to sanctify human aims and social goals
5. It promotes commitment and responsibility.

That a world view is logical paves the way to rational acceptance of it and renders it admissible to thought. It eliminates the ambiguities and obscurities that are great barriers to action.

That the world view of a school of thought gives rise to ideals lends it a magnetism as well as a fervour and force. That a world view sanctifies the aims of a school of thought leads to individuals' easily making sacrifices and taking risks for the sake of these aims. So long as a school is unable to sanctify its aims, to induce feelings in individuals of worshipfulness, sacrifice, and idealism in relation to the aims of the school, that school of thought has no assurance that its aims will be carried out.

That a world view promotes commitment and responsibility commits the individual, to the depths of his heart and conscience, and makes him responsible for himself and society.

The All-Encompassing World View of Tawhid

All the features and properties that are organic to a good worldview are summed up in the worldview of *Tawhid*, which is the only worldview that can have all these features. The worldview of *Tawhid* means perceiving that the universe has appeared through a sagacious will and that the order of being is founded on goodness, generosity, and mercy, to convey existents to attainments worthy of them. The worldview of *Tawhid* means the universe is unipolar and uniaxial. The worldview of *Tawhid* means the universe has for its essence “from Him-ness” (*inna lillah*) and “to Him-ness” (*inna ilayhi raji'un*) [*Qur'an, 2: 156*].

The beings of the universe evolve in a harmonious system in one direction, toward one centre. No being is created in vain, aimlessly. The universe is regulated through a series of definitive rules named the divine norms (*sunan ilahiya*). Man enjoys a special nobility and greatness among beings and has a special role and mission. He is responsible for his own evolution and upbringing and for the improvement of his society. The universe is the school for man, and God rewards every human being according to his right intention and right effort.

The worldview of *Tawhid* is backed by the force of logic, science, and reason. In every particle of the universe, there are indications of the existence of a wise, omniscient God; every tree leaf is a compendium of knowledge of the solicitous Lord.

The worldview of *Tawhid* gives meaning, spirit, and aim to life because it sets man on the course of perfection that stops at no determinate limit but leads ever onward. The worldview of *Tawhid* has a magnetic attraction; it imparts joy and confidence to man; it presents sublime and sacred aims; and it

leads individuals to be self-sacrificing.

The worldview of *Tawhid* is the only worldview in which individuals' mutual commitment and responsibility find meaning, just as it is the only worldview that saves man from falling into the terrible valley of belief in futility and worship of nothingness.

The Islamic worldview is the worldview of *Tawhid*. *Tawhid* is presented in Islam in the purest form and manner. According to Islam, God has no peer – **“There is nothing like Him” (42: 11)**. God resembles nothing and no thing can be compared to God. God is the Absolute without needs; all need Him; He needs none –

“You are the ones needing God, and God is the One Free of Need, the Praiseworthy” (35: 15). **“He is aware of all things” (42: 12)** and **“He is capable of all things” (22:6)**.

He is everywhere, and nowhere is devoid of Him; the highest heaven and the depths of the earth bear the same relationship to Him. Wherever we turn we face Him –

“Wherever you turn, there is the presence of God” (2: 115).

He is aware of all the secrets of the heart, all the thoughts passing through the mind, all the intentions and designs, of everyone –

“We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (50: 16).

He is the summation of all perfections and is above and devoid of all defect –

“The most beautiful names belong to God” (7: 180).

He is not a body; He is not to be seen with the eye –

“No visions can grasp Him, but He comprehends all vision” (6: 103).

According to the Islamic worldview, the worldview of *Tawhid*, the universe is a created thing preserved through the divine providence and will. If for an instant this divine providence were withdrawn from the world, it would cease to be.

The universe has not been created in vain, in jest. Wise aims are at work in the creation of the universe and of man. Nothing inappropriate, devoid of wisdom and value, has been created. The existing order is the best and most perfect of possible orders. The universe rests on justice and truth. The order of the universe is based on causes and effects, and one must seek for every result in its unique cause and antecedents. One must expect a unique cause for every result and a unique result for every cause. Divine decree and fore-ordination bring about the existence of every being only through its own unique cause. A thing's divinely decreed fate is identical with the fate decreed for it by the sequence of causes

leading to it.³

The intent of the divine will operates in the world in the form of a norm (*sunna*), that is, in the form of a universal law and principle. The divine norms do not change; what changes is based on the divine norms. For man, the world's good and evil depend on the kind of behaviour man adopts in the world, how he encounters it and how he acts. The good and evil of actions, apart from the fact that they revert to man in the other world in the form of rewards and punishments, do incur reactions in this world as well. Gradation and evolution are the divine law, the divine norm. The world is the cradle of human evolution.

Divine decree and foreordination preside over the whole universe; in accordance with them, man is free, empowered, and responsible and presides over his own fate. Man has essential nobility and dignity and is worthy to be God's vicegerent. This world and the next are related in the way the stage of sowing and the stage of harvest are related, in that each finally reaps what he sows. It is like the relation between childhood and old age in that one's old age is formed in one's childhood and youth.

The Realistic Worldview

Islam believes in truth, in reality. The word Islam means surrender; the first condition of being a Muslim is to surrender to realities and truths. Islam rejects and condemns every kind of obduracy, obstinacy, fanaticism, blind imitateness, partisanship, and selfishness, which are contrary to the spirit that seeks to realise truth and reality.

According to Islam, a person who seeks the truth, has no personal considerations, and struggles to attain the truth but fails may be excused, whereas the one who harbours obduracy and obstinacy and accepts the truth through imitation, because of his heritage or for like reasons, has no standing. The real Muslim, man or woman, according to his spirit of search after truth, adopts and integrates wisdom and truth wherever and from whomever he finds it. In searching for truth and knowledge, he does not display the least fanaticism, but instead hastens to find it in the farthest parts of the world.

The real Muslim does not confine this search for truth to a certain period of his life, a certain area, or certain persons because the great leader of Islam has ordered that the search for knowledge is incumbent upon all Muslims (men and women alike). He likewise has ordered, "Assimilate wisdom wherever and through whomever you find it, even through a *mushrik*."⁴ He has further ordered, "Seek knowledge, even if you must travel to China." This also has been attributed to him: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."

Shallow, one-sided conceptions of problems, blind imitation of parents, and submission to inherited traditions are condemned as contrary to the Islamic spirit of surrender and desire that the truth should prevail and as leading to error, deviation, and remoteness from the truth.

God, the Absolute Reality and Source of Being

Man is a realistic being. The human new-born seeks the mother's breast from the first hour of life; it seeks the mother's breast as a reality. Gradually, as the child's body and mind develop, it comes to distinguish between itself and other things, to regard other things as phenomena external to itself. Although a sequence of thought connects it to things, it uses thought as a means, a functional link, and knows that the reality of things is other than the thoughts it has in its mind.

The realities that man perceives through his senses, the sum total of which we call the world, are phenomena from which the following five properties are inseparable:

1. Limitation. The beings we sense and cognize, from the smallest particle to the most immense star, are limited. They are allocated to a particular area of space and interval of time. They do not exist beyond that area of space or interval of time. Some beings occupy a larger space or a longer time and some, a smaller space or a shorter time; but ultimately, all are limited to a region of space and a quantity of time.

2. Change. The beings of the universe are all undergoing change and transformation, are unstable. No being in the world of sense remains in a single state. All are either growing and evolving or eroding and declining. A sensible material being follows a course of continuous exchange with its environment throughout its term of existence. It takes, it gives, or it takes and gives both; that is, it partakes of the realities of other things and makes them part of its own reality; it transmits something of its own reality to the external environment; or it performs both of these functions.

3. Dependency. Every being's existence is dependent and conditional upon the existence of one or more other beings. If those other beings were not, neither would this being be. Whenever we look into the reality of these beings in their context more closely, we find each of them to be paired with an "if" or with many "ifs." We find no sensible being that can exist unconditionally and absolutely (free of ties to other beings, such that the presence or absence of other beings is of no consequence to it). Each being exists by virtue of the existence of another which in turn exists by virtue of another, and so on.

4. Need. The beings we sense and cognise in being dependent and conditional, have needs for all those conditions upon which they depend. And each of those conditions likewise in its turn needs another series of conditions. Among all sensible beings, we cannot find one that is of itself, that does not need things other than itself, that, supposing things other than itself should cease to exist, would remain in existence. Thus, poverty, necessity, and need envelop all these beings.

5. Relativity. The beings we sense and cognise are relative from the standpoints of the origin and the perfections of their existence. If, for instance, we characterise them as great, powerful, beautiful, old, or even existent, we do so by comparing them with other things. If we say the sun is large, we mean it is large by comparison with us, our earth, and the other bodies in our solar system; but the sun is small in

relation to some stars. And if we say some ship or animal is powerful, we mean it is powerful by comparison with a man or something weaker.

The same holds for objects in which we discern beauty and knowledge. Even the being of a thing is an appearance relative to the being of another. Whatever being, perfection, knowledge, beauty, power, or glory we consider is relative to a lesser, but one can also conceive of a greater, relative to which any of these attributes turns into its opposite. That is, relative to this greater, being becomes appearance; perfection, defect; knowledge, ignorance; beauty, ugliness; and power and glory, paltriness.

The power of man's reason and thought, which, by contrast with the senses, do not remain content with appearances but cause their rays to penetrate behind the curtain of existence, proclaims that being cannot be confined to these limited, mutable, relative, conditional, and necessitous phenomena. This edifice of existence that we see before us as a whole stands by itself and rests on itself. There must necessarily exist some unlimited, enduring, absolute, unconditioned, self-sufficient reality present at all times and places as a support to all beings. Otherwise the edifice of existence could not subsist, or rather there would be no such thing; there would be only sheer non-existence.

The Noble Qur'an refers to God by such attributes as "the Everlasting," "the Free of Need," and "the Eternal." Thus, it reminds us that the edifice of existence needs that Reality by which it subsists. That Reality is the support and preserver of all limited, relative, and conditional things. He is without need because all other things have needs. He is full and perfect (the Eternal) because all things other than Him are empty within and need the reality that is to fill them with being.

The Noble Qur'an designates sensed and cognised beings as signs (*ayat*), meaning that each being in turn is a sign of this unlimited Being and of the divine knowledge, power, life, and will. According to the Glorious Qur'an, all of nature is like a book composed by a knowing, wise Author, of Whose boundless knowledge and wisdom its every line, its every word, is a sign. According to the Qur'an, the more man learns through the power of science, the more aware he grows of the effects of divine power, wisdom, providence, and mercy.

Every natural science, just as from one point of view it is a science of nature, from another, more profound, point of view is a science of God.

Consider one of the many verses of the Qur'an on this subject:

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, the succession of night and day, the ships that sail the seas to the benefit of man, rain that God causes to fall from the skies, and in how by this means He revives a dead earth and scatters all kinds of creatures across the earth, and in the circling of the winds and the clouds that are appointed to work between the sky and the earth - are signs for people who reason and reflect. (2. 164)

This noble verse summons us to cosmology in its widest sense, to the art of navigation, to world travel

with its economic benefits, to meteorology, to study of the origin and source of wind, rain, and the movements of the clouds, and to biology and zoology. It holds that reflection on the philosophies of these sciences will lead to the knowledge of God.

The Attributes of God

The Noble Qur'an says that God is characterised by all the attributes of perfection:

“His are the most beautiful names” (59:24).

The most beautiful names and the highest qualities are His:

“His is the most sublime similitude in the heavens and the earth” (30:27).

The sublime qualities throughout existence are reserved for Him. Thus, God is “the Living,” “the Powerful,” “the Knowing,” “the Intender,” “the Merciful,” “the Guide,” “the Creator,” “the Wise,” “the Most Forgiving,” “the Just” – in sum, there is no attribute of perfection lacking in Him.

From another standpoint, He is not a body, is not compounded, mortal, weak, under compulsion, or oppressive. The first set of attributes, the attributes of perfection, by which God is characterised are called the affirmative attributes. The second set, which arise from defect and which God is above characterisation by, are named the negative attributes.

Our praise of God may take either of the forms termed in Arabic *thana* and *tasbih*. We offer God *thana* when we recall the beautiful names and the attributes of perfection, and we offer Him *tasbih* when we recount how He is beyond and free of what is unworthy of Him. In both cases, we reinforce our knowledge of Him and by this means raise ourselves higher.

The Uniqueness of God

God Most High has no likeness or associate. It is fundamentally impossible that God should have a likeness and in consequence that, instead of one God, we should have two or more gods, because to be multiple, twofold or more, is among the special properties of limited, relative beings. For an unlimited, absolute being, manifoldness and multiplicity have no meaning. We can have one, two, or more children or one, two, or more friends in that the child and the friend are both limited beings, and limited beings can have likenesses on their own level and in consequence will admit manifoldness and multiplicity. But an unlimited being does not admit them. The following analogy, however inadequate it may be from some standpoints, is useful in explaining this point.

