

Benefits Of Evils: An Excerpt From Murtada Mutahhari's Divine Justice

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Mutahhari's Divine Justice**

**Translated by
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This text explores the concept of Divine Justice in Islam, highlighting its importance and implications for human behavior and morality. The author examines various arguments and theories related to the topic and provides insights into the role of free will, human responsibility, and divine intervention in shaping the course of human life.

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Our discussion in the course of the previous section was a philosophical discussion and a rational analysis of the problem of evil. In this section, we look into the issue from another point of view.

Usually, people who consider the problem of evil in the world with a view to criticising it do not stop to calculate how the world would be if it were bereft of these evil? They only say, simply and generally, if only the world were filled with enjoyment and felicity, and if only everyone would attain his wishes, and no pain or failure ever existed... The following verses are attributed to Khayyam: [1](#)

*If I had control over the universe as God does,
I would destroy it all together –
And make anew a universe in which,
All would attain their heart's desire with ease.*

Now let us see how it is possible to create a world better than the present world, as the poet wished. When we want to start making the “world”, “destroying the roof of the universe and putting forth a new design”, we must definitely set aside limited thoughts and childish ideas that are appropriate for the limited life of a human individual and contemplate a large and vast design. I don't think this engineering will be an easy task, and we may not be able to make a decision.

In any case, it is best that first, we look into the existing situation and get to know it better; then we can tire our minds thinking about a “better order.” Perhaps, after a serious study, we would prefer the current state. To study the present world, it is necessary to discuss the phenomena of tragedy and tribulation from two points of view:

1. What place do evils have in the order of the entire world?
2. What is the value of evils in their own right?

In the first part, the discussion is about whether, in the entire order of the world, evils are dispensable. In other words, is a world without evils possible? Or, contrary to what might first come to mind, is omitting them from the world impossible, and is the non-existence of calamities equivalent to the destruction of the world? In other words, are the evils of the world inseparable from its good things?

In the second part, the discussion is whether tragedies are solely harmful, and so to speak, have negative value? Or do they also have benefits and positive effects, with their negative effects actually being as nothing next to their beneficial and positive effects.

The Issue Of Separation Of Good And Evil

From what was said in the discussion of “discrimination” and in the discussion “evil is relative”, to a large extent it became clear that evils are inseparable from good things, since evils are of the form of lacks and non-beings. In other words, vacuities like ignorance, inability, and poverty that exist in creation, to the extent that they are related to the ontic order, are absences of potential and limitations of possibility. That is, in the creational order, whatever level of deficiencies exist for every being is due to a deficiency in the capacity of the recipient [of Divine grace], and not due to the holding back of Divine grace, for it to be considered oppression or discrimination. Now in these things, the one thing that doesn’t [essentially] pertain to the lack of potential and limitation of possibilities is what lies in the domain of human freewill and responsibility.

Man, by virtue of his freewill and role in the formation of both himself and his society, must needs be attend to them—filling the vacuums as it were. This is one of the dimensions of man being God’s vicegerent. That humanity has been created in this way and has such a responsibility is a part of the design of the ideal order [of the universe]. And as for evils that are existential and are good in their in-itself being and evil in their for-other being, as mentioned their evil aspect, in that it is relative and relational and one of the inseparable corollaries of their real being, is inseparable from their good aspect.

What we must add here is another point, which is the principle of interdependence and the facts that the parts of the universe are as a single “body.” For we know that, the universe is an indivisible unit.

An important issue in philosophical and intellectual worldviews is how the different parts of the world relate and connect to one another. Do they take the form of a series of separate and scattered things? If

a portion of the universe were not to exist, or if it were to be supposed that some beings of the universe were to annihilated—what does this mean in terms of the remaining parts of the universe, is this possible [or not]? Or are the parts of the universe somehow all related and connected to one another.

In the fifth volume of *Principles of Philosophy and Method of Realism* we have discussed this issue. Here we suffice it to say that this issue has been the subject of debate from the time of the earliest philosophical inquiries. Aristotle supported the unity and “body-likeness” of the universe. In the Islamic world, this principle has always been affirmed. Mir Findariski, the well-known philosopher and gnostic of the Safavid era, says in the language of poetry:

*Truth [God] is the soul of the world, the world like a body.
The hosts of angels are as powers of this body;
Heavenly spheres, elements, and all that is born are organs;
This is **tawḥīd**, all else is trivia.* [2](#)

Hegel, the well-known German philosopher, notes this principle in his philosophy. The dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, which is strongly influenced by the philosophy and logic of Hegel, accepted this principle under the name of “mutual influence.”

