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Theology and Metaphysics

One of the fundamental issues dealt with in the *Nahj al-balaghah* relates to theological and metaphysical problems. In all, there are about forty places in the sermons, letters, and aphorisms where these matters are discussed. Some of these pertain to the aphorisms, but more often the discussion is longer, covering sometimes several pages.

The passages on *tawhid* (Divine Unity) in the *Nahj al-balaghah* can perhaps be considered to be the most wonderful discussions of the book. Without any exaggeration, when we take into account the conditions in which they were delivered, they can almost be said to be miraculous.

The discussions on this theme in the *Nahj al-balaghah* are of a varied nature. Some of them constitute studies of the scheme of creation bearing witness to Divine creativity and wisdom. Here, 'Ali speaks about the whole system of the heaven and the earth, or occasionally discusses the wonderful features of some specific creature like the bat, the peacock or the ant, and the role of Divine design and purpose in their creation. To give an example of this kind of discussion, we may quote a passage regarding the ant:

Have you observed the tiny creatures that He has created? How He has made them strong and perfected their constitution and shaped their organs of hearing and sight, and how He has styled their bones and skin?

Observe the ant with its tiny body and delicate form. It is so small that its features can hardly be discerned by the eye and so insignificant that it does not enter our thoughts. See how it roams about upon the ground and arduously collects its livelihood. It carries the grain to its hole and deposits it in its store.

It collects during the summer for the winter and, when winter arrives, it foresees the time to reemerge. Its livelihood is guaranteed and designed according to its built. The Benefactor and the Provider does not forget or forsake it. He does not deprive it, even though it should be in hard and dry stones and rocks.

You will be amazed at the delicate intricacy of its wonderful constitution if you investigate the structure of

its alimentary canals, its belly, and its eyes and ears which are in its head ...[1]

However, most of the discussions about *tawhid* in the *Nahj al-balaghah* are rational and philosophical. The rare sublimity of the *Nahj al-balaghah* becomes manifest in these discourses. In these philosophical and rational discourses of the *Nahj al-balaghah* on *tawhid* what constitutes the focus of all arguments is the infinite, absolute and self-sufficing nature of the Divine Essence. In these passages, 'Ali ('a) attains to the heights of eloquence, and none, neither before him nor after him, has approached him in this aspect.

Another issue dealt with is that of the absolute simplicity (*al-basatatal-mutlaqah*) of the Divine Essence and negation of every kind of multiplicity, divisibility in the Godhead and refutation of separability of the Divine Attributes from the Divine Essence. This theme occurs repeatedly in the *Nahj al-balaghah*.

Also discussed is a series of other profound problems which had never been touched before him. They are: God being the First while also being the Last; His being simultaneously the Manifest and the Hidden; His priority over time and number, i.e.

His pre-eternity is not temporal and His Unity is not numerical; His Supremacy, Authority, and Self-sufficiency; His Creativeness; that attendance to one affair does not prevent Him from attending to other affairs; the identity of Divine Word and Act; the limited capacity of human reason to comprehend His reality; that gnosis (*ma'rifah*) is a kind of manifestation (*tajalli*) of Him upon the intellects, which is different from conception or cognition by the mind; the negation of such categories and qualities as corporeality, motion, rest, change, place, time, similarity, opposition, partnership, possession of organs or instruments, limitation and number; and a series of other issues which we shall, God willing, mention later and give examples of every one of these.

Even a thinker well-versed in the beliefs and views of ancient and modern philosophers would be struck with wonder to see the wide range and scope of the problems propounded in that wonderful book.

An elaborate discussion of the issues raised and dealt with in the *Nahj al-balaghah* would itself require a voluminous book and cannot be covered in one or two articles. Unavoidably, we shall be brief; but before we commence our brief survey, we are compelled to mention certain points as an introduction to our discussion.

A Bitter Fact

We, the Shi'ah Muslims, must confess that we have been unjust in regard to our duty with respect to the man whom we, more than others, take pride in following; or, at the very least, we must admit falling short in our duty towards him. In substance, any kind of failure in fulfilling our responsibility is an act of injustice on our part.

We did not want to realize the significance of 'Ali ('a), or we had been unable to. All our energy and

labour were devoted to proclaiming the Prophet's statements about 'Ali and to denouncing those who ignored them, but we failed to pay attention to the intellectual side of Imam 'Ali's personality.

Sadi says:

The reality of musk lies in its scent, Not in the perfumer's advice.

Applying Sa'di's words to our attitude regarding Imam 'Ali's personality, we did not realize that this musk, recommended by the Divine Perfumer, itself carried its pleasant aroma, and before everything else we should have tried to know its scent and become familiar with it. That is, we should have familiarized ourselves and others with its inner fragrance.

The counsel of the Divine Perfumer was meant to acquaint the people with its pleasant redolence, not for the purpose that they may believe that it is musk and then devote all their energies trying to convince others by arguing with them, without bothering to acquaint themselves with its real fragrance.

Had the *Nahj al-balaghah* belonged to some other people, would they have treated it in the way we treated this great book? The country of Iran is the centre of Shi'ism and the language of its people is Persian. You have only to examine the translations and commentaries on the *Nahj al-balaghah* to make a judgement about what our accomplishment amounts to.

To take a more general case, the Shi'i sources of *hadith* (tradition) and texts of *du'a'* (prayers) are incomparable to the texts of the non-Shi'i works in the same field. This is also true of Divine teachings and other subjects. The problems and issues discussed in works like al-Kulayni's *al-Kafi*, or al-Shaykh al-Saduq's al-*Tawhid*, or *al-'Ihtijaj* of al-Tabarsi are nowhere to be found among the works of the non-Shi'is.

It can be said that if occasionally similar issues are dealt with in the non-Shi'i books, the material is unmistakably spurious, for it is not only opposed to the prophetic teachings but is also contradictory to the Qur'anic fundamentals.

There is a strong smell of anthropomorphism which hangs around them. Recently, Hashim Ma'ruf al-Hasani, in his book *Dirasat fi al-Kafi li al-Kulayni wa al-Sahih li al-Bukhari*, which is an original but a brief comparative study of al-Sahih of *al-Bukhari* and al-Kulayni's *al-Kafi*, has dealt with the traditions related to the problems of theology.

Shi'i Rationalism

The discussion of theological problems and their analysis by the Shi'i Imams, of which the *Nahj al-balaghah* is the earliest example, was the main cause of the emergence of rationalistic approach and philosophic outlook in the Shi'i intellectual world from the earliest days of Islam.