As to the dimensions of the sensed material universe (that is, the universe of bodies that we cognise and sense), scientists have presented two kinds of theories. Some advance the theory that the dimensions of the universe are limited (this sensed universe reaches a point and then ends), but some hold that the dimensions of the material universe are limitless, bounded in no direction, that the material universe has

no beginning, end, or middle. If we regard the material universe as limited, a question arises: Is there only one material, corporeal universe or more than one?

But if the universe is limitless, the supposition of another corporeal universe becomes irrational. Whatever we hypothesise as another universe will turn out to be this same universe or a part of it. This analogy pertains to the universe of bodies and corporeal beings that are limited, conditional, created, and none of which has an absolute, independent, and self-subsistent reality. The material universe, if unlimited in extent, is limited in reality. Because, according to this hypothesis, it is unlimited in extent, no second universe can be conceived of.

God Most High is the Unlimited Being and the Absolute Reality. He encompasses all things and is absent from no time or place. He is nearer to us than our jugular veins. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to have a likeness. Or rather, it is inconceivable that He should. We see the effects of His providence, planning, and wisdom in all beings. We witness a single intent, a single will, a single order throughout the universe, and this fact itself indicates that our universe has only one focus, not more.

If there were two (or more) gods, two (or more) intents and wills would necessarily be involved, both of which would necessarily bear the same relation to events in influencing them. Whatever was to come into existence under that one relation would necessarily constitute two beings if it were to derive from the two foci, and each of those two beings would constitute two further beings in turn, and so on ad infinitum. In consequence, no being would appear and the universe would not exist. Thus, the Noble Qur'an says:

“If there were in them gods other than God, [heaven and earth] would be in ruins” (21:22).

Worship

To know the One God as the most perfect Essence, with the most perfect attributes, above all lack and imperfection, and to know His relation to the universe of creation, preservation, and emanation, of kindness and mercy, induce a response in us termed “worship.”

Worship is a kind of relation of humility, adoration, and thanksgiving that man establishes with his God and can establish only with his God. It is correct and permissible only in relation to God. To recognise God as the only Source of being, the only Master, and the Lord of all things entails our pairing no created thing with Him in worship. The Noble Qur'an repeatedly affirms and stresses that worship must be reserved for God, that there is no sin like *shirk* toward God.

Two preliminary remarks are required to clarify the meaning of worship:

I. Worship is either verbal or active. Verbal worship consists in reciting a series of phrases and invocations, as in reciting the Opening and another *sura* of the Qur'an as well as invocations during the bows and prostrations of prayer and in pronouncing the *tashahhud* or by calling *Labbayka* during the

hajj. ⁵ Active worship is exemplified by the motions of standing, bowing, and prostrating in prayer or, on the *hajj* by the standing at 'Arafat and the Mash'ar and by the circumambulation of the Ka'ba.⁶ Most acts of worship include both verbal and active components, as is the case with the prayer and the *hajj*.

2. Man's actions are of two kinds. Some acts have no special referent; they are not accomplished as signs of something else but only for the sake of their natural and inherent results. For instance, a farmer carries out a series of labours connected with agriculture to reap the natural results of such labours. The farmer does not carry on agriculture as a sign and symbol, as an expression of a series of meanings and sentiments. But we do some things as signs with a series of meanings, as expressions of sentiments of certain kinds. For instance, we nod our heads as a sign of assent; in a gathering, we sit by the door as a sign of humility; and we bow as a sign of veneration and honour to another. Most human actions are of the first kind. But some human actions are of this second kind, done to represent a meaning, to express sentiments. Such actions have the force of words in conveying a meaning and expressing an intention.

Worship, whether verbal or active, is a significant action. Man through his words of worship expresses a truth, or rather truths, and through his acts of worship, such as bowing and prostration, halting and circumambulation, or commencing the fast, expresses the meanings he recites verbally.

Man expresses five things in his verbal and active worship:

1. Praise of God by means of those attributes and qualities that are uniquely God's – that is, those qualities that refer to the Absolute Perfection, such as absolute knowledge, absolute power, absolute will. The meaning of absolute perfection, absolute knowledge, absolute power, and absolute will is that they are not limited or conditional upon anything. They entail God's being free of need.
2. Praise of God by affirming that He is beyond all lacks and defects, such as mortality, limitation, ignorance, miserliness, and injustice.
3. Thanksgiving to God as the original Source of all good things and blessings, affirmation that all the blessings we enjoy come from Him and Him alone, that things other than Him are means He has established.
4. Utter surrender and utter obedience toward Him, acknowledgement that He is to be obeyed unconditionally and deserves obedience and surrender. He, in being God, fittingly gives commands, and we, in being servants, fittingly obey and surrender to Him.
5. Acknowledgement that He has no partner in any of the four matters: There is no absolute perfection but Him; there is no essence beyond defect other than Him; there is no benefactor or original source of blessings to whom all acts of thanksgiving revert but Him; there is no being deserving of absolute obedience and absolute surrender but Him. Every act of obedience, such as obedience to the Prophet, the Imam, the legitimate Islamic ruler, one's mother and father, or one's teacher must in the end equal obedience to Him and satisfaction of Him; otherwise it is impermissible.

This is the response that is appropriate to a servant before the great God. It is neither correct nor permissible in reference to any other being.

Levels and Degrees of Tawhid

Tawhid has levels and degrees, as does its opposite, *shirk*. Until one has traversed all the levels of *Tawhid*, one is not a true *muwahhid*.⁷

Essence

Tawhid as regards the Essence means to know the Essence of the God in its unity and uniqueness. The first knowledge anyone has of the Essence of God is of His self-sufficiency. This means that He is the Essence that stands in need of no other being in any respect. In the language of the Qur'an, He is the Self-sufficient. All need Him and receive help from Him, but He is free of need:

“O people! You are those in need of God, and God is the Self-sufficient, the Praiseworthy” (35: 15).

In the language of the *hukama'*, He is the Necessary Being.

They also ascribe to Him priority, which refers to His role as Principle, Source, and Creator. He is the Principle and Creator of other beings, which are all from Him, but He is from nothing. In the language of the *hukama'*, He is the Primal Cause.

This is the first knowledge and first conception anyone has of God. That is, whoever thinks about God, whether in affirmation or denial, belief or disbelief, has such a conception in mind: He asks himself, “Is there a Reality that is dependent upon no other reality, but upon Whom all realities depend, through Whose will all realities have come into being, and Who has not Himself come into being through any other principle?”

Tawhid as regards the Essence implies this Reality does not admit duality or multiplicity, has no likeness:

“There is nothing like Him” (42: 11).

There is no other being at His level of existence:

“And there is none comparable to Him” (112:4).

That a being should be considered an individual member of a species, as for instance that Hasan should be considered an individual member of the human species, such that the existence of other members of this species may automatically be inferred, is among the characteristics of creatures and contingent beings. The essence of the Necessary Being is above such implications and thus free from them.

Because the Necessary Being is single, the universe is necessarily single in respect to its principle and source and in respect to its point of return and end: The universe neither arises from numerous principles nor reverts to numerous principles. It arises from one Principle, one Reality:

“Say, God is the Creator of all things” (13:16).

It returns to that same Principle, that same Reality:

“Behold, all affairs course to God” (42:53).

The relation of God and the world is a relation of Creator and created, that is, a relation of creative cause and effect, not a relation such as that of light to the lamp or that of man's consciousness to man. God is not separate from the world.⁸ He is with all things, but the things are not with Him:

“He is with you wherever you may be” (57:4).

But that God is not separate from the world does not imply that He is like light to the lamp or consciousness to the body. If this were so, God would be an effect of the world and not the world the effect of God, as light is an effect of the lamp, not the lamp the effect of the light. Likewise, that God is not separate from the world and man does not imply that God, the world, and man all have one mode of being and that they all live and move with one will and one spirit. All these are attributes of the created, the contingent. God is above the attributes of created beings.

“Glory to your Lord! The Lord of Power! [He is free] of what they ascribe to Him” (37:180).

Attributes

Tawhid as regards the attributes means to perceive and know the Essence of God in its identity with its attributes and the attributes in their identity with one another. *Tawhid* as regards the Essence means to deny the existence of a second or a likeness, but *Tawhid* as regards the attributes means to deny the existence of any sort of multiplicity and compoundedness in the Essence itself.

Although the Essence of God is described by the attributes of perfection – beauty and majesty – it does not have various objective aspects. A differentiation between the Essence and the attributes or between attributes would imply a limitation in being. For a boundless being, just as a second for it cannot be conceived, neither can multiplicity, compoundedness, or differentiation between essence and attributes be conceived.

Tawhid as regards the attributes, like *Tawhid* as regards the Essence, is among those principles of the Islamic sciences and among those most sublime and elevated of human ideas that have been crystallised most especially in the Shi'i school of thought. 'Ali says in the first sermon of the *Nahj al-Balagha*: “Praise to God, Whom the praise of the speakers does not attain, and Whose blessings the counters do not reckon, and Whose due the strivers do not fulfil, Whom the far-reaching aspirations do

not reach, and Whom the plummeting of the sagacious do not attain, of Whom there is no limit to the description, and of Whom there is no qualification.” He mentions the limitless attributes of God.

A few sentences later, he says: “The perfection of devotion to Him is the rejection of attributes to Him, because any object of attribution bears witness that it is other than the attribute, and any attribute bears witness that it is other than the object of attribution, so whoever ascribes attributes to God (praise Him!) has associated Him, and whoever has associated him....” [9](#)

In this passage Ali has both affirmed attributes of God (“to whom there is no limit to the description”) and negated them (“any attribute bears witness”).

The attributes by which God is characterised are clearly the boundless attributes to the boundlessness of the Essence, identical to that Essence, and the attributes God is above and free of are the limited attributes distinct from the Essence and from other attributes. Therefore, *Tawhid* as regards the attributes means perceiving and knowing the unity of the Essence and the attributes of God.

Acts

Tawhid as regards acts means perceiving and knowing that the universe, with all its systems, norms, and causes and effects is God's act and God's work and arises from His will. Just as the beings of the universe are not independent in essence, all subsisting by Him and dependent on Him, He being in the language of the Qur'an the one Self-subsistent by means of Whom the universe subsists, neither are these beings independent in terms of effecting and causality. In consequence, just as God has no partner in essence, neither has He any partner in agency. Every agent and cause gains its reality, its being, its influence and agency from Him; every agent subsists by Him. All powers and all strength are by Him: **“Whatever God intend, and there is no strength except by God” (18:39)**; “no power and no strength except by God.”

Man, like all other beings, has a causal role in and effect on his actions. He is indeed more influential in shaping his own destiny than are the others, but he is by no means a fully empowered being, one left to his own devices. [10](#) “I stand and sit by God's power and strength.”

Belief in complete empowerment of a being, human or otherwise, by way of assignation, entails belief that that being is a partner with God in independence of agency, and independence of agency further entails independence in essence, which is inimical to *Tawhid* as regards the Essence, not to speak of *Tawhid* as regards acts. “Praise to God, Who does not take a wife and has no son, and with Whom there is no partner in rule, and Who has no supporter from inability, so magnify Him.” [11](#)

Is theoretical *Tawhid*, that is, to know God in His unity of essence, unity of essence and attributes, and unity of agency, possible? If it is possible, does such knowledge contribute to human happiness or is it superfluous? I have discussed the possibility or impossibility of such knowledge in *Usul-i Falsafa va Ravish-i Ri'alism* (Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism), but how we envision it depends

on how we understand man and his happiness. The tide of materialistic thought about man and being has led even believers in God to conceive of questions of theology as useless and vain, as a kind of abstractionism and flight from reality.

But a Muslim who views the reality of man as not just the corporeal reality, who views the basic reality of man as the reality of his spirit, whose substance is the substance of knowledge, sanctity, and purity, well understands that so called theoretical *Tawhid* (the three levels I have described), in addition to being the foundation of *Tawhid* in practice, is itself in its essence the highest perfection of the soul. It truly elevates man to God and grants him perfection. ***“To Him ascends the good word, and He exalts the righteous deed” (35: 10).*** Man's humanity is dependent upon his knowledge of God.

Man's knowledge is not separate from man; it is the most basic and dearest part of his existence. To whatever extent man attains knowledge of being, the system of being, and the source and principle of being, he has realised half his substance, which is knowledge, science, gnosis.

According to Islam, and especially according to Shi'i theology, to perceive theological truths, quite apart from the practical and social effects deriving from these truths, is itself the ultimate end of humanity.

Worship

The three levels I have described constitute theoretical *Tawhid* and belong to the class of knowledge, but *Tawhid* in worship is *Tawhid* in practice and belongs to the class of being and becoming. The first three levels of *Tawhid* I discussed constitute right thinking; this level means right being and right becoming. Theoretical *Tawhid* is an insight into perfection; *Tawhid* in practice is a movement aimed at reaching perfection. Theoretical *Tawhid* means perceiving the unity of God, but *Tawhid* in practice means bringing man into unity. Theoretical *Tawhid* is to see. *Tawhid* in practice is “to go.”