Right now, we can't enter this issue in detail. Of course, all of those who have spoken of the “body-likeness” and interdependence and relatedness of the parts of the universe have not spoken at the same level.

What we mean by this principle is that the universe is an indivisible unit; that is, the relation between the parts of the universe is not such that it is possible to suppose that some of them are removable and some retainable. Removing some parts necessitates, or rather equals, removal of all parts, just as retaining some equals retaining them all.

Thus, not only are non-beings inseparable from beings and relational and relative beings inseparable from real beings, real beings themselves are also inseparable from one another. So evils too, in addition to the two above-mentioned aspects and regardless of those two aspects, are inseparable from good things. In the words of Ṣāfi, “the Prophetic lamp” is together with the “Abu Lahabic flame”:

*In this parterre, none plucked a rose without a thorn.
So the lamp of Mustafa and the flames of Abu Lahab is.* [3](#)
*And he also points to the indivisibility of the parts of the universe where he says:
In the workshop of love, infidelity is unavoidable;
Who will the Fire consume, if not for Abu Lahab?*

The Total Order

So far the discussion has been about the relation and connectedness of things in existence and the indivisibility of the universe. Over and beyond this aspect, another point must be kept in mind; namely, in terms of goodness and evilness if things are looked at alone, separate, and independently of other things they have one ruling; and if they are looked at as part of a system and as an organ of a body they have another ruling, which occasionally may be opposite to the first one. It is obvious that if things that are in reality separate are looked at as a system, their actual being will be separate and their organic and body-like being will be suppositional; and in the same way if things that are actually and ontologically parts and organs of a system are looked at separately, their actual being will be organic and body-like, and their separate being will be suppositional. Now, we say:

If we were to be asked whether a straight line or a curved line is better on its own, we might say that a straight line is better than a curved line. But if the line in question is part of a complete system and order, we have to take the balance of the whole system into consideration in our judgement. In a complete and total order, in an absolute sense neither a straight line is desirable nor a curved line; just as in a face, it is good for the eyebrows to be curved and for the nose to be taut and straight; it is good for the teeth to be white and for the pupil of the eye to be black or blue. It is as someone said: “The curved eyebrow, if it were straight, would be off mark.”

In a complete system and total order, every part has a particular status in accordance to which a particular quality is appropriate for it:

“For a lion it is good to attack; for a gazelle, to flee.”

In a painting, there have to be different types of shading and various colours. Here, it is not right for there to be one colour and no variation. If the entire painting were to be monotonous and undifferentiated, it wouldn't be a painting.

When we look at the universe as a whole, we must accept that in the entire system and to maintain its balance, the existence of lows and highs, valleys and mountains, level and unlevel places, darknesses and lights, pains and pleasures, successes and failures, are all necessary.

The world is like an eye, curve, mole, and eyebrow;
Everything in its place is good.

Fundamentally, if variation and differences did not exist, there would be no such thing as multiplicity and variety; variegated beings would not exist; and there would be no meaning to there being a system or order (neither a beautiful order nor an ugly one). If there were to be no difference and variation in the world, all of being would have to be composed of a [single] simple matter, say carbon. The dignity and beauty of the world is in its vast variety and colourful differences. The Qur'an counts the existence of differences among the signs of Divine power and wisdom: differences of colour, differences of language,

difference of night and day, differences of people, and so on.

Ugliness As The Manifester Of Beauty

Uglinesses are necessary not only in that they are a part of the complete system of the universe and the total order depends on them, rather their existence is also needed to manifest and bring to light beautiful things. If beauty and ugliness were not compared to one another, neither would the beautiful be beautiful nor the ugly be ugly; that is, if ugliness were not to exist in the world, neither would beauty. If all people were to be beautiful, no one would be beautiful, just as if all were to be ugly, no one would be ugly. If all people were as beautiful as Yusuf [4](#) ('a), beauty would cease to exist; and likewise if everyone was like Ja'ā'id, [5](#) there would be no more ugliness. Similarly, if all people had heroic powers, there would be no more heroes. The expressions of emotion and praise that heroes receive are because they are few in number. In reality, the sensations and perceptions that man has of beautiful things are only possible if ugliness exists alongside beauty. The fact that people are pulled toward and attracted by beautiful people, and in other words attraction and stimulation is the natural response to beauty, is because they see ugly people and are repelled by them. In the same way, if mountain ranges and plateaus did not exist, plains would not exist and water would not fall from high to low.

