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Preface to the Translation

As a subject of inquiry, “Divine Justice” traditionally falls within the field of theology and *kalam*.[1] Theologians of all ages and religions have had to grapple with this topic, mainly because of its centrality within the ideology and doctrine of religion, and because of the consequences it has for the faith of believers. For, it is held that until the knowledge of God is not spelt out and objectively understood, man cannot correctly place himself in the grand scheme of things, and subjectively stands in danger of losing his bearings and going astray. In this appraisal of things, conceptual knowledge of the truth has direct implications for the human soul and its ability to will the good.

To put it differently, it is not until man knows the ultimate truth to be also the absolute good, that he can himself be truly good and perform acts of virtue over and against vice. Hence there is pressing need to absolve God of all evil on the one hand, and to instill man with the freedom of will on the other. It is for this very reason that the “Problem of Evil” and the debate on “Freewill and Predestination” figure so prominently in the discussions on Divine Justice, this present study being no exception.

Having stated that the discussion at hand is the special prerogative of theology, it is important to note that the author of this book is exceptional in that he chooses to approach the subject from an altogether different perspective. He uses philosophy as his base and primarily applies philosophical methods to solve the problems and questions that surround the issue of Divine Justice. This departure from the norm is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows the level and substance of the author himself–that he was not just an Islamic ideologue, dogmatist, or activist given to fiery apologetics, but beyond that, he was a seeker of truth and a philosopher in the best sense of the word. Secondly, it belies the inadequacy of the theological approach–something which the author explicitly mentions in his introduction. Thirdly, and as an indication of how and why an inadequacy was perceived in the first place, it bespeaks of the situation cum dilemma of religion in the modem world. This last reason will be briefly explained in what follows, as it is an inherently significant matter and will throw into relief the importance of this work.

Religion is from God and is His special device for mankind by which the greatest number possible are saved. But given the nature of fallen and falling man, religion is obligated to speak to him on his own

grounds and at whatever point it finds him on the arc of descent. So, where the former generations had more of a direct access to Revelation and the vision of the prophet through whom the religion was established, the latter due to their distance and the entropic conditions of the Fall have more difficulty in "seeing" the truth. They need to be helped from the outside, so to speak. They require aids to achieve the vision and intellection of the former generations. These aids and "artificial" constructs are providentially provided, and are a part and parcel of the religious tradition as a whole. Thus, while they are in reality the instruments that compensate for the overall decline, they are seen ostensibly as "developments." After the initial vision there is for instance the development in the religious universe and orthodoxy of a doctrine, theology, ideology, sociology, and political system.

Now, as far as the Islamic tradition goes, the problem of evil and the issue of Divine justice–something which from the Qur'anic perspective is not a problem at all and is a non–issue, became the subject of heated debate on the level of theology. For a time, the theological answers, ones that pertain to a discursive and rational understanding of religious truths, were satisfactory and sufficient, as reason was still based on higher levels of the intellect and the sense of the sacred and holy was still alive and strong. Further on this was not the case and reason was increasingly divorced from its higher principle namely the sacred intellect or *al–'aql al–qudsi* and a purely human rationality came to take its place; a rationality that insisted that all aspects of being fall within the pale of its discursive and deductive methods.

To complicate matters even more, in the Christian world–which was further ahead in its decline and due to its greater emphasis on the moral and ethical level, the problem of evil took on humanistic connotations and gravitated towards what might be called the justification of "personal" evils and suffering. Evil was now described as "the sum of the opposition ... to the desires and needs of individuals," something very different from the privation of being and goodness that St. Thomas had earlier postulated. With the advent of the modem age, these sentiments found their way into Muslim lands and compounded the existing problems caused by materialist and rationalist tendencies. It is under these complex and trying conditions that the author gave a series of lectures on the topic of Divine Justice and chose to proceed as he did.

To explain, as extreme situations call for extreme measures and further decline and deviation call for greater corrective and compensatory actions, the author consciously chose to up the ante and go the next higher level of intellectuality in his responses to the objections on Divine Justice. Moreover, even within the field of Islamic philosophy, he did not suffice himself with the peripatetic school of thought, but rather employed the firm bases of the transcendental school of Mulla Sadra and its emphatically unitive view of being. Finally, by his constant use of and reference to the works of great Persian poets such as Hafiz and Rumi, he alluded to the further development of the subject at the hands of the '*urafa*' and mystics of Islam.