Tawhid in practice, or *Tawhid* in worship, means worship of the One, to turn to worship of the One God. According to Islam, worship has levels and degrees. The most obvious levels of worship are to carry out the rites of glorification and the affirmation of transcendence in that if they were carried out for something other than God, this act would imply complete departure from the circle of the people of *Tawhid* and the pale of Islam. But according to Islam, worship is not confined to this level: every choice of orientation, of an ideal, of a spiritual *qibla*, constitutes worship.

“Did you see the one who took his passion for his God?” (25:43).

Or the one who obeys the orders of another to whom God has not commanded obedience, who submits to him completely, worships him:

“They took their priests and their anchorites as lords, in derogation of God” (9:31).

“We do not take some from among us as lords” (3:64).

Accordingly, *Tawhid* in practice, or *Tawhid* in worship, means to make only God our object of obedience, destination, *qibla* and ideal, to reject any other object of obedience, destination, *qibla*, or ideal – that is, to bow and rise for God, to stand for God, to serve God, to live for God, to die for God. It is as Abraham said:

“Say: I have set my face to Him Who created the heavens and the earth, in all exclusivity. My prayer, my sacrifice, my life, and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds. He has no partner; I am commanded of this, and I am of those who surrender” (6: 162–163).

This *Tawhid* of Abraham's is his *Tawhid* in practice. The “good word” *La ilaha illa 'llah* most of all has in view *Tawhid* in practice, in meaning that none but God is worthy of worship.

Man and the Attainment of Unity

The questions of how the existential reality of man is to attain unity within a single psychical system and a single humane and evolutionary direction, how human society is to attain unity and integration within a single harmonious, evolving social system, and, conversely, how the personality of the human individual has disintegrated into various poles and his existential reality fragmented into disparate segments and how man's society has disintegrated into conflicting egos and inharmonious groupings and classes, in contradiction and inimical to one another, have stimulated much thought. What must be done to bring the character of man from psychical and social standpoints to the state of unity we know as *Tawhid*, within a single humane and evolutionary course? Three theories address this question: the materialistic, the idealistic, and the realistic.

Materialistic Theory

The materialistic theory, which takes only manner into consideration and grants the psyche no sort of substantive reality, holds that private possession (ownership) of objects is what divides and disorders the individual psychically and society socially and makes each of them subject to inharmonious poles. In coming under individual possession, objects fragment man individually (psychically) and socially. Man is a “generic” existent (social by nature).

At the dawn of history, man lived as a social body, as a we. No I existed; that is, man felt no I. He was aware not of his individual existence but of his collective existence. His feelings were the collective's feelings, his pain, and the collective's pain. He lived for the collective, not for himself; his conscience was a collective conscience, not an individual one.

At the dawn of history, man had a communal life. He lived by hunting. Each was able daily to gain enough from sea and forest to satisfy his individual needs; no surplus production existed. This state of affairs persisted until man discovered agriculture and surplus production grew possible, and with it the growth of one class that worked, and another that consumed without working. This process culminated in the principle of ownership.

Private ownership, also termed the private possession by a special group of property and wealth (the resources for production, such as water and land, and the tools of production, such as the plow), shattered the collective spirit and bisected the society that had lived as a unity half prosperous and profiting and half deprived, exploited, and toiling. Society, which had lived as a “we,” was transformed into a collection of “I”s.

Through the appearance of ownership, man grew inwardly alienated from his real self, which was his social self, whereby he had felt his identity with other people. Instead of feeling himself a man, he felt himself an owner; he grew self-alienated and diminished. Only by severing this tie of possession can man return to moral unity and psychical well being and to social unity and well being. History flows inexorably toward these unities.

The ownerships that deform human unity into plurality and collectively into fragmentation are like the battlements that Jalal adDin Rumi speaks of in his beautiful parable as splitting the single and expansive light of the sun and giving rise to shadows. Of course, Rumi is speaking of a truth of *'irfan*, the appearance of multiplicity from unity and the return of multiplicity to unity, but with some distortion and forced interpretation, it can be regarded as an allegory for this Marxist theory:

*We were single, of one substance all
We lacked head and foot, that one head all,
We were one in substance like the sun,
We were guileless, pure as water, one.
First that clear light assumed form, and thence,
Number came like shadowed battlements.
Smash by catapult these battlements,
So this party shed all differences.* [12](#)

Idealistic Theory

The idealistic theory considers only the soul and inner being of man, man's relation to his own self; it takes this as its basis and principle. This theory concedes that possession and attachment obstruct realisation of unity and lead to multiplicity, work to fragment and disintegrate the collective, and draw the individual into psychical fragmentation and society into dissolution into groups, but it holds that inevitably the thing attached to is the cause of the fragmentation and dissolution of the thing attached, not the thing attached the cause of the fragmentation and dissolution of the thing attached to.

The possession of, the attachment to various entities – wealth, wife, position, and so forth – is not the cause of the fragmentation of the psyche and the dissolution of society; rather, the inward attachment of man to such entities causes man's division, decomposition, and alienation. Man's ownership has not separated man from self and society; rather, man's being owned has done this. What fragments me from moral and social standpoints is not my wealth, my wife, or my position, but rather wealth's me, wife's me,

and position's me.

It is not necessary to sever the possession of things by man to transform me into us; rather, the possession of man by things must be severed. Deliver man from his attachment to objects so that he may revert to his human reality. Do not free things from their attachment to man. Give man spiritual freedom. What has freeing things ever accomplished? Give deliverance, freedom, communality, and unity to man, not to a thing.

Tawhid as an ethical and social factor in man belongs under the heading of educational factors, especially factors in spiritual education, not under that of economic factors. The agent of *Tawhid* in man is his inner evolution, not his outer diminution. If man is to attain unity, one must give him spirit, not take from him matter. Man is first an animal and then human. He is an animal innately and human by acquisition. Man regains his humanity, which is his latently and inherently, in the light of faith and through the effects of the factors of correct education and upbringing. So long as man has not regained his spirituality under the effective influence of spiritual factors and become human, he is this same animal by nature, and there is no chance for unity of spirits and animal souls.

The animal soul has no unity

Seek not from the wind's soul such unity,

If this should eat bread, it sates not then that,

If this bears a load, it weighs not on that.

But rather this loves to see that one die,

It dies of sheer spite to see that one thrive.

The souls of the wolves and dogs are at odds,

But joined are the souls of the lions of God's.

Believers are numbered, but belief one,

Their bodies are numbered, but the soul one,

Apart from the mind and soul of the cow,

And ass, we've another mind and a soul.

Ten lamps, if you bring them all to one place,

Have each their own form distinct from the rest,

One can't make the light out of any one,

Then turn to its light and with doubt be done.

So seek from the Qur'an the meaning of, "Say,

We make no distinction among the prophets."

Of apples and peaches each if you count,

One hundred, when pressed they all become one.

In spirit there are no numbers or parts,

Are no separate beings, to analyse. [13](#)

To consider matter the agent of the fragmentation and coalescence of man (such that when it is fragmented, man is fragmented, when it coalesces, man coalesces, and when it is one, man is one) and to regard man's ethical character and social character as dependent and parasitical upon the economic situation and the state of production arise from an ignorance of man and a lack of faith in the substantive reality of man and the powers of his reason and will. It is an antihumanistic theory.

To sever the bond of possession of objects by private persons is impossible. Suppose this were done in the case of property and wealth. What could be done in the case of family, wife and children? Could one propose this area be communalized and advocate a sexual communism? If this were possible, why have those nations that years ago abolished private ownership of wealth stuck with the private family system?

Suppose this inherently private system of the family were also communalized. What could one do about posts, positions, reputations, and honours? Could one parcel these out evenly as well? Then what would one do with the individuals' distinct physical, psychical, and mental capacities? These qualities are inseparably attached to each individual's being; they could not be detached and equalised.

Realistic Theory

The realistic theory holds that what divides and disintegrates man individually and socially, the central factor in human fragmentation and multiplicity, is man's attachments to objects, not the objects' attachment to man. Man's captivity arises from his being owned, not from his ownership. Thus, this theory accords the greatest importance to education, to a revolution in thought, to faith, ideology, and spiritual freedom. But it holds that, just as man is not pure matter, neither is he pure spirit. Today's livelihood and the future life are inseparably paired. Body and soul have a reciprocal influence.

While in the light of *Tawhid* in worship, worship of God, one struggles with the spiritual and psychical agents of fragmentation, one must simultaneously war vehemently against the agents of discrimination, injustice, deprivation, oppression, strangulation, *taghutism*, and subservience to other-than-God.¹⁴ This is the logic of Islam.

When Islam appeared, it simultaneously launched two transformations or revolutions, two movements. Islam did not say "Eliminate discrimination, injustice, or property, and everything will be straightened out." Nor did it say "Reform the heart and leave the outer world alone. Construct a morality, and a society will be constructed automatically." When Islam proclaimed *Tawhid* as an inner psychological truth, in the light of faith in God Most High and worship of His single Essence, it simultaneously proclaimed *Tawhid* as a social truth, to be realised by means of jihad and struggle against social inequalities.

The following noble verse of the Qur'an shines like a star in the firmament of *Tawhid* as we know it. This is the verse that the Most Noble Prophet included in his letters summoning the heads of nations to faith. It presents Islamic realism and the comprehensive outlook of Islam:

“Say, ‘O people of the book! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we worship none but God, that we associate nothing as a partner with Him...’” (3:64).

Come to one parlance, one thesis, one truth that is the same for you and for us, that bears the same relation to everyone, under which neither you nor we have any special privilege: We are to worship the One God and nothing else.

To this point, the noble verse has covered how unity is granted people through a single faith, a single orientation and *qibla*, and a single ideal, and how spiritual freedom is attained. It continues: ***“and that we not take some from among ourselves as lords other than God...”*** Let not some of us people take others as our lords, despite the fact that God is Lord of all. Let us not be disintegrated into lord and serf. Come; let us sever the wrong social ties that lead to such discrimination.

After the disruption of the Islamic caliphate in the time of 'Uthman, the re-establishment of a class structure out of the days of ignorance, the popular uprising, and the killing of 'Uthman, the people flocked to 'Ali (upon whom be peace) to swear allegiance to him. 'Ali had no choice but to accept, although he personally was loath to accept. 'Ali explains his personal loathing and his legal responsibility in this way: “If the people had not gathered, if their support had not made it incumbent upon me, and if God had not extracted a pledge from the *'ulama* to reduce the engorgement of the oppressors and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have laid the bridle [of the caliphate] on its shoulders and left it alone.”¹⁵

After 'Ali undertook the office, he placed two responsibilities at the head of his agenda: one was to advise and counsel the people, to reform their mentalities and morals, and to expound divine knowledge in a way that we see exemplified in the *Nahj al-Balagha*. The other was to struggle against social discrimination. Ali did not content himself with inward reform and spiritual liberation, just as he did not consider social reforms enough. He worked for reform in both directions. This is the program of Islam.

Thus, Islam bore in one hand a logic, a summons, and a program for the individual and collective unity of people, directed at worship of God, and in the other hand a sword to sever unjust human relations, to overthrow social classes, and to destroy the *taghuts*.

The Islamic classless society is the society without discriminations, without deprived persons, without *taghuts*, without oppression, the just society. It is not the society without differences; such homogeneity is itself a kind of oppression and injustice. There is a distinction to be made between discrimination and difference. Differences exist in the created system of the universe. And these differences have imparted beauty, diversity, progress, and evolution to the universe, but they do not constitute discrimination.

The “virtuous city” of Islam is the city opposed to discrimination, not to differences. ¹⁶

Islamic society is the society of equality and fraternity, not of negative equality, but rather of positive equality. Negative equality means to take no account of natural distinctions among individuals and to deny their acquired distinctions in order to establish equality. Positive equality means creation of equal

opportunities for all, possession by each of his acquisitions, and denial of imaginary and unjust distinctions.

Negative equality is the sort of equality spoken of in the myth [of Procrustes], who lived in the mountains and offered his hospitality to wayfarers. The guest was obliged to sleep on a certain bed. As the host's servants laid him on that bed, if he was neither shorter nor longer than that bed, he was allowed to sleep. But alas for the unfortunate guest if his stature was not equal to the length of the bed! If he was taller, he would be evened with the bed with a saw, at his head or feet. If he were shorter, he would be stretched until he drew even. In either case, it is clear how he wound up.

Positive equality, however, resembles the disinterestedness of a compassionate and sympathetic teacher who regards all students alike. When they give equivalent answers, he gives equal grades; when they give different answers, he gives to each the grade that he deserves. Islamic society is the natural society. It is neither the discriminatory society nor the society of negative equality. The thesis of Islam is “Work according to ability, merit according to work.”