This cannot be labelled as an innovation in Islam; rather, its basis was laid down by the Qur'an itself. It was in accordance with the approach of the Qur'an and for the purpose of its interpretation that the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) expounded such issues. If anybody can be reproached in this matter, it is those who did not adopt this method and abandoned the means to follow it.

History shows that from the earliest Islamic era, the Shiah, more than any other sect, were interested in these problems. Amongst the Ahl al-Sunnah, the Mu'tazilites, who were nearer to the Shi'ah, did possess similar inclinations. But, as we know, the general view predominant among the Ahl al-Sunnah did not welcome it, and as a result the Mu'tazilite sect became extinct about the end of the 3rd/9th century .

Ahmad Amin, the Egyptian writer, confirms this view in the first volume of his *Zuhr al-'Islam*. After discussing the philosophic movement in Egypt during the reign of the Fatimids, who were a Shi'ah sect, he writes:

Philosophy is more akin to Shi'ism than it is to the Sunni Islam, and we witness the truth of this in the era of the Fatimid rule [in Egypt] and in that of the Buyids [in Iran]. Even during the later ages Iran, which is a Shi'ite country, has paid more attention to philosophy than any other Islamic country. In our own times, Sayyid Jamal al-Din al Asadabadi, who had Shi'ite inclinations and had studied philosophy in Iran, created a philosophic movement in Egypt when he arrived here.

Curiously, Ahmad Amin in his explanation of why the Shi'ah showed more inclination towards philosophy, commits an error, willfully or otherwise. According to him, "the reason for greater inclination on the part of the Shi'ah towards rational and philosophical discussions is to be found in their esotericism and their flair for *ta'wil*. 2

They were compelled to seek the assistance of philosophy for defence of their esotericism. That is why the Fatimid Egypt and Buyid Persia, and Iran during the Safawid and Qajar periods, were more disposed towards philosophy than the rest of the Islamic world."

This is sheer nonsense on the part of Ahmad Amin. It was the Imams ('a) of the Shi'ah who for the first time introduced philosophical approach, and it was they who introduced the most profound and intricate concepts with regard to theological problems in their arguments, polemics, sermons, a*hadith*, and prayers, of which the *Nahj al-balaghah* is one example.

Even with regard to the prophetic traditions, the Shi'ah sources are far more sublime and profound than the traditions contained in the non-Shi'i sources. This characteristic is not confined to philosophy only, but is also true of *kalam*, *fiqh*, and *usul al-fiqh*, in which the Shi'ah enjoy a position of distinction. All this owes its origin to one and same source: stress on rationalism.

Some others have tried to trace the origin of this difference [between the Shi'i and the Sunni intellects] in the concept of "the Shi'ite nation". According to them, since the Persians are Shi'ite and the Shi'ah are

Persian, and as the Persians are a people with a philosophical temperament, fond of the intricacies of speculation and pure thought, with the help of their rich and strong philosophical tradition, they succeeded in raising the level of Shi'a thought and gave it an Islamic colour.

Bertrand Russell, in A History of Western Philosophy, expresses a similar view based on the above-mentioned argument. With his habitual or inherent impoliteness he puts forth this opinion. However, Russell lacks the capacity of vindicating his claim, since he was totally unfamiliar with Islamic philosophy and basically knew nothing about it.

He was not qualified to express any informed opinion about the origins of Shi'ah thought and its sources.

Our rejoinder to the upholders of this view is: first of all, not all Shi'ah were Iranian, nor all Iranians were Shi'ah. Were Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Qummi and Muhammad ibn Abi Talib al-Mazandarani Persian, but not Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud al-Sijistani and Muslim ibn Hajjaj al-Nishaburi?

Was al-Sayyid al-Radi, the compiler of the *Nahj al-balaghah*, of Persian origin? Were the Fatimids of Egypt of Persian descent?

Why was philosophic thought revived in Egypt with the inception of Fatimid rule and why did it decline with their fall? And why was it revived later, after a long interval, only through the influence of an Iranian Shi'ah?

The truth is that the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) were the only real dynamic force behind this mode of thinking and this kind of approach. All scholars of the Ahl al-Sunnah admit that among the Prophet's Companions only 'Ali ('a) was a man of philosophic wisdom, who had an altogether distinct rational approach. Abu 'Ali ibn Sina is quoted as having remarked:

'Ali's position among the Companions of Muhammad (S), was that of the “rational” in the midst of the “corporeal.”

Obviously, the intellectual approach of the followers of such an Imam as 'Ali ('a) should be expected to be radically different from that of those who followed others. Moreover, Ahmad Amin and others have been susceptible to another similar misunderstanding. They express doubts with regard to the authenticity of ascription of such philosophic statements [as exist in the *Nahj al-balaghah*] to 'Ali ('a).

They say that the Arabs were not familiar with such kind of issues and such arguments and elaborate analyses as are found in the *Nahj al-balaghah* before their acquaintance with Greek philosophy, and evidently, according to them, these discourses should have been composed by some later scholars familiar with Greek philosophy, and were attributed to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a).

We also accept that the Arabs were not familiar with such ideas and notions. Not only the Arabs, the non-Arabs, too, were not acquainted with them, nor were those notions familiar to the Greeks and Greek

philosophy.

Ahmad Amin first brings down 'Ali ('a) to the level of such Arabs like Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan and then he postulates his minor and major premises and bases his conclusion on them: The Arabs were unfamiliar with philosophical notions; 'Ali was an Arab: therefore 'Ali was also unfamiliar with philosophical notions. One should ask him whether the Arabs of the Jahiliyyah were familiar with the ideas and concepts that were propounded in the Qur'an.

Had not 'Ali ('a) been brought up and trained by the Messenger of Allah himself? Didn't the Prophet (S) introduce 'Ali ('a) to his Companions as the most learned and knowledgeable amongst them? Why should we deny the high spiritual status of someone who enriched his inner self by drawing on the bounteous wealth of Islam in order to protect the prestige of some of the Prophet's Companions who could never rise above the ordinary level?

Ahmad Amin says that before acquaintance with Greek philosophy the people of Arabia were not familiar with the ideas and concepts found in the *Nahj al-balaghah*. The answer to this is that the Arabs did not become acquainted with the ideas and notions propounded in the *Nahj al-balaghah* even after centuries of familiarity with Greek philosophy.