In reality, the attractiveness of good-looking people is strengthened by the repulsiveness of ugly people. The magic and spell of beauty exists courtesy of the gracelessness of ugliness. The ugly have the greatest of rights over the beautiful. If not for them, the beautiful would not have had the glitter and shine that they do. The meaning of beauty comes from ugliness. If all were the same, there would be no appeal, nor attraction, nor movement, nor love, nor passion, nor pain, nor burning, nor warmth.

It is a simpleminded idea to say that if everything in the universe were the same, the universe would be better. They suppose that the demand of Divine justice and wisdom is for all things to be at the same level. Whereas it is precisely by such a levelling out that all goodnesses, beauties, and all energies and passions, movements and evolutions towards perfection are destroyed. If mountain and valley were the same level, neither would mountain remain nor valley. If there weren't low points, there would be no high points either. If not for Mu'awiyah, 'Ali ('a) with all his dignity and goodness would not exist. "In the workshop of love, infidelity is unavoidable."

Of course, one shouldn't think that the All-Wise Creator, in order to make the existing order the best [possible] order, and because His eye was to the entirety of the system, randomly made things beautiful or ugly even though it was possible for those beautiful things to be ugly or for those ugly things to be beautiful, choosing each being for its post by lottery or on a whim.

We said earlier that the order of the universe, horizontally and vertically, is a necessary order. God gives every being the very existence and the level of perfection and beauty that it is able to accept; deficiencies come from the essences of those beings themselves, and not from [a shortcoming in] Divine grace.

The meaning of saying that evil has, for example, such-and-such a benefit is not that so-and-so, who could possibly have been made beautiful, was specifically made ugly in order for the value of the beauty of some other person to become clear, for it then to be asked, “Why didn’t the opposite happen?” Instead, the meaning is that at the same time that every being has the greatest degree of perfection and beauty possible for it, good effects also exist for this variation, such as beauty gaining value, the coming into being of attraction and motion and so on. The comparison we mention in the following part may make the issue clearer.

Society Or Individual?

Scholars have a discussion under the title “Principality of the individual or society” about whether the individual is principle or society? Sometimes the discussion has a philosophical aspect and the point is whether the individual is a real entity and society is a conventional and derivational one, or on the contrary, society is a real entity and the individual is a suppositional and derivational one. Of course, here a third case can also be postulated, which is that both are principle and real; and in our view only this last case is correct. And sometimes the discussion is from the legal aspect and the aspect of “philosophy of law” and the point is whether the goal of law should be the “felicity of the individual” or the “empowerment of society.”

Supporters of the principality of the individual say that to the extent possible the lawmaker must take in view the ease, welfare, pleasure, and liberty of individuals; the happiness of the individual has first priority. The happiness and felicity of individuals should not be hindered with the pretext of societal interest, except where there is a risk of the destruction and dismemberment of society; only in such a case should the interest of society take precedence over the interest of the individual, since if society comes apart, the individual will naturally be destroyed as well. And in reality, here too it is the condition and interest of the individual that has been observed. As for the supporters of the principality of society, they say that what is most important is the strength and honour of society; lawmakers and politicians must focus their energies on the strength, honour, and pride of society. The pride of the individual, the comfort and happiness of the individual, the felicity of the individual, the freedom of the individual, and everything that relates to the individual should be sacrificed for society; society must stand tall, even if all of its individuals are in a lowly suffering and wretchedness.

To compare these two systems of thought, we take a look at the national budget. If the leaders of a country think in terms of the principality of the individual, they will strive to spend their country’s budget in programs that are responsible for the comfort of the people of the nation and improvement of the economic standing of the general public, even if the pace of national progress is to slow down. But if they think in terms of the principality of society, they will not attend to the needs of individuals and will strive to put forward programs that ensure the ever-greater progress of society in the future and its glory and honour among other societies.

The space programs that the powerful countries of the world have originated are in line with this way of thinking. As we know, these programs are given priority over programs of health and public education and training. For the designers of these programs it isn't important that individuals in their country live in hunger, disease, and ignorance; what is important is the honour and glory of their country. The expense of these programs is so great and burdensome that it has weighed down the people of these countries, and in spite of the fact that these governments steal more than fifty percent of the wealth of the world through hook and crook, they still suffer from budget deficits.