The discriminatory society is the society in which people's relations are based on subjugation and exploitation, that is, on individual living by exploiting others' toils, by force. The natural society, however, is the society in which any way one person lives by exploiting another is condemned. The relationship among persons is one of mutual taming. All strive freely and according to their abilities and opportunities, and all are tamed by one another. That is, bilateral employment is the rule.

Insofar as natural differences and discrepancies among individuals are the rule, whoever has the greater power and ability will attract the greater number of forces to himself. For instance, an individual who has the greater ability in science will attract the greater number of prospective students of science to himself and tame them to the greater extent. Whoever has the greater ability in technology will necessarily draw the more others, propel them the further in the direction of his own thought and innovation, and tame them the more.

While the Glorious Qur'an negates lordship and servanthood in society, it admits the reality of natural differences and various degrees of abilities from the standpoint of how we are created and affirms the relationship of mutual taming. It is said in the *Sura Zukhruf*:

Do they apportion the mercy of the Lord? [Is it theirs to bestow the mantle of prophecy upon whomever they please?] ***It is We who portion out among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and we raise them above each other in degree, so they might obtain labour [yattakhidha . . . sukhrayan] of each other. But the mercy of your Lord is better than what they amass. (43:32)***

The discrepancy in merits is thus not one-sided; that is, people do not fall under one of two classes, one endowed with nominal superiority and the other not. In such an event, one class would be the tamers and the other, the tamed. If this were the case, it would have had to be thus expressed: “We raise some of them above others in degree, so that they [the former] might obtain labour of them [the latter].” But

the actual wording is **“we raise them above each other in degree, so they might obtain labour of each other.”** That is, all enjoy some superiority and all tame each other. In other words, both merit and the act of taming are bilateral.

The second point relates to the word “taming” (*sukhriyan*). Here the initial letter *sin* bears the short vowel *u*; thus, the word bears the aforementioned sense.

In two other verses of the Qur'an, this word occurs with the short vowel *i*. One instance is Mu'minun: 110, addressed to the people of hell, in which their inadmissible behaviour toward the people of the faith is attacked:

“And there were a party among My servants. But you treated them with derision [*sikhriyan*] to the point that it made you forget to remember Me, while you were laughing at them” (23:109–110).

The other is verse 63 of the blessed *Sura Sad*, in which the people of hell themselves say,

“What has happened to us such that we do not see men whom we used to number among the evil? Did we treat them with derision, or have our eyes failed to perceive them?” (38:62–63).

Indications are (and in all the works of exegesis I have consulted—*Majma' al-Bayan*, *Kashshaf*, *Tafsir-i-imam*; Bayzawi, *Ruh al-Bayan*, Safi, *Tafsir al-Mizan* (exegetes concur in this interpretation) that *sikhriyan* as it appears in these two verses means as the object of derision. Only the *Majma' al-Bayan* has transmitted (while describing it as unreliable) an assertion by some that it means having been enslaved. Some assert categorically that *sikhriyan* always means as the object of derision and that *sukhriyan* always means tamed (*musakhkhar*).

The verbal noun *taskhir* and its passive participle *musakhkhar* appear repeatedly in the Noble Qur'an with the previously given meanings of to tame and tamed, respectively. The Qur'an speaks of the taming of the moon, sun, night, day, sea, rivers, mountains (for the prophet David), wind (for Solomon), and all that is in the heavens and on earth (for man). The meaning in all these instances is that these phenomena have been so created as to render them tame to man and available for man's use and benefit. These verses speak only of things being tamed for man, not of man being tamed for things. In the verse under consideration, man is spoken of as being tamed for man in a bilateral manner.

The senses of unwillingness and coercion do not enter into the meaning of the word *taskhir*. For instance, the lover is tamed by the beloved, the disciple by the master, the student by the teacher, and the common people, generally, by heroes; but these are under no coercion. Accordingly, the *hukama'* of Islam have perceptively distinguished the expression “agency under 'taming'” (*fa 'iliyya bi't taskhir*) from the expression “agency under coercion” (*fa 'iliyya bi'l-jabr*). An act of taming inheres in every act of coercion, but the converse does not hold.

These are the terms in which the Qur'an defines this word. But I do not know whether this terminology is peculiar to the Qur'an such that the Qur'an has given a new crystallization to the original meaning of the

word in order to communicate an extraordinarily novel truth regarding the course of creation, that the activity of natural forces has the character of an activity governed by the action of taming and is neither a predestined activity nor an assigned one – or this terminology was in use prior to the Qur'anic revelations.

Here it grows clear how wide of the mark are the definitions of *taskhir* offered by some dictionaries, such as *Al-Munjid*, which define it as a task performed for another without compensation. First, these lexicographers have applied the word only to the elective social relationships of people. Second, they have had to import the idea of coercion and unwillingness into its meaning, whereas the Qur'an has applied it to a relationship made inherent by creation, without bringing in this idea of coercion and unwillingness.

The verse under consideration expounds this relationship of people in their social life, the relationship of taming of all for all. It is one of the most important verses of the Qur'an from the standpoint of expressing the social philosophy of Islam. How well, how sublimely have Bayzawi in his well-known *Tafsir* and, after him, 'Allama Fayz expounded this verse, saying that the meaning of the phrase **“so that they might obtain labour of each other”** is that “they make use of each other in their needs,” by this means familiarity and mutual solidarity appear, and thus the order of the world is assured.

It is likewise said in a Tradition that the meaning of the verse is “We have created all in need of one another.” The relationship of taming is so composed that, just as it interrelates people's natural needs, it does not lead society out of the arena of free competition, by contrast with determinate relationships. The life of social animals is based on determinate relationships; thus, man's sociality differs from that of honeybees or ants. Determinate laws govern their life. Their life is not an arena for competition. They have no possibility to rise or to fall.

Although man is social, he also enjoys a kind of freedom. Human society is the arena for a competition in progress and evolution. Fetters that limit an individual's freedom on the course of evolution block the unfolding of human capacities.

Man as envisioned by materialist theory, in not having attained to freedom within, in finding only his outward fetters broken, is like a wingless bird that has been unfettered but still cannot fly. Man as envisioned by idealist theory is free inwardly but in fetters outwardly, is a bird with wings but with its feet tied to a massive form. Man as presented by the realistic theory, however, is a bird with wings that is fully prepared for flight, from whose feet these heavy fetters have been removed.

Tawhid in practice, individual and social, consists in the individual's growing unified through worship of God alone by means of rejection of all kinds of counterfeit worship (such as worship of carnal desires, money, or prestige) and in society's growing unified through worship of God alone by means of rejection of *taghuts*, of discrimination, and of injustice. So long as individual and society do not attain unity, they will not attain happiness. And except by worship of the Truth, they will not attain unity.

In the blessed *Sura Zumar*, verse 29, the Noble Qur'an addresses the waywardness and directionlessness of man and the fragmentation and dispersion of his personality in the system of *shirk* and, conversely, his unity, his attainment of a single character and direction, and his evolutionary alignment in the system of *Tawhid*, in these words:

“God coins a parable: a man in whom partners share ownership, and a man belonging wholly to one man: are these two equal in comparison?” (39:29).

Imagine a man with several masters, each of whom angrily and ill-naturedly orders him in a different direction. Man under the system of *shirk* is drawn every moment in a different direction, toward a different pole. He is a piece of straw floating on the sea; the waves wash him in a new direction every instant. But in the system of *Tawhid*, he is like a ship equipped with navigational systems, making an orderly, harmonious journey under a benevolent captain.

Levels and Degrees of Shirk

Just as *Tawhid* has levels and degrees, so has *shirk*. According to the rule, “Things are known by their contraries,” by comparing the levels of *Tawhid* with the levels of *shirk*, we can better understand both *Tawhid* and *shirk*. Opposite the *Tawhid* that the prophets have summoned us to, kinds of *shirk* have always existed.

Essence

Some people have professed belief in two, three, or more independent, internal, pre-existent principles (dualism, trinitarianism, and polytheism, respectively). They have regarded the world as having more than one basis) pole, or focus. What are the roots of such ideas? Is each of them the reflection, the expression, of a people's social situation? Say, for instance, that when a people have professed two eternally pre-existent principles, two essential axes for the universe, is it because their society has been divided between two poles and that, likewise, when a people believe in three principles or gods, their society has been a threefold system?

That is, has the social system always been reflected in the people's minds as a principle of belief? Does it not follow automatically that when prophets of *Tawhid* have professed a belief in *Tawhid*, a belief that the universe has a single origin, the social system must already have been gravitating to a single pole?

This theory derives from another philosophical theory I have already considered: that the spiritual and rational aspects of man and the ideal constituents of society, such as science, law, philosophy, religion, and art, are functions of social systems and especially of economics and have no substantive reality of their own. I have already rebutted this theory, and, because I believe in the substantive reality and autonomy of thought, ideology, and humanity, I hold such sociological theories for *shirk* and *Tawhid* to be groundless.

It is true, of course, that sometimes a belief system, a religious system, will become a vehicle for abuses in a given social system, just as the particular system of idolatry of the *mushriks* of the Quraysh tribe became a vehicle by which Arab usurers maintained their profits.¹⁷ But these usurers, the Abu Sufyans, Abu Jahls, and Walid ibn Mughiras, had not the least belief in these idols; they defended them only to preserve the existing social system.¹⁸ These defensive actions grew earnest just as Islam, the system of *Tawhid* opposed to exploitation and usury, appeared. The idolaters, in seeing themselves faced with acute danger of extinction, advanced reverence for popular beliefs as a defense.

This point is referred to many times in the verses of the Qur'an, especially in the story of Moses and Pharaoh. But this point is to be distinguished from the idea that, overall, the economic system is the infrastructure of the system of thought and belief or that every system of thought and belief is a determinate reflection of the economic and social systems.

The school of the prophets emphatically denies that every school of thought is necessarily the crystallization of society's demands, which are, in turn, the products of economic conditions. According to this totally materialistic theory, the school of *Tawhid* of the prophets is itself the crystallization of society's demands and so the product of the economic needs of their time. That is, the development of the tools of production gave rise to a series of social demands that had to be rationalised as a conception of *Tawhid*. The prophets were the vanguard and in fact the envoys of this social and economic need. This is what it means for an idea or belief, such as the idea of *Tawhid*, to have an economic infrastructure.

The Qur'an, in maintaining that man has a primordial nature and in accounting this nature a basic existential dimension of man that in turn gives rise to a range of thoughts and desires, regards the prophets' summons to *Tawhid* as an answer to these innate needs. It poses no other infrastructure for *Tawhid* than the universal primordial nature of man. The Qur'an, in maintaining a primordial nature for man, does not present class conditions as determining factors in thought or belief.

If class conditions had the character of an infrastructure, and if there were no such thing as a primordial nature, everyone's thoughts and inclinations would necessarily point where his class background dictated. In this case, no choice or election would exist; there would be neither Pharaohs deserving of blame nor anti Pharaohs deserving of praise because man is deserving of praise or blame when he can be other than what he is. If he cannot be other than what he is, as the black in his blackness or the white in his whiteness, he deserves neither.

But we know that man is not condemned to thought based on class: He can rise up against his own class interests, just as Moses did after having grown up amid the luxuries of a Pharaoh. This in itself shows that the idea of infrastructure and superstructure, besides negating the humanity of man, is nothing more than a superstition.

I do not however, mean that one's material situation and one's mental state do not interact or that they are alien to and devoid of influence upon one another. I simply deny that one is the infrastructure and

the other, the superstructure. The Qur'an itself says:

“man transgresses when he sees himself as self-sufficient” (96:6-7).

The Qur'an attests to the special role of the grandees (*mala'*) and the affluent in struggling against the prophets and the special role of the oppressed in supporting them, but in such a way as to uphold the primordial nature in everyone that imparts to man the worth to be summoned and reminded. The difference between the groups lies in the fact that, although, in accordance with the primordial nature, the requisites for acceptance exist in both, one group (the grandees and the affluent) must surmount a great obstacle from a spiritual standpoint, which is their extant material interests and the oppressors' privileges they have acquired, whereas the other faces no such obstacles. In the words of Salman Farsi¹⁹, “The disencumbered found deliverance.”

Not only is there no obstacle to the oppressed responding positively to their primordial nature, but they have an additional inducement – they are leaving behind hard circumstances and attaining a better life. This is why the oppressed compose a majority of the prophets' followers. But the prophets have always gained some adherents from among the other group, who have risen against their class and class background, just as some of the oppressed have joined the ranks of the prophets' enemies, through being ruled by a range of habits, subliminal influences, consanguinary tendencies, and so forth.

The Qur'an does not conceive of the pharaohs' and Abu Sufyans' defences of the *shirk*-ridden systems of their day, which incited the people's religious sentiments against Moses and the Seal of the Prophets, as being the inevitable product of these persons' class situations, such that they could not think in any other way and their social aims were crystallised in these beliefs. The Qur'anic conception is that they acted with duplicity and that, while in accordance with their God-given primordial nature they perceived and recognised the truth, they assumed an attitude of denial:

“And they rejected [Our signs], while their souls were convinced of them” (27: 14).