Not only the Arabs, even the non-Arab Muslims were not acquainted with these ideas, for the simple reason that there is no trace of them in Greek philosophy itself! These ideas are exclusively special to Islamic philosophy. The Islamic philosophers gradually picked these ideas up from the basic Islamic sources and incorporated them in their thought under the guidance of revelation.

Philosophical Notions Concerning Metaphysics

As mentioned before, the *Nahj al-balaghah* adopts two kinds of approach to the problems of theology. The first kind of approach calls attention to the sensible world and its phenomena as a mirror reflecting the Knowledge and Perfection of the Creator. The second approach involves purely rationalistic and philosophical reflections. The latter approach accounts for the greater part of the theological discussions of the *Nahj al-balaghah*. Moreover, it is the only approach adopted in regard to the discussion about the Divine Essence and Attributes.

As we know, the value of such discussions and the legitimacy of such reflections have been always questioned by those who consider them improper from the viewpoint of reason or canon, or both. In our own times, a certain group claims that this kind of analysis and inference does not agree with the spirit of Islam and that the Muslims were initiated into such kind of speculations under the influence of Greek philosophy and not as a result of any inspiration or guidance effused from the Qur'an.

They say that if the Muslims had adhered closely to the Qur'anic teachings they would not have entangled themselves with these tortuous clebates. For the same reason, they view with suspicion the

authenticity of such speculations found in the *Nahj al-balaghah* and their ascription to Imam 'Ali ('a).

In the second and third centuries a group of people opposed such kind of discussions and questioned their legitimacy, raising doctrinal objections. They insisted that it is obligatory for Muslims to be satisfied with the literal and commonly understood meaning of the words of the Qur'an, and regarded every kind of inquiry into the meaning of the Qur'an as an innovation (*bid'ah*) in religion.

For instance, if someone inquired about the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "*The All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne* " [20:5], he was confronted by the displeasure of those who regarded such questions as not only improper but distasteful. He would be told: "The exact meaning is unknown and questioning is heresy". 3

During the 3rd/9th century, this group, which later came to be called Ash'arites, overwhelmed the Mu'tazilites, who considered such speculations to be within the bounds of legitimacy. This victory of the Asharites delivered a severe blow to the intellectual life of Islam.

The Akhbaris, who were a Shi'i school which flourished during the period between the 10th/16th and the 14th/20th centuries-and particularly during the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries-followed the Asha'irah in their ideas and beliefs. They raised doctrinal objections against ratiocination. Now we shall proceed to discuss the objections raised from a rationalist point of view.

As a result of the triumph of the empirical and experimental method over the deductive approach in Europe, especially in the physical sciences, the view began to prevail that rational speculation was unreliable not only in the physical sciences but also in all scientific disciplines and that the only reliable method was that of empirical philosophy. The result of it was that tne problems of theology were viewed with doubt and suspicion, because they lay beyond the domain of experimental and empirical observation.

The past victories of the Ash'arites, on the one hand, and the amazing triumphs of the empirical method, which followed one another in quick succession, on the other hand, drove some non-Shi'ite Muslim writers to the extremes of excitement.

The outcome was the eclectic opinion that from the religious (*Shar'i*) as well as the rational point of view the use of deductive method even in problems of theology should be discarded. From the *Shar'i* viewpoint, they made the claim that according to the outlook of the Qur'an the only approach valid in theology was the empirical and experimental method and the study of the natural phenomena and the system of creation; the rest, they declared, is no more than an exercise in futility.

They pointed out that in scores of its verses, the Qur'an in most unequivocal terms has invited human beings to study the phenomena of nature; it considers the keys to the secrets of the origin and workings of the universe to be concealed within nature itself. In this way they echoed, in their writings and speeches, the ideas expressed by the European proponents of empirical philosophy .

Farid al-Wajdi in his book *'Ala atlal al-madhhab al-maddi* (On the Ruins of Materialism), and Sayyid Abu al-Hasan al-Nadawi, in his *Madha khasira al-'alam bi-inhitat al-Muslimin* ("What the World Lost Through the Decline of Muslims") and the writers belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) such as Sayyid Qutb and others, have supported this view, vehemently attacking the opposite viewpoint.

Al-Nadawi, in his above-mentioned book, says:

The prophets informed men about the existence of God and His Attributes and informed them about the origin and beginning of the world and the ultimate destiny of man, putting this free information at his disposal.

They relieved him of the need to understand and discuss these problems the basics of which lie beyond our reach (because these problems belong to the sphere of the supra-sensible and our knowledge and experience is limited to the physical and the sensible). But men did not value this blessing and entangled themselves in debates and speculations about these problems, and strode into the dark regions of the hidden and the unknowable. 4

The same author, in another chapter of the same book, where he discusses the causes of the decline of Muslims, under the heading "*The Neglect of Useful Sciences,*" criticizes the muslim *'ulama'* in these words:

The Muslim scholars and thinkers did not give as much importance to practical and experimental sciences as they gave to debating about metaphysics, which they had learnt from Greek philosophy.

The Greek metaphysics and theology is nothing more than Greek's polytheistic mythology presented in a philosophical outfit, and is no more than a series of meaningless conjectures expressed in an absurd jargon. God has exempted Muslims from debate, speculation and analysis in these matters, which are not much different from the analytic pursuits of the Alchemists. But out of ingratitude for this great blessing, the Muslims wasted their energy and genius in problems of this sort. 5

Without doubt, the views of the like of Farid al-Wajd; and al-Nadawi should be regarded as a kind of return to Ash'arism, though dressed in contemporary style akin to the language of empirical philosophy.

Here, we cannot enter into a philosophic discussion about the value of philosophic reflection. In the chapters entitled "*The Value of Information*" and "*Origin of Multiplicity in Perception*" of the book *The Principles and Method of Realism*, we have discussed the matter in sufficient detail. Here, we shall confine ourselves to the Qur'anic aspect of this problem, and investigate whether the Holy Qur'an considers the study of nature to be the only valid method of inquiry into theological problems, or whether it allows for another approach besides the above-mentioned.

However, it is essential to point out that the disagreement between the Ash'arites and the non-Ash'arites

is not about the legitimacy of the use of the Book and the Sunnah as sources in the problems of theology; rather, the disagreement concerns the manner of their utilization. According to the Ash'arites, their application should not exceed mute acceptance.

According to them, we assign the various Attributes like Unity, Omniscience, Omnipotence and the rest to God because they have been ascribed to Him by the *Shar'iah*, otherwise we would not know whether God is such or not, because the basic principles and essentials dealing with God are beyond our reach.