The issue is that if the national budget were to be spent in an economic, health, or cultural program designed for the benefit of the general public, it is possible that it could bring about a good amount of welfare, comfort, and liberty for the people of the nation. But if the budget is spent on these programs – though it constricts all the individuals [of the country], it is a cause of pride and honour for that society.

Supporters of the principality of society say that the power and glory of society should be given the greatest degree of importance; and supporters of the principality of the individual say that the interests, comforts, and freedoms of the individuals must be given the greatest degree of attention.

The aim of presenting this topic is to draw attention to the point that the rule of the part is different from the rule of the whole. It is possible that something which is harmful and ugly for the part is beneficial and beautiful for the whole.

Differences Of Capacities

With regard to human societies, as we said sometimes there is a conflict between the part and the whole; that is, sometimes for the good of society, it is necessary for an individual to be deprived of his rights. But with respect to the natural order of the world, this is not the case. Here, no part has been oppressed in order for the entirety of the universe to be beautiful.

From what we explained in the second section under the title “the secret of differences” it became clear that the differences and variation that have made the universe similar to a perfect and beautiful painting are essential differences. The positions and levels specified in creation for beings are not like social posts, which are changeable and alterable.

These positions and states, similar to the attributes of geometrical shapes, are essential to the beings. When we say that the peculiar attribute of a triangle is that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles and the peculiar attribute of a square is that the sum of its angles is equal to four right angles, it doesn't mean that the former has been bestowed the attribute of having two right angles or the latter has been bestowed with the attribute of having four right angles. Thus, it is baseless to ask why the triangle has been dealt with unjustly and not given the attribute of having four right angles. No, a triangle can have none but its own specific attribute. No one has made the triangle a triangle; that is, it is not the case that the triangle previously had some other state with differing attributes, and then someone came

and turned it into a triangle. Nor is it the case that the triangle, square, and so on in one stage of their existence and actuality lacked all attributes, and then some overruling power came and distributed these attributes among them, and he desired to give the sum of a triangle's angles the attribute of equivalence to two right angles and give the sum of the angles of a square the attribute of equalling four right angles, in which case the question would arise as to why there has been discrimination. Meaning that it would be appropriate for the triangle to wordlessly object to the injustice done to it and demand an attribute like the attribute of a square.

The differences among the creatures of the world is also the same way. The fact that inanimate objects do not have growth and perception, that plants have growth but not perception, and that animals have both growth and perception is essential to the level and state of being of inanimate objects, plants, and animals respectively. It is not that they were initially all equal, and then the Creator gave one, both perception and growth, another, only one of the two, and a third, neither of them. Ibn Sina has a well-known statement that expresses this reality; he says,

ما جعل الله المشمشة مشمشة بل أوجدها

God did not make the apricot an apricot; He merely created it.

The apricot was mentioned as an example; what is meant is all existents. God created things, and they are different in their essence. God created the apricot, the apple, the pomegranate, and so forth; but it is not that they were formerly all equal and God established differences among them after the fact, so to speak.

God created time. Time has a particular characteristic; it incorporates the past, present, and future. How did God create time? Did He initially create time like a ball of thread in the form of a collection with all of its parts being together, and then stretch and open it and make it in its current form? He also created the body. Did He first create the body without dimension and size, and then give it size and dimension? Or is the creation of the body equivalent to creation of dimension, length, size, precedence and antecedence, there being no duality between the creation of the body and the creation of size and dimension?

The Qur'an has a very subtle and fine expression here; it relates from Prophet Musa [6](#) ('a) that when Pharaoh asks him and his brother Harun [7](#) ('a), "Who is your lord?" Musa ('a) replies:

رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

'Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (Qur'an, 20:50)

What is interesting is the use of the expression "its creation," from which we can deduce that every thing has a peculiar creation that is its own; that is, every thing can accept only one particular manner of being

and no more; and God bestows it with that particular being. One shouldn't think that things used to be some other way and God changed them to their present form; or at least it was possible for them to be different or have a manner of creation different from what they have, better or worse, and God chose this particular form of creation in spite of those possibilities. The reality is that the universe was possible only in this form in which it presently exists, and for every one of its parts as well only a specific form of creation was possible, and God bestowed it with that very creation.