The Qur'an considers their unbelief to be uncandid (*juhudi*) unbelief, that is, unbelief of the tongue concurrent with belief of the heart. In other words, it conceives of these acts of denial as a kind of rebellion against the rule of conscience.

A great mistake some have made in interpreting the Qur'an is that of supposing it accepts the Marxists' materialistic view of history. This theory neither accords with the objective actualities of history nor proves defensible scientifically.

Belief in multiplicity of origins is *shirk* as regards the Essence, the point diametrically opposite *Tawhid* as regards the Essence. Where the Qur'an adduces a demonstration and says, ***“if there were in them gods other than God, [heaven and earth] would be in ruins” (21:22)***, it is adducing a demonstration against this group.²⁰ Such belief occasions departure from the circle of the people of *Tawhid* and from the pale of Islam. Islam totally rejects *shirk* as regards the Essence.

Creatorship

Some peoples regard God as the Essence without like or peer and recognise Him as the sole Principle of the universe, but account some created things partners with Him in creatorship. For instance, they say that God is not responsible for the creation of evils, but that evil is the creation of some created things.²¹ This kind of *shirk*, *shirk* as regards creatorship and agency, is the point diametrically opposite *Tawhid* as regards acts. Islam holds that this form of *shirk* cannot be excused. *Shirk* as regards creatorship also has levels, some of which constitute hidden (*khafi*), not evident (*jali*) *shirk* and thus do not occasion complete exclusion from the circle of the people of *Tawhid* and the pale of Islam.

Attributes

Because *shirk* as regards the attributes is too fine a point for the lay public, it is never discussed. *Shirk* as regards the attributes applies only to some thinkers who have considered these questions but lacked the requisite competence and profundity. Among Islamic theologians, the Ash'aris fell into this kind of *shirk*. This kind of *shirk*, too, is hidden and does not occasion departure from the pale of Islam.

Worship

Some peoples have worshipped wood, stone, metal, animals, stars, the sun, trees, or the sea. This kind of *shirk* was once common and is still to be found in parts of the world. This *shirk* is *shirk* in worship and is the point diametrically opposite *Tawhid* in worship.

The previously mentioned levels of *shirk* are theoretical and fall under the heading of spurious knowledge, but this kind of *shirk* is *shirk* in practice and falls under the heading of spurious being and becoming.

Shirk in practice has levels. The highest level, which occasions departure from the pale of Islam is the kind just described and is considered evident *shirk*. But kinds of hidden *shirk* exist, and Islam struggles hard against them in its campaign of *Tawhid* in practice. Some of these kinds are minute and hidden as to require a powerful microscope even to descry with difficulty.

The Most Noble Prophet (upon whom and whose family be peace and blessings) says in a Tradition: “[The progress of] *shirk* is more hidden than the passage of an ant over a stone on a dark night. The least of it is that one should love something of oppression or hate something of justice. Is religion anything other than loving and hating for God? God says,

[Say,] if you love God, follow me [my directives that come from God], so that He may love you“
(3:31)²²

According to Islam, every sort of worship of whim, prestige, position, money, or personality is *shirk*. The Noble Qur'an, in the story of the encounter of Moses and Pharaoh, terms the latter's tyrannical rule over

the Israelites “enslavement” (*ta'bid*). It has Moses give this reply to Pharaoh:

“And this is the favour you are reminding me of – that you enslaved the Israelites?” (26:22).

That is to say, “Having made the Israelites your slaves, are you now trying to make me feel beholden to you because while I was in your house, this and that happened?”

It is clear that the Israelites neither worshipped Pharaoh nor were his bondservants; rather, they were completely under the oppressive and *taghut*-styled dominance of Pharaoh, which fact is expressed elsewhere in the Qur'an, in words ascribed to Pharaoh: **“we are masters over them” (7: 127)** (that is, “They are under our power, and we are set over them and subjugate them”).

And these words also are ascribed to him: **“and their people are in thrall to us” (23:47)** (that is, “The people of Moses and Aaron [the Israelites] are slaves for us”). In this noble verse, the expression *lana* (for us) is the best indication that what is meant is not worship, because, supposing that the Israelites were compelled to worship, they would have been worshipping Pharaoh, not all the Pharaoh's henchmen.

What had been imposed upon the Israelites by the Pharaoh and his henchmen (in Qur'anic language, Pharaoh's grandees (*mala'*) was forced obedience.

Ali (upon whom be peace) in the *Qasi'a* sermon, as he discussed the imposition of the Pharaoh's oppressive domination upon the Israelites, refers to it as enslavement. He says: “The Pharaohs took them as slaves (*'abidan*).” He goes on to describe this enslavement in this way: “(The Pharaohs] placed them under torture and gave them cups of gall to drink. They lived in deadly abasement and in subjugation from the oppressive dominance of the enemy. They had no means of non-cooperation or of defence.”

Nothing is more clear and explicit on this matter than the noble verse on the entrusting of the viceregency to the people of faith.

“God has promised those of you who have faith and do good that He will make them vicegerents on earth [just as He made others vicegerents before them], that He will surely establish the religion that He has chosen for them, and that He will transform their state from their prior fear into security: 'They shall worship [only] Me and associate nothing with Me'” (24:55).

The final sentence of this verse considers the fact that when the governance of the Truth and the divine viceregency is established, the people of faith will be free from bonds of obedience to any tyrant. It is phrased “They shall worship [only] Me and associate nothing with Me” to make it clear that, according to the Qur'an, every act of obedience to an order constitutes worship. If it is for God, it is obedience to God, and if it is for other than God, it is *shirk* toward God.

This sentence is remarkable for holding that the forced obedience that is by no means accounted

worship from a moral viewpoint is in fact worship from a social viewpoint. The Most Noble Prophet says: “Whenever the tribe of ‘As ibn Umayya [the ancestor of Marwan ibn Hakam and most of the Umayyad caliphs) come to number thirty, they will pass God's wealth from hand to hand, make God's slaves their own servants, and distort God's religion.”²³ Reference is made to the oppression and autocracy of the Umayyads. Plainly, they neither called upon the people to worship them nor made them their chattel and bondservants. Rather, they imposed their autocracy and tyranny upon the people. God's Prophet (upon whom and whose family be peace and blessings) with his God-given prescience, called this condition a kind of *shirk*, a tie of master and mastered.

Boundary Between Tawhid and Shirk

What is the precise boundary between *Tawhid* and *shirk* (whether in theory or in practice)? What sort of thought is characterised by *Tawhid*, and what sort of thought is characterised by *shirk*? What sort of action is characterised by *Tawhid*, and what sort of action is characterised by *shirk*? Is belief in a being other than God *shirk* (*shirk* as regards the Essence)? And does *Tawhid* as regards the Essence entail our having no belief in the existence of anything other than God (even as His creature)? (This is a form of the doctrine of unity of being [*vahdat-i vujud*].)

It is plain that the creature of God is the act of God; the act of God is itself one of God's modes (*shu'un*, sing. *sha'h*) and not a second entity before Him. God's creatures are manifestations of His effulgence. To believe in the existence of the creature from the standpoint of its creatureliness does not contradict, but fulfils and complements, belief in *Tawhid*. Therefore, the boundary between *Tawhid* and *shirk* is not belief in the existence or non-existence of other things, given they are His creatures.

Is belief that creatures have a role in influence and impression, in cause and effect, *shirk* (*shirk* as regards creatorship and agency)? Does *Tawhid* as regards acts entail our denying the system of causality if the universe, regarding every effect as stemming directly and without intermediation from God, and professing no role for secondary causes? For instance, are we to believe that fire has no role in burning, water, none in quenching, rain, none in promoting growth, and medicine, none in curing? Thus, God directly burns, directly quenches, directly brings about growth, directly grants healing. The presence or absence of these agents makes no difference. What exists is God's habit of performing His works in the presence of these phenomena.

As an analogy, if one is in the habit of writing letters while wearing a hat, the presence or absence of the hat has no effect on the writing of the letter, but the writer does not care to write a letter in the absence of the hat. According to this theory, the presence or absence of the phenomena that are called factors or causes amounts to this. If we profess otherwise, we have professed belief in a partner, or rather partners, with God in agency (the theory of the Ash'ari and predestination theologians).

This theory, too, is incorrect. Belief in the existence of the creature does not equal *shirk* as regards the Essence and belief in a second god or second pole vis-a-vis God but rather fulfils and complements

belief in the existence of the One God. Likewise, belief that things have influence, causality, and a role in the system of the universe does not constitute *shirk* as regards the creation, but rather fulfils and complements belief in the creative agency of God. Just as beings have no independence in essence, they have no independence in influence, but exist by His existence and exert influence by His influence.

It might prove otherwise if we were to profess the doctrine of assignation and the independence of creatures, if we were to conceive of the relation of God to the universe as being the relation of the artificer to his artefact (like that of the maker of the automobile to the automobile). The artefact needs the artificer to come into being, but after it is made, it performs its work in accordance with its mechanism. The artificer plays a role in making the artefact, but not in its subsequent operation. If the maker of the automobile should die, the automobile goes on functioning. If we thus suppose that the constituents of the world – water, rain, electricity, heat, earth, vegetation, animal life, man, and so forth – have such a relation to God (Mu'tazilites occasionally expressed such a view), this is categorically *shirk*. The creature needs the Creator in creation and in continuation.

The universe is pure emanation, pure attachment, pure connection, pure dependency, pure “from Him-ness.” From this standpoint, the influence and causality of things is identical with the influence and causality of God. The creativity of the powers and forces of the universe, whether human or extrahuman, is identical with the creativity of God and the unfolding of His agency. In fact, to believe that it is *shirk* to hold that things have a role in the workings of the universe is itself *shirk* because such a belief arises from an unconscious assumption that things have an essential independence vis-a'-vis the Essence of the Truth. It would follow that if beings have a role in influence, the influences would be attributable to other poles. Therefore, the boundary between *Tawhid* and *shirk* is not that we do or do not profess that things other than God have a role in influence and causality.

Is the boundary between *Tawhid* and *shirk* belief in a supernatural power and influence? This view implies that belief that a being, whether angel or man (such as the Prophet or the Imam), has supernatural power is *shirk* but that belief that one has a power and influence within familiar and conventional limits is not *shirk*. Likewise, belief that a deceased person has power and influence is *shirk* in that a dead person is an inanimate being, and, according to natural laws, an inanimate being has no consciousness, power, or will. Thus, to believe that a dead man has perception, to greet him, honour him, venerate him, call upon him, and seek favours of him is *shirk* because it entails imputing a supernatural power to something other than God.

Likewise, belief in objects' harbouring an occult and mysterious power, such as belief that a certain kind of earth has an influence that can cure illness or that a certain place can be effective in obtaining an answer to prayer, is *shirk* because it entails belief in a supernatural power in a thing. Such a power cannot be understood, tested, sensed, or felt, as a natural force can. Thus, belief in the absolute that things have influences is not *shirk* (as the Ash'arites supposed). Rather, belief that things have supernatural influences is *shirk*.

Being is thus dichotomised into the natural and the supernatural. The supernatural is the special province of God, and the natural is the special province of His creation or the shared province of God and His creatures. A range of actions has a supernatural aspect, such as giving life, giving death, giving daily provenance, and the like; what remain are usual and normal actions. Paranormal actions are exclusively God's, and those that remain are the domain of His creatures. This part of the argument has to do with theoretical *Tawhid*.

From the standpoint of *Tawhid* in practice every kind of spiritual contemplation of other-than-God (that is, contemplation that does not take place by way of the face and tongue of the contemplator and the face and outward ear of the contemplated, but rather involves the contemplator's seeking to establish a kind of inner, spiritual bond between himself and his opposite number, calling upon that one to gain his attention, seeking that one's intermediation and granting of pleas) is *shirk* and worship of other-than-God, because worship is nothing if not such actions as these. Worship of other-than-God is impermissible according to the dictates of reason and the imperatives of the Shari'a and entails departure from Islam. Carrying out such practices, besides being an act of worship of other-than-God, just like the acts the *mushriks* carried out for their idols, entails belief in the possession of a supernatural power by the personality contemplated (the Prophet or the Imam).

So runs the theory of the Wahhabis and crypto-Wahhabis of our time.²⁴ This theory has grown so widespread, amid one stratum in particular, that it is accounted the very mark of an intellectual. But measured on the scales of *Tawhid*, this theory is as *shirk*-tainted as the Ash'aris' theory in respect to *Tawhid* as regards the Essence and is among the most *shirk*-ridden theories in existence in respect to *Tawhid* as regards creatorship and agency.

I said earlier in refutation of the Ash'aris' theory that it denies the influence and causality of things, arguing that belief in the influence and causality of things entails belief in poles and origins alongside God. I said that things would emerge as such poles only if they possessed essential independence. Here it grew clear that the Ash'aris unconsciously assumed a kind of essential independence of things that entailed essential *shirk*. But they failed to note this; they sought to affirm *Tawhid* as regards creatorship by negating the influence of things. Accordingly, in the very act of rejecting *shirk* as regards creatorship, they unconsciously affirmed a kind of *shirk* as regards the Essence.