Therefore, according to them, we are forced to accept God as such, but we cannot know or understand that God is such. The role of the religious texts is that they prescribe for us the way we ought to think and believe so that we may follow it in our thought and beliefs.

According to the contestants of this view, these issues are amenable to human understanding, like any other rational concept or idea. That is, there exist certain principles and essentials which if known properly enable man to understand them.

The role of the religious texts lies in their capacity to inspire, motivate, and guide human reason by putting understandable principles and essentials at its disposal. Basically servitude in intellectual matters is absurd. It is like ordering one to think in a certain fashion, and asking him to derive certain prescribed conclusions.

It is like ordering someone to see a thing in a certain fashion and then asking him, “How do you see it? Is it big or small? black or white?” Servitude in thinking does not mean anything other than absence of thinking and acceptance without reflection.

In short, the question is not whether it is possible for man to go beyond the teachings of the Revelation. God be our refuge, there is nothing that lies beyond them; because that which has reached us through Revelation and the Household of the Revelation (i.e. the *Ahl al-Bayt* [A]) is the utmost limit of perfection concerning knowledge of the Divine.

Here our debate centres upon the capacity of human thought and reason, whether it can, when supplied with the basic principles and essentials, undertake an intellectual journey through the world of theological problems[6] or not.

As to the invitation of the Qur’an to study and inquiry about the phenomena of creation, and its emphasis on nature as a means for attaining the knowledge of God and the supra-natural, it should be said that it is, indubitably, a basic principle of the Qur’anic teachings. It is with extraordinary insistence that the Qur’an asks human beings to inquire into the nature of the earth, the sky, the plants and animals, and man himself, and urges them to study them scientifically.

It is also indubitable that the Muslims did not take enough worthy steps in this direction. Perhaps the real reason behind it was Greek philosophy, which was deductive and based on pure speculation, and they

used this approach even in the field of the physical sciences. Nevertheless, as the history of science bears testimony, the muslim scientists did not altogether abandon the experimental method in their studies like the Greeks.

The Muslims were the pioneers of the experimental method, not the Europeans, as is commonly thought, who followed on the tracks first laid by the Muslims.

The Value of Study of the Natural Phenomena

Aside from all of this, the question worthy of consideration is whether the Qur'an, besides its emphasis on the study of the creatures of earth, water, and air, allows other ways of approaching the issue, or if it closes all other doors.

The question is whether the Qur'an, even as it invites people to study the signs of God (*ayat*), also welcomes other modes of intellectual endeavour. Basically, what is the value of inquiry into the works of creation (an inquiry which the Qur'an urges us, explicitly or implicitly, to undertake), from the viewpoint of initiating us into the awareness and consciousness which this heavenly Book aims to cultivate?

The truth is that the measure of assistance provided by the study of the works of the creation in understanding the problems explicitly pointed out by the Holy Qur'an is quite restricted. The Qur'an has propounded certain problems of theology which are by no means understandable through the study of the created world or nature.

The value of study of the system of creation is limited only to the extent to which it proves that the world is governed by a Power which knows, designs, plans, and administers it. The world is a mirror, open to empirical experiment, only to the extent that it points towards something that lies beyond nature and discloses the existence of a Mighty Hand which runs nature's cosmic wheels.

But the Qur'an is not content that man should only know that a Mighty, Knowing, and Wise Power administers this universe. This may perhaps be true of other heavenly scriptures, but is by no means true of the Holy Qur'an, which is the final and ultimate heavenly message and has a great deal to say about God and the reality transcending nature.

Purely Rationalistic Problems

The most basic problem to which the mere study of the world of creation fails to provide an answer is the necessity of existence and uncreatedness of the Power which transcends nature. The world is a mirror in the sense that it indicates the existence of a Mighty Hand and a Wise Power, but it does not tell us anything more about Its nature. It does not tell us whether that Power is subservient to something else or not, or if it is self–subsisting. And if it is subject to something else, what is that?

The objective of the Qur'an is not only that we should know that a Mighty Hand administers the world,

but that we may know that that Administrator is “Allah” and that “Allah” is the indefinable: (There is nothing like Him), whose Essence encompasses all perfection, or in other words, that “Allah” signifies Absolute Perfection and is the referent of, (His is the loftiest likeness). How can the study of nature give us an understanding of such notions and concepts?

The second problem is that of the Unity of God. The Qur’an has stated this issue in a logical form and used a syllogistic argument to explain it. The method of argument it has employed in this regard is what is called 'exclusive syllogism' or 'reductio ad impossible' (*burhan al-tamanu'*). On occasion it eliminates the possibility of multiplicity in the efficient cause as in the following verse: 7

“If there had been (multiple) gods in them (i.e. the earth and the heaven) other than God, they would surely go to ruin …” (21:22)

At other times it argues by eliminating the possibility of multiplicity in the final cause:

“God has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any god besides Him; for then each god would have taken off that he created and some of them would have risen up over others …” (23:91)

The Qur’an never suggests that the study of the system of creation can lead us to the knowledge of the Unity of the Godhead so as to imply that the essential knowledge of the transcendental Creator be considered attainable from that source. Moreover, such a suggestion would not have been correct.

The Qur’an alludes to various problems as indicated by the following examples:

“No thing is like Him …” (42:11) ***“And God's is the loftiest likeness …”*** (16:60) ***“To Him belong the Names most Beautiful.”*** (20:8) ***“And His is the loftiest likeness in the heavens and the earth …”*** (30:27) ***“He is God, there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable. the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime …”*** (59:23) ***“And to God belong the East and the West; whither so ever you turn, there is the Face of God …”*** (2:115) ***“And He is God in the heavens and the earth; He knows your secrets, and what you publish …”*** (6:3) ***“He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; He has knowledge of everything.”*** (57:3) ***“He is the Living, the Everlasting …”*** (2:255) ***“God, is the Everlasting, [Who] has not begotten, and has not been begotten and equal to Him is not any one.”*** (112:2-4)

Why does the Qur’an raise such issues? Is it for the sake of propounding mysterious matters incomprehensible to man, who, according to al-Nadawi, lacks the knowledge of its essential principles, and then asking him to accept them without comprehending their meaning? Or, the Qur’an actually does want him to know God through the attributes and descriptions that have come in it? And, if this is true, what reliable approach does it recommend?