Thus, with the framework of transcendental philosophy in place, the author makes his final argument in favour of Divine Justice by holding that "justice" is a formal Divine attribute that is inseparable from His

essence and other Divine attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence. Hence the justice or injustice of Divine acts should not be sought on the level of His operation and efficiency. His justice is as necessary as is His existence. He further holds that evil exists not as an objective fact, but as a subjective notion; things are evil not in and of themselves, but by reason of their relation to other things. All realities are in themselves good. Any perceived evil is subsumed under God's infinite wisdom and is ultimately good. On the question of moral evil and the issue of human free will, the argument takes on a different shape. He states, as is the classical Shia position, that it is not the case that man is totally predestined and under Divine decree and compulsion, nor is it true that he is totally free and beyond the scope of the Divine will. Rather, the reality is something between the two positions. In an attempt to try to locate this "something" the author says that, "the Divine decree and destiny which has willed the human has also willed his freedom of choice." In other words, man is compelled to be free.

This paradoxical way of speaking is the forte of the mystics. It is an attempt to try to get man to go beyond the dualisms of discursive rational thought and to arrive at a unitive understanding–by way of a direct knowledge or "tasting" of the fundamental matters of being. It is to try to overcome the dichotomy implicit in the knower–known paradigm and to achieve a vision of the unity that comprehends and composes all reality. The supra–rational resolution of this paradox is accomplished by the perfect man and it unites him with his Maker in such a fashion that he becomes God's hand, face, and hand on earth, and in short, His vicegerent (*khalifah*) and highest manifestation.

It is appropriate here to quote Imam Khumayni,[2] the author's teacher and perpetual source of inspiration, who writes:

"In conclusion, it is known that both *tafwid* (free will) and *jabr* (compulsion or predestination) are invalid and impossible on the basis of metaphysical reasoning and rational criteria. The creed of the middle position (*amr bayn al–amrayn*) is one which is affirmed by the way of the people of gnosis as well as by transcendental philosophy.... That which is the soundest of views and most secure from controversy and more in consonance with the religion of tawhid is the creed of the illustrious gnostics and the people of the heart. However, this creed, on every topic pertaining to the Divine teachings, stands in the category of "simple and impossible" (*sahl wa mumtani'*) whose understanding is not possible through discursive proofs and arguments and is unattainable without complete piety of the heart as well as Divine succour."[3]

Having said this, Imam Khumayni acknowledges the need to discuss the topic by the way of logical demonstration and philosophical discourse–as rationality, positively seen, is nothing but the shadow of the sacred intellect. What follows is perhaps one of the best attempts at such an explanation and places this book among the classics of contemporary Islamic literature.

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Some notes about the translation are in order here. The translation is unique in that it was done by

students of the Hawzah 'Ilmiyyeh Qum, who are is some ways familiar with the theological and philosophical arguments contained in this work. Parts of it were carried out during Muharram of 1425 A.H. while the translators were involved in the commemorative ceremonies of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a) in three different continents. This, alongside the time constraints, presented considerable logistical problems which, by the grace of Allah, were overcome. A final editing was done to ensure the consistency of terminology used. The quotes from Persian poets–which occur quite often in the book were researched, and in most cases the references to either the original or published English translations were found and documented in the footnotes. Endnotes were added that contain the lengthy explanatory notes not appropriate for footnotes, biographical material on most of the important personalities mentioned in the text, and the original text in Persian or Arabic, of many of the poems and traditions quoted in the work.

Translations of Qur'anic verses were mostly adapted from the recent translation by Sayyid Ali Quli Qara'i titled The Qur'an with an English Paraphrase. Most of the biographical endnotes are the contribution of Hujjat al–Islam wa al–Muslimin Hamid Parsania. A number of individuals were helpful in finding the references for and explaining the meanings of the many instances of Persian poetry that occur in the book. Among them we may especially mention Aqa Muhammad Hasan 'Arabi and Mahmud Najafi. We would like to acknowledge with gratitude here the help of all these people, as well as those others who have gone unmentioned.

Shuja' Ali Mirza
Qum
8th Safar, 1425/March 29, 2004

1. Short form of ʿIlm al–Kalam عِلْم الكَلام, literally "science of discourse") also called "Islamic scholastic theology", is the study of Islamic doctrines ('aqa'id). A scholar of Kalam is referred to as a mutakallim. The Arabic term Kalam means "speech, word, utterance" among other things, and its use regarding Islamic theology is derived from the expression "Word of God" (Kalam Allah) found in the Qur'an.
2. See Endnote 1
3. Sayyid Ruhullah al–Musawi al–Khumayni, Forty Hadith, hadith 39

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