This same objection applies to the theory of the Wahhabis and the crypto-Wahhabis. They too have unconsciously professed a kind of essential independence for things and so have regarded any belief in a role for them beyond the limits of normal factors as entailing belief in a pole or power alongside God. They fail to note that, given a being is dependent on the will of the Truth in its whole being and has no independent aspect of its own, its supernatural influence, like its natural influence, prior to being predicated to the being itself, is to be predicated to God, and the being is nothing but a conduit for the transmission of the emanations of God to things. Is it *shirk* to believe in Gabriel's being a medium for the emanation of revelation and knowledge, in Michael's being a medium of provenance, in Seraphiel's being

a medium of reanimation, or in the Angel of Death's being a medium for the emanation of spirits?

From the standpoint of *Tawhid* as regards creatorship, this theory is the worst kind of *shirk* because it professes a kind of division of labour between the Creator and the creation. It makes supernatural acts the special province of God and natural acts the special province of God's creatures or the shared province of God and creatures. To profess a special province for creatures is precisely *shirk* as regards agency, just as it is to profess a shared domain.

Contrary to widespread opinion, not only is Wahhabism as a theory against the Imamate, but, prior to that, it is against *Tawhid* and against humanity. It is against *Tawhid* in that it professes a division of labour between Creator and creation, in addition to which it professes the kind of hidden *shirk* as regards the Essence I have previously explained. It is against humanity in that it does not perceive the human capacity of man that has raised him above the angels, made him God's vicegerent, as is stated in the text of the Qur'an, and obliged the angels to prostrate before him – it brings him down to the level of a natural animal.

In addition, it distinguishes between the living and the dead, such that the dead are not seen as living even in the next world, and it advances the idea that all of man's personality is constituted by his body, which ends up as an inanimate form. This is a materialistic and antidivine conception.²⁵

The distinction between unknown, occult effects and recognised, evident effects, along with the conception that the former, as opposed to the latter, are supernatural, constitutes another kind of *shirk*. Here we begin to discern what the Most Noble Prophet means in saying that “The progress of *shirk* is more hidden than the passage of an ant over a stone on a dark night.”

The boundary between *Tawhid* and *shirk* lies in the relation of man and the universe with God of “from Him-ness” and “to Him-ness.” What demarcates *Tawhid* from *shirk* in theory is “from Him-ness” (*inna lillah*): Whenever we have recognised any reality, any being, in its essence, attributes, and actions, as having the quality of “from Him-ness” we have understood it rightly and in accordance with the vision of *Tawhid*. It is immaterial whether that thing has no effect, or one, or several effects, and whether those effects have a supernatural aspect or not, because God is not just the God of the supernatural, the God of heaven, the God of the Realm of Spirits and the Realm of Power; He is God of all the universe. He is just as close to nature and has just as much a relation of immediacy and sustaining toward it as He has to the supernatural realm. That a thing should have a supernatural aspect does not confer an aspect of divinity upon it.

According to the Islamic worldview, the universe has from Him-ness for its essence. In numerous verses, the Noble Qur'an ascribes miraculous acts to some of the prophets, such as raising the dead and curing congenital blindness. But it appends the phrase “by His permission” (*bi idhnihi*) to these ascriptions. This phrase reveals the essential from Him-ness of these acts so that no one might suppose the prophets have an independence. Therefore, from Him-ness demarcates theoretical *Tawhid* from

theoretical *shirk*. To believe something exists whose existence is not from Him is *shirk*. To believe that something has an influence that is not from Him is likewise *shirk*, whether that influence is supernatural, like the creation of the heavens and the earth, or is small and inconsequential, like the tumbling of a leaf.

Tawhid is demarcated from *shirk* in practice by to Him-ness (*inna ilayhi raji'un*) Whenever any being, whether it be outward or spiritual contemplation, is contemplated as being a road to God and not an end in itself, God himself is contemplated. In any undertaking or journey, to contemplate the road from the standpoint that it is the road, to attend to the signs, arrows, and indications of that road so as not to be lost or wander far from the destination, from the standpoint that these are signs, indications, and arrows, is to be headed toward the destination and to be going toward the destination.

The prophets and *awliya'* are roads to God—"You are the greatest road and the straightest road." [26](#) They are the signs and indications of the journey to God – "and guideposts to His servants, and a tower in His lands, and guides upon His path." They are guides and show the way to the Truth – "the summoners to God and the guides on the way of God's satisfaction." [27](#)

Therefore, the question is not whether it is *shirk* to seek intermediation of, to make pilgrimages to, and to call upon the *awliya'* and to expect some supernatural act of them. The question is whether the prophets and *awliya'* have ascended so far through the stages of closeness to God as to have gained such gifts from Him. The Noble Qur'an testifies that God has indeed bestowed such stations and degrees upon certain of His servants. [28](#)

Another question is whether, from the standpoint of *Tawhid*, the people who seek intermediation, go on pilgrimages, and petition the *awliya'* have a correct perception. Do they go on pilgrimages with to Him-ness in mind, or do they go unminded of Him but having for their object the person whose tomb they visit? The majority of the people go on pilgrimages with an instinctual regard to *Tawhid*, but there may be a minority who lack this sense of *Tawhid* (even instinctually). One must not for this reason regard pilgrimage as *shirk*; one must teach these people *Tawhid*.

Words and deeds that convey praise, magnification, and glorification, express worship of an absolutely perfect essence or an absolutely self-sufficient being, and are directed to other-than-God are *shirk*. He is the Absolutely Praised and the Absolutely Exalted above every defect and deficiency. He is the Absolutely Great. He is the One to whom all worship refers exclusively. His Essence is that by which all powers and all strengths are maintained. Ascription of such attributes to other-than-God either by word or deed is *shirk*.

Veracity and Sincerity

To know God automatically influences all man's character, morale, ethics, and actions. The extent of this influence depends on the degree of one's faith; the stronger and more intense is one's faith, the greater the influence of this knowledge of God within one's being and the more it brings one's character under its

dominion.

The influence and penetration of knowledge of God in man has levels and degrees, upon which will depend the differences among people from the standpoint of human perfection and nearness to God. Collectively, they are named veracity (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*), that is, all these degrees are degrees of veracity and sincerity.

When we turn to God and worship Him, we are expressing “The only thing worthy of worship is the Essence of Unity, and I am utterly surrendered to Him.” To thus stand and express oneself is worship and impermissible except when directed to God. But to what extent does this expression of ours have veracity? To what extent have we in this act let go the bond of surrender to other-than-God and become utterly surrendered to His Essence? This aspect of worship depends on the degree of our faith.

Not all individuals have the same degree of veracity and sincerity. Some advance so far that in practice nothing but God's command rules their beings; they have no other commander than God inwardly or outwardly. Psychological impulses and inclinations cannot draw them from this side to that, and no other person can subject them to his command. They permit their psychological inclinations just that scope of activity which conforms to God's pleasure, this being the road that leads man to his real perfection. And they comply with others' orders (father, mother, teacher, and so forth) to please God and within limits of what God has permitted. Some have gone further than this and have no object or beloved other than God.

They make God their true Beloved, and they love God's creatures according to the rule “Everyone who loves a thing, loves its traces, signs, and keepsakes as well” because God's creatures are the traces and creations of God, His signs, keepsakes, and remembrances. Some have advanced even beyond this and see nothing but Him and His manifestations (*jilva*); that is, they see Him in everything. They see everything as a mirror and the whole world as a house of mirrors in which wherever they turn they see Him and His manifestations. Their beings declare wordlessly:

*I look on the plain, I see it as You,
I look on the sea, I see it as You,
Wherever I look, mount, vale, or plain,
I see it reveals the beauty of You.* [29](#)

Ali (upon whom be peace) said, “I saw nothing without seeing God prior to and along with it.” What passes between a worshipper in the act of worship and his God that worshipper will enact in his everyday life, and so he will arrive at the stage of veracity.

For a real worshipper, worship is a contract, and the sphere of his life is the fulfilment of that contract. This contract includes two central provisions. One is to free oneself from the rule of other-than-God, from obedience to that rule, whether of psychological impulses and appetites or of beings, objects, persons. The other is utter submission to what God commands, contentment with that, love of that.

Real worship is a major, basic factor in the worshipper's spiritual education. Worship is a lesson to the worshipper: the lesson of liberation, free-spiritedness, sacrifice, love of God, love of God's command, love of, solidarity with, the people of the Truth, beneficence and service to the people. Islamic *Tawhid* accepts no other motive than God. The evolutionary reality of man, the evolutionary reality of the universe, is to Him-ness; whatever is not directed to Him is vain and opposed to the evolutionary course of creation.

According to Islam, just as one must do one's own work for God's sake, one must do the people's work for God's sake. It is sometimes said that to work for God means to work for the people, that the way of God and the way of the people are one and the same thing, that "for God's sake" means "for the people's sake," and that to speak of working for God minus the people is *akhundism* or Sufism. But this is wrong. According to Islam, the road is the road to God, period; the goal is God and nothing other. But the road to God passes among the people.

To work for oneself is egoism, to work for the people, idolatry, to work for God and the people, *shirk* and worship of two, to do one's own and the people's work for God, *Tawhid* and worship of God. In the Islamic method of *Tawhid*, tasks must be begun in the name of God. To begin a task in the name of the people is idolatry, in the name of God and the people, *shirk* and idolatry, and in the name of God alone, *Tawhid* and worship of the One.

The Glorious Qur'an makes an interesting point concerning the word *ikhlas*: that to be *mukhlis* is something other than to be *mukhlas*.³⁰ To be *mukhlis* means to exercise *ikhlas* in one's actions, to carry them out purely for God. But to be *mukhlas* means to have been purified for God. To purify one's activity is one thing, and to be pure throughout one's being is another.

Unity of the Universe

Is the universe (nature, the spatio-temporal creation of God) a real unity in its totality? Does *Tawhid*, the unity of God in Essence, attributes, and agency, imply that the creation enjoys a kind of unity in its totality?

If the whole universe is interrelated as a unity, what form does this interrelatedness take? Is it like the way the parts of a machine are connected, purely contingent and artificial, or is it like the relation of the members of a body to that body? In other words, is the relation of the parts of the universe mechanical or organic?

I have discussed the nature of the unity of the universe in my annotations to *Usul-i Falsafa* (Principles of Philosophy), volume 5. I have also spoken in *Adl-i Ilahi* (Divine Justice) of how nature is an indivisible unity, how the non-existence of one part of nature equals the non-existence of the whole, and how the removal of what are called "evils" from nature would amount to all nature's ceasing to exist. Modern philosophers, especially Hegel, affirm the principle of organicity, that is, the principle that the relation of

the parts of nature to the whole is as the relation of the members to the body.

Hegel proves this point on the basis of principles whose acceptance is conditional upon acceptance of all the principles of his philosophy. Hegel's materialist followers, the partisans of dialectical materialism, have taken this principle from him and defend it vociferously as the principle of reciprocal influence, the principle of the universal interrelationship of things, or the principle of interdependence of opposites and advocate the position that the relationship of the part to the whole in nature is organic, not mechanical.

But all they can prove is a mechanical relationship. Materialistic philosophical principles cannot prove that the universe in its totality has the character of a body and that the relationship of the part to the whole is the relationship of the member to the body. The theosophies who have held from ancient times that the world is the “great man” and that man is the “little world” have had such a relationship in view. Among Islamic philosophers, the Ikhwan as-Safa particularly stressed this point.³¹ The *'urafa'*; too, in their turn looked upon the world and being with the eye of unity, more than did the *hukama'* or the philosophers. According to the *'urafa'* all of creation and all creatures constitute one flash (*jilva*) bearing witness to the Preeternal:

*Your face mirrored in the cup
Impelled the 'arif to raw craving,
In the radiance of the wine.
Your face beautiful, making
This one flash of vision mirrored
All these images appearing
In the mirror of illusion*

(Hafiz)³²

The *'urafa'* term this other the “holy emanation” (*Fayz-i muqaddas*) and say analogically that the holy emanation is like a cone that at the apex, that is, where it impinges on the Essence of the Truth, is pure simplicity (pure Existence) and at the base, extended and ramified.

I am not going to develop any of the philosophers' or *'urafa'*s' explanations here. I am pursuing the subject because it relates to my own preceding discussion. I said earlier that the universe has as its reality the properties of from Him-ness and to Him-ness. On the one hand, it is proven that the universe is not a moving, fluid reality; rather, it is motion and flux itself.³³ On the other hand, research on motion has proven that unity of source, unity of end, and unity of course impart to motions a kind of unity and singularity. Therefore, considering that the whole universe runs on one evolutionary course from one source to one end, it necessarily takes on a kind of unity.