How is it possible to acquire this knowledge through the study of the natural phenomena? The study of

the creation teaches us that God has knowledge of the things; that is, the things that He has made were created knowingly and wisely. But the Qur'an expects us not only to know this, but also stresses that:

"Indeed God has the knowledge of everything." (2:231) ***"And not so much as the weight of an atom in earth or heaven escapes from thy Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but in a Manifest Book."*** (10:61) ***"Say: If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it. "*** (18:109)

This means that God's knowledge is infinite and so is His power. How and wherefore is it possible through perception and observation of the world of creation to reach the conclusion that the Creator's Knowledge and Power are infinite? The Qur'an, similarly, propounds numerous other problems of the kind.

For instance, it mentions *al-lawh al-mahfuz* (the Protected Tablet), *lawh al-mahw wa al-'ithbat* (The Tablet of Expunction and Affirmation), *jabr* and *ikhtiyar* (determinism and free will), *wahy* (revelation) and *ilham* (intuition), etc.; none of which are susceptible to inquiry through the empirical study of the world of creation.

It must be admitted that the Qur'an, definitely, has raised these problems in the form of a series of lessons and has emphasized their importance through advice and exhortation. The following verses of the Qur'an may be quoted in this connection:

"What, do they not meditate in the Qur'an? Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts? ...." (47:24) ***"(This is) a Scripture that We have revealed unto thee, full of blessing, that they may ponder its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect."*** (38:29)

Inevitably, we are forced to accept that the Qur'an assumes the existence of a reliable method for understanding the meaning of these truths, which have not been revealed as a series of obscure incomprehensibles which lie beyond the reach of the human mind.

The scope of problems propounded by the Qur'an in the sphere of metaphysics is far greater than what can be resolved or be answered through the study of physical creation. This is the reason why the Muslims have pursued these problems, at times through spiritual and gnostic efforts, and at other times through speculative and rational approach.

I wonder whether those who claim that the Qur'an considers the study of nature as the sole, sufficient means for the solution of metaphysical problems, can give a satisfying answer in regard to the multifarious problems propounded by it, a characteristic which is special to this great heavenly Book.

'Ali's sole source of inspiration in his exposition of the problems mentioned in the previous chapters is the Holy Qur'an, and the sole motive behind his discourses is exegetical. Perhaps, had it not been for 'Ali ('a)

the rationalistic and speculative aspects of the Qur'an would have forever remained uninterpreted.

After these brief introductory remarks on the value of these issues, we shall go on to cite some relevant examples from the *Nahj al-balaghah*.

The Divine Essence and Attributes

In this section we shall cite some examples of the *Nahj al-balaghah*'s treatment of the problems of theology related with Divine Essence and Attributes. Later we shall make a brief comparative study of the issue in various schools and conclude our discussion on this aspect of the *Nahj al-balaghah*.

However, before proceeding further, I ask for the reader's pardon that the discussion in the last three sections became a bit technical and philosophical, which is not very welcome for those not used to it. But what is the remedy?

Discussion on a book such as the *Nahj al-balaghah* does entail such ups and downs. For this reason, we shall limit ourselves to giving only a few examples from the book on this subject, and refrain from any elaborate discussion. Because, if we were to comment on every sentence of the *Nahj al-balaghah*, the result will be, as is said:

My mathnawi requires seventy maunds of paper.

The Divine Essence

Does the *Nahj al-balaghah* have anything to say about the Divine Essence and how to define it? The answer is, Yes, and a lot. However, much of the discussion revolves around the point that the Divine Essence is Absolute and Infinite Being, without a quiddity. His Essence accepts no limits and boundaries like other beings, static or changeable, which are limited and finite.

A changeable being is one which constantly transcends its former limits and assumes new ones. But such is not the Divine Essence. Quiddity, which may qualify and confine Him within limits of finitude, is not applicable to Him. None of the aspects of being are devoid of His Presence, and no kind of imperfection is appllicable to Him, except absence of any imperfection whatsoever: the only thing amiss in Him is absence of defect or inadequacy of any kind.

The sole kind of negation applicable to Him is the negation of all negations. The only kind of non-being attributable to Him is the negation of any kind of imperfection in relation to Him. He is free from all shades of non-being which characterize the creatures and effects. He is free from finitude, multiplicity, divisibility, and need.

The only territory that He does not enter is that of nothingness and non-being. He is with every thing, but not in any thing, and nothing is with Him. He is not within things, though not out of them. He is over

and above every kind of condition, state, similarity, and likeness. For, these qualities relate to limited and determinate beings characterized by quiddity:

"He is with everything but not in the sense of [*physical*] *nearness. He is different from every thing but not in the sense of separation."* (*Sermon* 1)

"He is not inside things in the sense of physical [*pervasion or*] *penetration, and is not outside them in the sense of* [*physical*] *exclusion* [*for exclusion entails a kind of finitude*]*."* (*Sermon* 186)

"He is distinct from things because He overpowers them, and the things are distinct from Him because of their subjection to Him." (*Sermon* 152)

That is, His distinctness from things lies in the fact that He has authority and control over them. However, His power, authority and sovereignty, unlike that of the creatures, is not accompanied with simultaneous weakness, subjugation, and subjection.

His distinction and separateness from things lies in the fact that things are totally subject to His power and authority, and that which is subject and subordinated can never be like the one who subjugates and commands control over it. His separateness from things does not lie in physical separation but is on account of the distinction which lies between the Provider and the provided, the Perfect and the imperfect, the Powerful and the weak.

These kind of ideas are replete in 'Ali's discourses. All the problems which shall be discussed later are based on the principle that Divine Essence is Absolute and Infinite, and the concepts of limit, form and condition do not apply to it.

Divine Unity an Ontological, not a Numerical Concept

Another feature of *tawhid* (monotheism) as propounded by the *Nahj al-balaghah* is that Divine Unity is not numerical, but something else. Numerical unity means the oneness of something which has possibility of recurrence.

It is always possible to imagine that the quiddity and form of an existent is realizable in another individual being. In such cases, the unity of an individual possessing that quiddity is numerical oneness and stands in opposition to duplicity or multiplicity.

'It is one,' means that there is not another like it, and inevitably this kind of unity entails the quality of being restricted in number, which is a defect; because one is lesser in number as compared to two or more of its kind.

But, if a being be such that assumption of recurrence with regard to it is impossible, since it is infinite and unlimited, and if we assume another like it to exist, it will follow that it is the same as the first being

or that it is something which is not similar to it and therefore cannot be called a second instance of it. In such a case, unity is not numerical.

That is, this kind of unity is not one opposed to duplicity or multiplicity, and when it is said 'It is one,' it does not mean that 'there are not two, three or more of its kind,' but it means that a second to it is unconceivable.