The Qur'an expresses this point with a sublime simile. The Qur'an brings the simile of rainwater which falls from above and gradually creates floods and water in the beds of various rivers and streams; it says:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to (the extent of) their capacity. (Qur'an, 13: 17)

That is, the mercy of the Lord does not deprive any able existent, but the potential and capacity of existents also is not equal; potentials and capacities are different; Divine mercy fills every container to the extent of its capacity.

This point is what we expressed in the second section under the title "the Secret of Differences"; it was repeated here because, in addition to the benefit of completing [the discussion], it would not be fallaciously supposed that in the creation of the universe, the principality of the whole was kept in view, and for the beauty of the whole, some of the parts were dealt with unjustly. Instead, a beautiful whole has come about that owes its beauty to differences and variation [among beings], and at the same time those differences do not take the form of discrimination and injustice, and both the right of the part and the interest of the whole have been observed.

Those who, in responding to the problem of evil, have paid attention solely to the necessity of differences in the entire order, provide an incomplete answer, since the deficient part [of the system] has the right to object and say, "Now that it is necessary that in the whole order, some be perfect and others be deficient, why was I created deficient and another created perfect? Why wasn't it the other way around?" Similarly, it is possible for the "ugly" to object and say, "Now that it is necessary in the total order of creation for both the ugly and the beautiful to exist, why should I be ugly and another be beautiful? Why not the other way around?" When there are two things, one of which must get a lesser share of being and the other a greater share of being, what basis is there to give precedence to, say, A over B?

Thus, simply for us to say that in the total order, the coexistence of ugly and beautiful, perfect and deficient is necessary does not solve the objection. It must also be added that at the same time, every being and every part of the universe has received its right and the share it was possible for it to receive.

In other words, the issues of “benefit,” “interest,” and “wisdom” that are mentioned with respect to evil things are all subordinate to our understanding of reality—i.e. our understanding the fact that the relation of causes to their effects and the relation of premises to their conclusions is a necessary one, and the Divine pattern or precedent is unchanging.

Calamities, The Source Of Felicities

Apart from the fact that evils has an important role in manifesting beauty and bringing about a wonderful whole, there is also another basic point in the relation of evil and good. Between that which we call calamity and evil and that which we know as perfection and felicity, there is a causal relationship. Evil things are the source of and give birth to things that are good. This is the third beneficial effect of evil.

The first effect was that the existence of evil and ugliness is necessary in bringing about the beautiful whole of the universe. The second effect was that beautiful things as well are manifested by ugly things, and if ugliness and evil didn't exist, beauty and good would have no meaning, in the sense that the beauty of a beautiful thing in [one's] senses is because ugly things exist to which they can be compared.

Here, we discuss the third effect of evil and wretchedness under the title that ugliness is a preliminary for and originator of the existence of beauty. Felicities and happiness are hidden in the belly of afflictions and calamities, just as sometimes tragedies are formed inside of happiness; and this is the formula of this world:

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night ... (Qur'an, 22:61, 31:29, 35: 13, 57:6)

The well-known parable that says, “At the end of every dark night there is light” expresses the definite mutual link between the bearing of troubles and attaining of felicity. It is as though illumination is born of darkness, just as in instances of deviation whiteness produces blackness.

Hegel, the well-known German philosopher of the nineteenth century, has a statement that is worthy of note in this regard. He says,

“Conflict and evil are not negative things originating in the mind; instead, they are entirely real things, and in the view of wisdom they are stages of good and development. Conflict is the law of progress. Attributes and characteristics are originated and perfected in the battlefield of chaos and turmoil of the world, and one can only reach the peak of elevation through suffering, responsibility, and hardship. And suffering is a comprehensible thing, a sign of life, and a motive for reform.

Passions, too, have a place among comprehensible things; no great thing has reached its perfection

without passion, and even the ambition and self-centeredness of Napoleon contributed, without his intention, to the progress of [various] nations. Life is not for felicity (ease and the contentment resulting from it). Rather, it is for evolution and development. The history of the world is not a scene of happiness and felicity; periods of felicity comprise its soulless pages, since these periods were periods of agreement, and such a costly contentment and happiness is not appropriate for a man. History was made during periods in which the contradictions of the real world were solved through progress and development.”

To explain the mutual link between comforts and hardships, the Qur'an says:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

Indeed, ease accompanies hardship. Indeed, ease accompanies hardship. (Qur'an, 94:5-6)

The Qur'an doesn't say that after hardship there is ease; the Qur'anic expression is that with hardship, there is ease. That is, ease is within the confines of and together with hardship; and in the words of Rumi, "One opposite is hidden within its opposite."