The Unseen and the Manifest

The Islamic world view of *Tawhid* regards the universe as a combination of unseen and visible worlds.

That is, it divides the universe into two parts: the world of the unseen and the world of the manifest. In the Noble Qur'an repeated mention is made of the unseen and of the manifest, especially of the unseen. Faith in the unseen is the pillar of Islamic faith:

“Those who believe in the unseen (2:2),

“With Him are the keys to the unseen—none know them but He” (6:59).

The word *ghayb* (unseen) can also be translated as hidden. The unseen, the hidden, falls under two categories: the relative unseen and the absolute unseen. The relative unseen embraces things that are concealed from an observer's senses because of his remoteness from them or some similar reason. For instance, for someone who is in Tehran, Tehran is the manifest and Isfahan is the unseen. But for someone in Isfahan, Isfahan is the manifest and Tehran is the unseen.

In the Noble Qur'an, *ghayb* is sometimes used in this relative sense. For instance, where it says,

“These are some of the stories of the unseen we have revealed to you” (11:49), it is clear that the stories of the ancients are unseen to present day people but were manifest to the ancients themselves.

But in other instances, the Noble Qur'an applies the term *ghayb* to realities that are inherently invisible. There is a difference between realities that can be sensed and touched but remain hidden because of distance or some other barrier, as Isfahan is hidden to people who are in Tehran, and realities that are unsusceptible to sensation by the outward senses because of their boundlessness and immateriality and so are hidden.

Where the Qur'an characterises the believers as those who have faith in the unseen, it does not mean the relative unseen. All people, believers and unbelievers alike, admit the existence of the relative unseen. Thus, where it states, ***“With Him are the keys to the unseen –none know them but He,”*** and so restricts knowledge of the unseen to the Divine Essence, it means the absolute unseen. It does not accord with the definition of the relative unseen. Where it refers to the manifest and the unseen together, as for instance: ***“the Knower of the manifest and the unseen, He is the Merciful, the Compassionate” (59:22)*** – that is, He knows the perceptible and the imperceptible – again it means the inherently invisible and not the relative unseen.

What sort of relationship have the world of the unseen and the world of the manifest? Does the perceptible world have a boundary, beyond which lies the world of the unseen? For instance, is from here to the celestial vault the world of the visible and from there onward the world of the unseen? Plainly, such conceptions are vulgar. On the supposition that a physical boundary separates the two worlds, the two worlds would themselves be manifest, physical, material.

One cannot explain the relationship of the unseen and the manifest in material, physical terms. The nearest we can come to a definition the mind can grasp is to say that it resembles the relationship

between primary and secondary principles or that between figure and shadow. That is, this world amounts to a projection of that. It can be inferred from the Qur'an that whatever is in this world is a being sent down of the beings of the other world. "What are termed "keys" in a previously quoted verse are in other verses termed "treasuries":

"And there is not a thing but its treasuries are with Us, and. We send it down only in assigned quantities" (15:21).

It is by this reckoning that the Qur'an conceives of everything, even things like stone and iron, as sent down: ***"and We sent down iron" (57:25)***. Plainly, what is intended is not that "We have transported all things, including iron, from one place to another." So the realities, the principles, and the essential substances of the contents of this world are in another world, which is the world of the unseen. What is in this world are their laminae (*raqiqa*), their shadows, or these things themselves at the level of descent into this world.[34](#)

Lo! The star-studded wheel, so beauteous and splendid!

What's above has a form here below correspondent.

Should this lower form scale the ladder of gnosis,

It will ever find union above with its origin.

The intelligible form that is endless, eternal,

Is compendious and single with all or without all.

No external prehension will grasp this discussion,

Be it Bu Nasr Farabi or Bu 'Ali Sina.[35](#)

Just as the Qur'an presents a species of faith and vision of being under the heading of the unseen and accounts it necessary, it also at times expounds this topic under other headings, such as faith in the angels or in the prophetic mission of the prophets (faith in revelation):

"The Messenger believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, as do the believers: each believes in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers" (2:285).

".. and whoever denies God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day has gone far astray" (4: 136).

In these two verses, faith in God's books is accorded independent mention. If the celestial books that were sent down to the prophets were meant, this belief in the prophets would suffice. The context shows that realities of a different kind, not that of tomes and pages, are meant. In the Qur'an itself, there is repeated mention of hidden, unseen realities named the Clear Book, the Preserved Tablet, the Mother of the Book, the Inscribed Book, and the Concealed Book.[36](#) Faith in such supernal books is a part of Islamic faith.

Basically, the prophets have come to impart to man the kind of vision and worldview that would allow

him to form an image, however sketchy, of the whole system of the creation, to the extent of his allotted powers. Creation is not confined to sensible, palpable phenomena within the scope of the physical and experimental sciences. The prophets sought to raise man's vision from the sensible to the intelligible, from the evident to the hidden, from the limited to the limitless.

Unfortunately, the tide of narrowly materialistic and sensualistic thought has washed so far that some urge that all the sublime, vast, far-reaching concepts of the Islamic worldview be brought down to the level of sense objects and material things.

[This World and the Hereafter](#)

Another pillar of the Islamic world view is the division of the universe into this world and the hereafter. What I said in the previous section applies to a world prior to this world, a world that makes and governs this world. Although from one point of view the world of the hereafter is the unseen and this world is the manifest, the world of the hereafter merits independent consideration, insofar as it is a world subsequent to this world. It is both the world from which we have come and the world to which we are going. This is the meaning of the discourse by Ali (upon whom be peace):

“God has mercy upon one who knows: from where? through where? and to where?”³⁷ Ali did not say, “God has mercy on one who knows from what? through what? and to what?” If he had said that, we would have taken him to mean, “Of what were we created? Of the earth. And into what shall we pass? Into the earth. And out of what shall we arise again? Out of the earth.”

If he had said this, he would have been alluding to this verse of the Qur'an:

“From it We created you, into it We will return you, and from it We will extract you another time” (20:55).

But Ali's assertion here refers to other verses of the Qur'an and bears a higher meaning: What world have we come from? “What world are we in? To what world are we going?”

Within the Islamic world view, this world and the hereafter, like the unseen and the manifest, are both absolute concepts, not relative ones. In the language of the Qur'an, each is a separate emergence (*nash'a*). Works are relative: works of this world, works of the hereafter. That is, if a work has for its object egotism, it is a work of this world; if this same work is carried out for God, to satisfy God, it is a work of the hereafter. In a later volume of this series, *Zindagi-yi Javid ya Hayat-i Ukhravi* (Eternal Life, or the Afterlife), I will discuss this world and the hereafter in detail.³⁸

[Far-Reaching Wisdom and Divine Justice](#)

Within the theosophical world view, some questions concerning the relationship between the world and God are discussed (such as questions of the createdness in time versus the eternity of the world,

questions dealing with the order and system of the emergence of beings, and other questions discussed extensively in theology). What we might appropriately take note of here are the questions of God's far-reaching wisdom and of divine justice, two closely related questions.[39](#)

The question of God's far-reaching wisdom is set forth in this way: The system of being is a wise system; that is, not only do knowledge, consciousness, intent, and will enter into the workings of this world, but the existing system is the best and most fitting of systems – a better and more fitting system is impossible. The existing world is the most perfect world possible. Questions and objections arise here, given that events and phenomena falling under the categories of defect, evil, ugliness, and inutility are witnessed in the world. Divine wisdom requires that perfection should exist in place of defect, good in place of evil, beauty in place of ugliness, and utility in place of inutility.

Congenital defects, plagues and pestilences, ugly features, and superfluous organs and members on the bodies of persons and animals seem to prove the contrary of wisdom. That a system is just implies that injustice and discrimination should not exist in it, that disasters and misfortunes should not exist in it, that mortality and extinction should not exist in it, because it is unjust to bring a being into existence, give it to taste of the pleasure of existence, and then send it to the realm of oblivion. That a system is just implies that such defects as ignorance, impotence, weakness, and poverty should not be found in the beings of that system because it is unjust to withhold from a being the conditions and attainments of existence just as one clothes it in existence.

If the existing system is the just system, then why all this discrimination? Why is one ugly and another beautiful? Why is one healthy and another sickly? Why is one created a man and another a sheep, a scorpion, or an earthworm? Why is one created a devil and another an angel? Why are all not created alike? Why were not the opposite statuses assigned; for instance, why was the beautiful or the healthy not the ugly, or the ailing? The world view of *Tawhid*, which regards the world as the act of an absolutely wise and just God, must answer these questions.

My book on this subject, *Adl-i Ilahi*, presents the detailed means of resolving these difficulties.[40](#) Here I will simply cite ten principles, acquaintance with which will constitute groundwork for resolving these difficulties I leave the task of arriving at conclusions to the reader.

Self-Sufficiency and Perfection of the Divine Essence

God Most High, in being the Necessary Being in the absolute and in lacking no perfection or activity, does nothing in order to attain a goal or a perfection or to compensate for a shortcoming. His work is not movement from defect to perfection. Accordingly, the meaning of wisdom as it applies to Him is not that He in His works elects the best goals and the best means of arriving at His goals. This meaning for wisdom holds for man, not for God. Divine wisdom means that His work is to bring beings to their highest attainments, to the apogee of their being. His work is creation, which itself means bringing things to the attainment of existence (from non-existence), directing and perfecting them, and impelling them

toward their attainments and well-being, which is another kind of effulgence and work of bringing to perfection.

Some of the questions, objections, and difficulties arise from comparing God to man. Usually when it is asked, ““What is the use and wisdom of such-and-such a created thing?” the questioner is thinking of God as like a creature that seeks in its actions to employ available creatures and beings to its own ends. If he had borne in mind from the first that the meaning of divine wisdom is that His act, not His self-hood, has an end, that the wisdom of each creature is an end inherent within it, and that God is impelling it toward its essential end, he would find that many of his questions would be answered.

Order

The divine emanation, that is, the emanation of being which envelops the entire universe, has a particular system. An inviolable priority and causality prevail among beings and creatures. That is, no being can exceed or avoid its own particular rank and occupy the rank of another being. Because the ranks of being have degrees and stations, differences and discrepancies from the standpoints of defect or perfection and of vigour or weakness prevail. Differences and discrepancies do not constitute discrimination, which would be considered contrary to wisdom and justice. Discrimination exists when two beings have the capacity for the same specific degree or perfection and it is granted one and withheld from the other. But when discrepancies and differences are traceable to essential deficiencies, they do not constitute discrimination.

Universality

Another human error arising from comparing God to oneself lies here: Man resolves to build a house within a certain time or in a place – of course, under certain prevailing conditions – and he builds it. By a series of artificial bonds, he brings into relation quantities of brick, clay, cement, and iron that have no essential connection with one another. And the product is a certain kind of building called a house. What about God? Is God's work of this nature? Does God's perfectly precise workmanship have this character of an artificial and derivative bond among several unrelated phenomena?

To produce such artificial and derivative bonds is the work of a creature such as man, who is part of this system and avails himself of the existing, created powers, forces, and properties of things, within determinate limits. It is the work of a creature whose agency and creativity are limited to a dynamic agency. That is, they are limited to inducing a motion, a superficial motion at that, not an organic one, in an existing thing. But God is the Creative Agent; He is the Creator of things, with all their faculties, powers, properties, and traits.

For instance, man uses fire and electrical energy when it is advantageous to him and prevents their appearance when they would harm him. But God is the Creator and Originator of fire and electricity with all their properties. The existence of fire or electricity entails that it give heat, create motion, or cause

combustion. God has not created fire or electricity for a particular person or occasion (for instance, to heat a poor man's shack, but not to burn his clothing should it fall into the fire). He has created it with the property of combustion.

Therefore, if one is to see that the existence of fire is necessary, useful, and consistent with wisdom, one must consider its total role in the system of the universe, not some particular role it has in some narrow circumstance in regard to some individual and personal motive.

In the case of divine wisdom, the end must be taken to be the end of the act, not the end of the agent. God's wisdom means not God's effecting the best means to deliver Himself from defect to perfection, from potentiality to act, and to arrive at His own objects of perfection, but His creating the best possible system to bring beings to their ends. Further, the ends of divine acts are universal, not particular. The end of the creation of fire is combustion in general, not some particular instance of combustion that might prove useful to some individual or some other particular instance that might prove harmful to another.

Subject's Capacity

For a truth, a reality, to come into being, the effulgence and completeness of agency of the agent are not sufficient; the subject's capacity is also necessary. The absence of this capacity becomes in many instances the source of deprivation for some beings of some boons and attainments. This is why some deficiencies, such as ignorance and weakness, crop up from the standpoint of the total system and the aspect of relationship with the Necessary Being.

Necessary Being

Just as God Most High is the Necessary in Essence, He is the Necessary Being in every respect. Accordingly, it is impossible that a being should find the capacity for existence but fail to be filled with His effulgence and so grow impoverished.