This notion can further be clarified through an example. We know that the astronomers and physicists are not in agreement about the dimensions of the universe, whether it is limited in size or infinite.

Some scientists have favoured the idea of an unlimited and infinite universe; others claim that the universe is limited in dimensions so that if we travel in any direction, we shall reach a point beyond which there is no space. The other issue is whether the universe in which we live is the only universe in existence, or if there are other universes existing besides it.

Evidently, the assumption of another physical world beyond our own is a corollary to the assumption that our universe is not infinite. Only in this case it is possible to assume the existence of, say, two physical universes each of which is limited and has finite dimensions. But if we assume that our universe is infinite, it is not possible to entertain the assumption of another universe existing beyond it. For, whatever we were to assume would be identical with this universe or a part of it.

The assumption of another being similar to the Being of the One God–like the assumption of another physical universe besides an infinite material universe–amounts to assuming the impossible, for the Being of God is absolute: Absolute Selfhood and Absolute Reality.

The notion that Divine Unity is not a numerical concept, and that qualifying it by a number is synonymous with imposing limits on the Divine Essence, is repeatedly discussed by the *Nahj al-balaghah*:

"He is the One, but not in a numerical sense." (*Sermon* 152)

"He is not confined by limits nor counted by numbers." (*Sermon* 186)

"He who points to Him, admits for Him limitations; and he who admits limitations for Him has numbered Him." (*Sermon* 1)

"He who qualifies Him limits Him. He who limits Him numbers Him. He who numbers Him denies His pre-eternity." (*Sermon* 152)

"Everything associated with unity is deficient except Him." (*Sermon* 65)

How beautiful, profound, and full of meaning is the last sentence. It states that everything except the Divine Essence is limited if it is one. That is, every thing for which another of its kind is conceivable is a

limited being and an addition of another individual would increase its number. But this is not true of the Unity of the Divine Essence; for God's Unity lies in His greatness and infinity, for which a like, a second, an equal or a match is not conceivable.

This concept that Divine Unity is not a numerical notion is exclusively an Islamic concept, original and profound, and unprecedented in any other school of thought. Even the Muslim philosophers only gradually realized its profundity through contemplating the spirit of the original Islamic texts and in particular the discourses of 'Ali ('a), and ultimately formally incorporated it in the Islamic metaphysical philosophy.

There is no trace of this profound concept in the writings of the early Islamic philosophers like al Farabi and Ibn Sina. Only the later philosophers ushered this concept into their philosophic thinking calling it "*Really True Unity,*" in their terminology.

God, The First and the Last; the Manifest and the Hidden

Of the many issues discussed by the *Nahj al-balaghah* is the notion that God is the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Manifest. Of course this, too, like other notions, has been deduced from the Holy Qur'an; though here we are not going to quote the verses from the Qur'an. God is the First, but His precedence is not temporal so as to be in contradiction with His being the Last.

He is the Manifest, but not in the sense of being physically visible or perceptible to the senses; His Manifestness does not contradict His Hiddenness. In fact His Firstness is identical with His Lastness and similarly His Manifestness and Hiddenness are identical; they are not two different things:

"Praise be to Allah, for whom one condition does not precede another, so that He may he the First before being the Last or may be Manifest before being Hidden ..."[8]

"Time is not His accomplice, nor does He need the assistance of tools and agents His Being transcends time. His Existence transcends nothingness and His pre-eternity transcends all beginning."[9]

The Divine Essence's transcendence over time, nothingness, beginning, and end is one of the most profound concepts of *al-hikmah* philosophy. God's pre-eternity does not mean that God has always existed. Certainly God has always existed but Divine pre-eternity (*azaliyyah*) is something greater in meaning than 'existence at all times'; because, 'existing at all times' assumes existence in time; but God's Being has not only been at all times, It precedes time itself. This is the meaning of Divine pre-eternity. This shows that His precedence is something other than temporal precedence.

"Praise be to God, whose creation bears testimony to His Existence; temporality (*huduth*) *of whose creation is the evidence of His preternity the similarity and likeness amongst whose creation proves that He is unique. The senses do not perceive Him and nothing can conceal Him."*[10]

That is, God is both Hidden and Manifest. By Himself He is Manifest but is Hidden from the human senses. His Hiddenness from the senses is due to man's own limitations and not on account of Him.

It needs no proof that existence is synonymous with manifestation; the more powerful the existence of a being, the more manifest it would be. Conversely, the weaker its being is and the more intermingled it is with non-being, the less manifest it is to itself and others.

For everything, there are two modes of being: its being-in-itself (*wujud fi nagsih*), and its being-for-others. The being of every thing for us depends upon the structure of our senses and certain special conditions. Accordingly, the manifestation of a thing is also of two kinds: its manifestation-in-itself (*zuhur fi nafsih*) and its manifestation-for-others.

Our senses, on account of their limitations, are able to perceive only a limited number of finite objects possessing the characteristics of similarity and opposition. The senses can perceive colours, shapes, sounds, etc., which are limited temporally and spacially; that is, their existence is confined within a particular time and place. Now if there existed a uniform light, always and everywhere, it would not be perceptible. A continuous monotonous sound heard always and everywhere would not be audible.

The Being of God, which is absolute being and absolute reality, is not confined to any particular time and place, and is hidden from our senses. But God in Himself is absolutely manifest; the perfection of His manifestness, which follows from the perfection of His Being, is itself the cause of His hiddenness from our senses. The two aspects of His manifestness and hiddenness are one and the same in His Essence. He is hidden because He is perfectly manifest, and this perfect manifestness conceals Him.

Thou, who art hidden on account of Thy perfect brilliance, Thou Art the Manifest, hidden in Thy manifestness.

The veil on Thy face is also Thy face,
So manifest Thou art,
Thy manifestness conceals Thee from the world's eyes.

An Appraisal

An appraisal however brief of the approach of the *Nahj al-balaghah* and its comparison with that of other schools of thought is essential for discovering the true worth of its views on the problems of theology. We shall confine ourselves to the brief, though not quite sufficient, examples quoted in the foregoing pages and proceed to evaluate them.

The subject of the Divine Essence and Attributes is one which has been discussed a lot by the ancient and modern philosophers, mystics and Sufis of the East and the West. But in general their method and approach is totally different from that of the *Nahj al-balaghah*, whose approach is highly original and unprecedented.

Only in the Holy Qur'an can be found a precedent for the *Nahj al-balaghah*. Apart from the Holy Qur'an, we do not find any other source that provides some ground for the discourses of the *Nahj al-balaghah*.

As pointed out earlier, some scholars, because of their failure to trace back to some earlier source the notions elaborated in the *Nahj al-balaghah*, have questioned the authenticity of ascription of these discourses to 'Ali ('a). They have supposed that these discourses appeared in a later period, after the appearance of the Mu'tazilites and assimilation of Greek thought, heedless of the saying:

The mean earth with the sublime heaven does not compare!

What ignorance to compare the Mu'tazilite and Greek ideas with the teachings of the *Nahj al-balaghah* !

The Nahj al-balaghah and the Notions of Kalam

The *Nahj al-balaghah*, while it ascribes all the Attributes of perfection to God, the Exalted, negates any separation of these Attributes from His Essence and does not consider them as an appendage of Divine Essence. On the other hand, the Ash'arites, as we know, consider the Divine Attributes to be additional to Essence and the Mu'tazilites negate all Attributes.

The Ash'arite believes in Separation [*of the Attributes from the Essence*]
The Mu'tazilite speaks of subservience [*of the Attributes to the Essence*].

This has led some to imagine that the discourses found in the *Nahj al-balaghah* on this topic are fabrications of a later period under the influence of Mu'tazilite views; whereas, anyone with some insight can readily perceive that the Attributes negated by the *Nahj al-balaghah* with respect to Divine Essence are qualities of imperfection and limitation; for the Divine Essence, being infinite and limitless, necessitates identity of the Attributes with the Essence, not negation of the Attributes as professed by the Mu'tazilites. Had the Mu'tazilites reached such a notion they would never have negated the Divine Attributes considering them subservient to the Essence.

The same is true of the views on the createdness or temporality (*huduth*) of the Qur'an in the *sermon* 184. One may, possibly, imagine that these passages of the *Nahj al-balaghah* relate to the latter heated controversies among the Islamic theologians (*mutakallimun*) regarding the eternity (*qidam*) or temporality (*huduth*) of the Holy Qur'an, and which might have been added to the *Nahj al-balaghah* during the latter centuries.

However, a little reflection will reveal that the discourses of the *Nahj al-balaghah* related to this issue have nothing to do with the debate on the Qur'an being either created or uncreated, which was a meaningless controversy, but relates to the creative command (*amr takwini*), and Will of the Almighty.

'Ali ('a) says that God's Will and His command represent Divine Acts and, therefore, are *hadith* and posterior to the Essence; for if the command and Will were co-eternal and identical with His Essence,

they will have, necessarily, to be considered His associates and equals. 'Ali ('a) says:

When He decrees the creation of a thing, He says to it, “Be”, and it assumes existence; but not through an audible voice which strikes the ear or a cry that can be heard. Indeed the speech of God, glory be to Him, is but His created Act, which did not exist before [it came into existence]. Had it (Divine speech) been itself eternal, it would be another god besides Him. (*Sermon* 186)

In addition, there are other musnad traditions on this subject related from 'Ali ('a), only some of which have been collected in the *Nahj al-balaghah*, and can be traced back to his time. On this basis, there is no room for doubting their genuineness.

If any superficial resemblance is observed between the statements made by 'Ali ('a) and some views held by the Mu'tazilah, the probability to be allowed in this connection is that some of his ideas were adopted by the Mu'tazilah.

The controversies of the Muslim theologians (*mutakallimun*), both the Shi'ah and the Sunni, the Asha'irah as well as the Mu'tazilah, generally revolved around the doctrine of rational basis of ethical judgement concerning good and evil (*al-husn wa al-qubh al-'aqliyyan*).

This doctrine which is not other than a practical principle operating in human society, is considered by the *mutakallimun* to be also applicable to the Divine sphere and govern the laws of creation; but we find no trace of it in the *Nahj al-balaghah*, similarly there is no sign of it in the Qur’an. Had the ideas and beliefs of the *mutakallimun* found their way into the *Nahj al-balaghah*, first of all the traces of this doctrine should have been found in that book.

The Nahj al-balaghah and Philosophical Concepts

Some others, on coming across certain words such as 'existence' (*wujud*), 'non-existence' ('*adam*), 'temporality' (*huduth*) and 'pre-eternity' (*qidam*), and so on in the *Nahj al-balaghah*, have been led to assume that these terms entered the Muslim intellectual world under the influence of Greek philosophy and were inserted, unintentionally or intentionally, into the discourses of 'Ali ('a). If those who advocate this view had gone deeper into the meanings of these words, they would not have paid heed to such a hypothesis.

The method and approach adopted in the arguments of the *Nahj al-balaghah* is completely different from that of the philosophers who lived before al-Sayyid al- Radi or during his time, or even those born many centuries after the compilation of the Nahj al-balalghah .

Presently, we shall not discuss the metaphysics of Greek or Alexandrian (Neo-Platonic) philosophy, but shall confine ourselves to the metaphysical views propounded by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Undoubtedly Muslim philosophers brought new problems into philosophy under the influence of Islamic teachings which did not exist before, and in addition to them, introduced radically

original ways of demonstration and inference to explain and argue their point with regard to some other problems.

Nevertheless, what we learn from the *Nahj al-balaghah* is obviously different from this approach. My teacher, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, in the preface to his discourse on the traditions of Islamic scholarship, writes:

These statements help in resolving a number of problems in the theological philosophy. Apart from the fact that Muslims were not acquainted with these notions and they were incomprehensible to the Arabs, basically there is no trace of them in the writings and statements of pre-Islamic philosophers whose books were translated into Arabic, and, similarly, they do not appear in the works of Muslim philosophers, Arab or Persian.

These problems remained obscure and unintelligible, and every commentator discussed them according to his own conjecture, until the eleventh century of the Hijrah (17th century A.D.). Only then they were properly understood for the first time- namely, the problem of the True Unity (*al-wahdat al-haqqah*) of the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*) (a non-numerical unity); the problem that the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being is identical with the proof of His Unity (since the Necessary Being is Absolute Existence, Him Being implies His Unity); the problem that the Necessary Existent is the known-in-His-Essence (*ma'lum bil dhat*); that the Necessary Being is known directly without the need of an intermediary, and that the reality of every thing else is known through the Necessary Being, not vice versa ... 11

The arguments of the early Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, such as the discussions on the Divine Essence and Attributes, such as Unity, Simplicity (*basatah*), Self-Sufficiency, Knowledge, Power, Will, Providence, and so on, revolve around the conception of the necessity of existence (*wujub al-wujud*), from which all of them are derived, and the necessity of existence itself is deduced indirectly.