Categories of Evils

Evils belong either to the category of non-being (ignorance, weakness, and poverty) or to the category of being, but derive their evilness from the fact that they become sources of non-being (earthquakes, microbes, floods, hailstorms, and the like). The evil of beings that become sources of non-being arises from their existence incidental and relative to other beings, not from their intrinsic existence. That is, whatever is evil is not evil in and of itself but for something else. The real existence of any thing is its intrinsic existence; its incidental and relative existence is a nominal and abstract circumstance that is an inseparable concomitant of its real existence.

Goods and Evils

Goods and evils do not form two separate and independent ranks; rather, evils are inseparable concomitants and attributes of goods. The root of evils that belong to the category of non-being is the lack of capacity of the subject; given the subject's capacity, the effulgence of being from the Necessary Being is certain and inevitable. On the other hand, the root of evils that do not belong to the category of nonbeing is their inseparability from goods.

Good in Evil

No evil is absolute. Deprivation and non-being are in their turn the antecedents of beings, goods, and attainments. Evils in their turn are the thresholds and steps of evolution. Thus a good lies hidden in every evil, and a being is hidden in every non-being.

Laws and Norms

The universe of being, in functioning according to a universal cause-and-effect system, operates according to laws and norms. The Noble Qur'an affirms this point explicitly.

Essential Unity

Just as the universe has a universal and inviolable system, it is an indivisible unity in its essence. That is, the whole creation forms a unity like that of the body with its members. Therefore, not only are evils and non-being inseparable from goods and being, but all the parts of the universe, in composing a unity and a single manifestation are inseparable from one another.

In accordance with these ten principles, what has the possibility to exist is a determinate, universal, and immutable system. Therefore, the phenomenon of the universe has the possibilities of existing with this determinate system and of not existing at all. That it should exist and have no system or have a system with a different configuration as, for instance, one in which causes replace effects and effects, causes, is absurd. Therefore, either the universe exists with a determinate system or nothing exists. Wisdom requires the optimum, that is, being, not non-being.

Furthermore, things have the possibility to exist only with all their inseparable concomitants and attributes. That goods and beings, however, should prove separable from evils and non-being is no more than sheer fantasy and absurd illusion. Therefore, from this standpoint as well, the paired existence or nonexistence of goods and evils, not the existence of goods and the nonexistence of evils, is the choice confronting wisdom.

Lastly, the whole universe as an interdependent unity, not one part in the absence of another, has the possibility to exist. Therefore, what can be contemplated by wisdom is the existence or nonexistence of the whole, not the existence of one part and the nonexistence of another part.

These principles, if rightly assimilated, reduce all the uncertainties and problems of far-reaching wisdom and perfect divine justice to the level of a phantasm. I again refer those requiring more detail to my work *Adl-i Ilahi* (Divine justice)

The Principle of Justice in Islamic Culture

In Shi'ism, the principle of justice is one of the principles of religion. Justice in Islamic culture is divided into divine justice and human justice. Divine justice is subdivided into creative justice and legislative justice. Human justice is subdivided into individual justice and social justice. The concept of justice considered unique to Shi'ism that has taken its place among the principles of religion in Shi'ism is divine justice. This type of justice specifically arises in the context of the Islamic worldview.

To believe in divine justice means to believe that God acts in accordance with truth and justice, both in the system of the creation and in the system of legislation, and never shows injustice. Justice has become one of the principles of Shi'ism because some who denied human choice and freedom appeared among the Muslims.

They arrived at a belief regarding divine decree and foreordination that was wholly inconsistent with human freedom. They denied the principle of cause and effect in the overall system of the universe and in the system of human conduct. They came to believe that divine decree acts directly and without intermediation. According to this belief, fire does not cause to burn, but God causes to burn; a magnetic field in no way attracts iron, but God directly draws the iron to the lines of the magnetic field; man does not the good or evil deed, but God directly carries out the good or evil deed through the human form.

Here a major question arose. If the system of cause and effect has no reality, and if man himself has no real role in choosing his actions, then what function is served by rewarding or punishing the individual for his acts? Why does God mete out rewards to some people and take them to paradise and punish others and take them to hell when He Himself has carried out both the good deed and the evil one? To punish human individuals when they have not possessed the least choice and freedom of their own is injustice and contrary to the categorical principle of divine justice.

The Shi'a at large and a party among the Sunnis called the Mu'tazilites, relying on decisive rational and transmitted proofs, denied that man is determined and that divine decree and fore-ordination act directly on the universe; they regarded these ideas as inimical to the principle of justice and so became known as the People of Justice (*'adliyya*).

Although justice is a divine principle (that is, linked with one of the attributes of God), it is likewise a human principle because it is linked with human freedom and choice. Therefore, among the Shi'a and the Mu'tazilites, belief in the principle of justice means belief in the principle of human freedom, human responsibility, and human creativity.

The question concerning divine justice that generally – especially in our own time – draws the most attention has to do with certain social inequalities: How is it that some individuals are beautiful and others ugly, some healthy and others sickly, some comfortable and affluent and others empty-handed and indigent? Would divine justice not require all individuals to be equal with respect to wealth, lifespan, offspring, social position, reputation, and receipt of love? Can anything but divine decree and foreordination be responsible for these inequalities?

The roots of this question and the confusion underlying it are two. One is inattention to the nature of the operation of divine decree and foreordination. The questioner has imagined that they work directly.⁴¹ For instance, wealth would be directly and without the intervention of any cause or agency transported from the divine treasuries of the unseen and parcelled out at people's doors, and the same would hold for health, beauty, power, position, love, offspring, and other blessings.

The questioner has failed to note that no sort of sustenance, whether material or spiritual, is apportioned directly from the treasury of the unseen. Rather, divine decree has produced a system and originated a series of norms and laws. Whatever anyone seeks, he must seek through that system and those norms. The second root of this error is inattention to the station and situation of man as a being who seeks to better his own life, to struggle with the factors in nature on the one hand and to struggle with the evil factors in society and the misdeeds and oppression of human individuals on the other – who has these as his responsibilities. If there are certain inequalities in society, if some are rich and have wealth by the shiploads at their disposal, while others are destitute and in despair on oceans of affliction, the divine decree is not responsible. Man, free, empowered, and responsible, bears the blame for these inequalities.

¹. The first essay in the series, “Darsha’i az Ma’arif-i Qur’an” (Lessons from the teachings of the Qur’an), to be titled *Shinakht dar Qur’an* (Knowledge in the Qur’an), in which the problems of knowledge will be considered, will be published soon through the *Hawza-i ‘Ilmiya-yi Qum*, God willing. [This essay was later published in an undated pamphlet of sixty-eight pages. Trans.]

². See *The Scientific Outlook* (New York, 1931), “Limitations of Scientific Method”, the chapter title being a polite way of denying the theoretical value of science.

³. See *my Insan va Sar Nivisht* (“Man and Fate”), Tehran, 1345 Sh./1966.

⁴. Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Halabi, *Tuhaf al-‘Uqul*, p.198.

⁵. Tashahhud: the pronouncement of the Islamic declaration of faith, “Ashhadu an la ilaha illa ‘llah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu ‘llah” (I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is God’s Messenger), in prayer. Trans.

⁶. ‘Arafat: The plain just outside of Mecca dominated by a low mountain where all the pilgrims on the haj must be present on the ninth day of Dhu’l-Hijja, the pilgrimage month.

Mash’ar: More fully, the Mash’ar al-Haram, literally, “the Sacred Waymark” and also known as Muzdalifa, a site eight kilometres from ‘Arafat where the pilgrims must perform the sunset and night prayers on the ninth day of the pilgrimage month. Trans.

⁷. Muwahhid: Practitioner of tawhid. Trans.

⁸. “He is not external to things, and He is not internal to them”. (*Nahj al-Balaghah*)

⁹. Exact place of occurrence not found. Trans.

¹⁰. ‘Ali Shari’ati has compared the concept of assignment (*tafviz*, passive participle *mufavvaz*) in Muslim philosophy with

that of *délaissement* in the existentialism of Sartre. See his *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* (Berkeley, 1980), p.46. Trans.

[11.](#) This is virtually the Qur'anic verse 17:111. Trans.

[12.](#) "This party" is interpreted to mean the Sufis. Trans.

[13.](#) Phrases such as, "Say, We make no distinction among the prophets" are found in 2:136, 2:285 and 3:84. Trans.

[14.](#) The *taghut* is a typification of evil mentioned in the Qur'an (e.g. 4:76) and characterized by an overrunning of all bounds, as in tyranny. (For a discussion of the term see Mahmud Taleghani, *Society and Economics in Islam* (Berkeley 1982) pp.80–82. Revolutionary figures often characterized the Shah's regime as the regime of *taghutism*. Trans.

[15.](#) *Nahj al-Balagha*, Shaqshaqiya sermon.

[16.](#) *Virtuous City: Madina-yi Fazila*, a conception of an idealized political order having its roots in Plato's *Republic* and in Muslim philosophy associated most closely with Abu Nasr Muhammad Farabi (259/872–339/950). Trans.

[17.](#) The Meccan mercantile family into which the Prophet Muhammad was born and which was, as an influential ruling family, the source of many of Islam's early enemies. Trans.

[18.](#) Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, Walid bin Mughira: early Qurayshi opponents of the Prophet and of Islam. Trans.

[19.](#) Salman Farsi: An early companion of the Prophet of Iranian origin, also closely associated with 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Trans.

[20.](#) I have discussed the import of this verse earlier in this chapter (see "The Uniqueness of God"). For an account and explanation of this demonstration, called demonstration of interobstruction (*burhan-i tamanu'*), refer to my annotations to 'Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafa va Ravish-i Ri'alism* ("The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism" Qum 1350 Sh./1971 [Hereafter referred to as *Usul-i Falsafa*]), vol.5.

[21.](#) They term misfortunes, deformities, defects, deficiencies and all unthought-for occurrences "evils". I have discussed in detail the manner evils are to be predicated of God in the book 'Adl-i Ilahi ("Divine Justice", Tehran 1349 Sh./1970).

[22.](#) See *Tafsir al-Mizan* under the above verse (3:31).

[23.](#) From Ibn Abi'l-Hadid's *Sharh* to the *Nahj al-Balagha*, the section treating Discourse 128.

[24.](#) People living under the influence of Wahhabism without acknowledging it. Trans.

[25.](#) I discuss the question further in *Muqaddima'i bar Jahan Bini-yi Islami*, volume 7: "Hayat-i Javid, ya Hayat-i Ukhravi" ("Eternal Life, or the Afterlife"), Qum, 1358 Sh./1979.

[26.](#) See following note.

[27.](#) All three quotes are from *Ziyarat-i Jami'a-yi Kabira* [a litany recited when visiting the tombs of the Imams; for the text, see 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-Jinan*, Tehran, n.d., pp.750–759. Trans.]

[28.](#) See my treatise, *Vala'ha va Vilayatha* ("Allegiances and Sovereignities"), Tehran, 1349 Sh./1960.

[29.](#) Unknown. Trans.

[30.](#) *Ikhlas* is the verbal noun, *mukhlis* is the active participle, and *mukhlas* is the passive participle. Trans.

[31.](#) *Ikhwan as-Safa*: A philosophical association of fourth century Basra and Baghdad, noted for their collective authorship of the *Rasa'il*, an encyclopedia of the philosophy and high culture of that time, written in a notably simple and clear Arabic. Trans.

[32.](#) See Hafiz Shirazi, Divan, Na'ini and Ahmad, eds. (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973), p.268. Trans.

[33.](#) Only Islamic philosophy has demonstrated that the natural universe is motion and flow. Some Western systems have advanced this idea, but they are incapable of demonstrating it. For further consideration of this point, refer to the essay "Tazadd va Harakat dar Falsafa-yi Islami" (Contradiction and Motion in Islamic Philosophy) in my collection *Maqalat-i Falsafi* ("Philosophical Essays"). [See also "The Mutable and the Constant" in the third essay, "Philosophy" in this book. Trans.]

[34.](#) See *Tafsir al-Mizan* (Arabic text), vol.7, under the Sura An'am, verse 59.

[35.](#) Bu Nasr Farabi: Abu Nasr Muhammad Farabi, the tenth-century philosopher. Bu 'Ali Sina: the famous philosopher and physician better known to the West as Avicenna (d.1037 C.E.). The poem is by the Safavid era philosopher, Mir Abu'l Qasim Findiriski (d.1640 C.E.). See "Illuminationism and Peripateticism" in the third essay "Philosophy" in this book.

[36.](#) See *Tafsir al-Mizan*, under the verses in which these terms occur.

[37.](#) Unknown.

[38.](#) Published in Qum in 1358 Sh./1979. Trans.

[39.](#) “Far-reaching wisdom” (hikma baligha): a term found in the Qur’an, 54:5. Trans.

[40.](#) Published in Qum in 1349 Sh./1970. Trans.

[41.](#) Refer to my *Insan va Sar Nivisht* (“Man and Fate”) where questions related to divine decree and foreordination are discussed at length.

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