In this fashion it is demonstrated that the existence of all possible existents (*mumkinat*) cannot be explained without assuming the existence of the Necessary Being. Although the argument used for proving the truth of this cannot be called demonstration per impossible (*burhan khulf*) in view of its indirect mode of inference, it resembles burhan khulf and hence it fails to provide completely satisfactory demonstration, for it does not explain the necessity of existence of the Necessary Being. Ibn Sina in his *al-'Isharat* claims that he has succeeded in discovering "the Why?" (*lima*) of it and hence chooses to call his argument "*burhan al-siddiqin*" (*burhan limmi*, i.e. causal proof). However, the latter philosophers considered his exposition of "the Why?" (*lima*) as insufficient.

In the *Nahj al-balaghah*, necessity of existence is never used to explain the existence of the possible beings (*mumkinat*). That on which this book relies for this purpose is the real criterion of the necessity of existence, that is, the absolute reality and pure being of the Divine Essence.

'Allamah Tabataba'i, in the above-mentioned work, while explaining a *hadith* of 'Ali ('a) found in al-*Tawhid* of al-Shaykh al-Saduq, says:

The basis of our discussion rests upon the principle that Divine Being is a reality that does not accept any limits or restrictions whatsoever. Because, God, the Most Exalted, is Absolute Reality from Whom is derived the existence of all other beings within the ontological limits and characteristics peculiar to themselves, and their existence depends on that of the Absolute Being. 12

In the *Nahj al-balaghah* the very basis of all discussions on Divine Essence rests on the position that God is Absolute and Infinite Being, which transcends all limits and finitude. No point of space or time, nor any thing is devoid of Him.

He is with everything, yet no thing is with Him. Since He is the Absolute, and the Infinite, He transcends all time, number, limit and proximity (all kinds of quiddities). That is, time and space, number and limit are applicable to a lower stage i.e. stage of Divine Acts and creation. Everything is from Him and returns unto Him. He is the First of the first and the Last of the last. He precedes everything and succeeds everything.

This is the idea that forms the axis of all discourses of the *Nahj al-balaghah*, and of which there is no trace in the works of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazali, and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

As pointed out by 'Allamah Tabataba'i, these profound discussions of theology proper (*ilahiyyat bil-ma'na al-'akhass*) are based on a series of inter-related problems which have been posited in metaphysics (*al-'umur al-'ammah*). 13An elaborate discussion of those theological problems and their relevant issues mentioned above is outside the scope of our present discussion.

There are two reasons for rejecting the claims that the theological discussions of the *Nahj al-balaghah* were inventions of later writers familiar with philosophical notions. Firstly, the kind of problems discussed in the *Nahj al-balaghah* were not at all raised by any philosopher till the time of al-Sayyid al-Radi, the compiler of the *Nahj al-balaghah*.

That the Unity of the Necessary Being is not of the numerical kind and that Divine Essence precedes number; that the existence of the Necessary Being implies Its Unity; the simple reality of the Necessary Being; His immanence and other such notions were not known to philosophy during or before al-Sayyid al-Radi's times. Secondly, the axes of arguments presented in this book are altogether different from the axes of philosophical discussions which have been prevalent throughout history until the present day.

The Nahj al-balaghah and Western Philosophic Thought

The *Nahj al-balaghah* has played a great role in the history of Eastern Philosophy. Mulla Sadra, who brought a revolution in theological thought (*al-hikmat al-'ilahiyyah*), was under profound influence of 'Ali's discourses.

His method of argument with regard to the problems of *tawhid* is the method of inferring the Essence from the Essence, and also deducing the Attributes and Acts from the Essence, and all these arguments are based on the belief that there exists the Necessary Being only. These arguments are based on radically different general principles, which are elaborated in his system of metaphysics.

Eastern theological thought (*al-hikmat al-'ilahiyyah*) attained fruition and strength from the sources of Islamic teachings and was firmly established on unviolable foundations. However, theological philosophy in the West remained deprived of such source of inspiration. The widespread philosophical malaise of inclination towards materialism in the West has many causes whose discussion is outside the scope of our discourse.

But we believe that the major cause of this phenomenon is the weakness and insufficiency of theological conceptions of Western religious thought. 14Anyone interested in making a comparative study of the approaches pointed out in these chapters, should first study the arguments advanced by Western philosophers such as Anselm, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant and others for proving the existence of God and their discussions about acceptance or rejection of various arguments, then he should compare them with the *burhan al-siddiqin* argument advanced by Mulla Sadra under the inspiration of 'Ali's words. He would see for himself the wide chasm that separates the one from the other.

1. Sermon 185
2. The term ta'wil has been defined variously, but generally when used in the opposition to tafsir (which is applied to the explanation of the literal and explicit meanings of the Qur'anic texts) it is applied to interpretation of the Qur'anic verses which goes beyond their literal meaning. According to Imamiyyah Shi'ah, no one except the Prophet (S) and the twelve Imams (A) is entitled to draw tawil of the Qur'anic verses. To illustrate what is meant by ta'wil consider these examples: (1) According to Shi'ah hadith, the verse 2:158, Where ever you maybe, God will bring you all together', pertains to the 313 companions of al Imam al Mahdi (A) whom God will gather in a certain place from various parts of the earth in a single night. (2) According to another hadith the verse 67:30, 'Say: What think you? If your water (in wells) should have vanished into the earth, then who would bring you running water?' pertains to the ghaybah (occultation) of al Imam al Mahdi (A). Such interpretations, which obviously go beyond the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses, are called ta'wil.
3. Allamah S.M.H Tabatabai, Usul e falsafah wa rawish e riyalism (The Principles and Method of Philosophy of Realism), Introduction to vol. I
4. Muhammad Sulayman Nadawi, Madha khasara al alam bi inhitat al Muslimin, vol. IV, p. 97
5. Ibid., p. 135
6. Allamah Tabatabai, op. Cit
7. Ibid, vol. V
8. Sermon 65
9. Sermon 186
10. Sermon 152
11. Maktab e tashayyu, No. 2 p. 120
12. Ibid, p. 126
13. Ibid, p. 157
14. See Murtada Mutahhari, Ilal e garayesh beh maddigari (The causes of inclination towards Materialism), under the chapter: Naresa iha ye mafahi me falsafiI (The inadequacies of [Western] Philosophical Ideas)

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