Life depends on dying (to self) and on suffering tribulation

The water of Life is the (Land of) Darkness.[8](#)

There is a delicate point here, the understanding of which depends on quoting all of the verses of this chapter:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ الَّذِي أَنقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

This chapter is addressing the person of the Prophet (s), and it is peculiar to the Prophet (s):

In the Name of God, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful.

Did We not open your breast for you and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back? Did We not exalt your name? Indeed ease accompanies hardship. Indeed ease accompanies hardship. So when you are done with, appoint, and turn eagerly to your Lord.[9](#)
(Qur'an, 94: 1-8)

This chapter, with a tone full of kindness, reassures the mind of the Prophet (s), which was as though it

had been troubled by hardships. It speaks of how God lightened his heavy load from his shoulders and changed his difficulty to ease; then, in the manner of experimental sciences, from an event which has occurred and been observed, it draws the conclusion: “Ease accompanies hardship”; that is, from the fact that in the past there was a burden on your shoulders and we lifted it and elevated your name and gave you perseverance and tolerance, you should conclude that “Certainly, with every difficulty is ease.”

Then, to strengthen the conclusion and assure that it is definite, the chapter repeats that certainly, “Ease accompanies hardship.”

The interesting point is that after concluding this general formula, the chapter also specifies the future path to follow on this basis; it says,

“So when you become free, make effort.”

That is, since ease has been placed within fatigue and hardship, whenever you find leisure, make efforts anew and once again put yourself to work.

This peculiarity relates to living beings, especially humanity: hardships and difficulties are a preliminary for perfections and progress. Blows destroy inanimate objects and reduce their power, but they motivate living beings and make them powerful.

“How often abundance is within deficiencies!”

Calamities and hardships are necessary for the development of humanity. If not for hardships and sufferings, humanity would be destroyed. The Qur’an says,

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

Certainly, We created man in travail. (Qur’an, 90:4)

Man must tolerate hardships and suffer difficulties to attain his appropriate level of being. Conflict and turmoil are the whips of development. Living beings traverse their path towards perfection through this whip. This law applies to the world of plants, animals, and especially human beings.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a), in one of his letters to Uthman ibn Hunayf, his appointed governor of Basrah, made mention of the biological law that living in ease and comfort and avoiding difficulties causes weakness; and conversely, living in difficult and disturbed conditions makes a person strong and fit, strengthening the essence of his being and making it experienced. In this letter, this great leader rebukes his governor for participating in an evening gathering of the nobles and setting foot in an assembly that had room only for the rich and not for the destitute. And in this connection he explains his own simple life and asks his followers and especially the members of his government to follow the example of his conduct.

Then, to close the door of pretexts, he explains that disturbed conditions and simple nutrition do not reduce a person's powers or weaken one's strength. Desert trees that are deprived of the regular observation and care of a gardener have stronger wood and greater durability; conversely, garden trees that are always cared for by a gardener are weaker-skinned and less durable:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الشَّجَرَةَ الْبَرِّيَّةَ أَصْلَبُ عُودًا، وَالرَّوَّاعِعَ الْخَضِرَةَ أَرْقُ جُلُودًا، وَالنَّائِبَاتِ الْعِذِيَّةَ أَقْوَى وَقُودًا، وَأَبْطَأُ خُمُودًا

Remember that the tree of the forest is the best for timber, while green twigs have soft bark, and the wild bushes are very strong for burning and slow in dying off¹⁰

God says in the Qur'an:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ٤ وَيَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient. (Qur'an, 2: 155)

That is, calamities and afflictions are beneficial and have good effects for people who combat them and persevere; therefore, if they are steadfast they should be given glad tidings.

God, in order to train and rear the soul of human beings, has two programs: creational and legislative; and in each He has placed difficulties and hardships. In the legislative program, He has mandated acts of worship, and in the creational program, He has placed adversities in humanity's path. Fasting, pilgrimage, holy war, charity, and prayer are hardships that have been placed [on people's shoulders] by making them obligatory, and patience and perseverance in carrying them out are a cause of perfection of the soul and evolution of the lofty human abilities. ¹¹ Hunger, fear, and loss of property and life are hardships that have been placed in creation and naturally have sway over people.

Tribulations For Divine Friends

This is why when God shows special grace to one of His servants, He places him in hardships. The well-known sentence “البلاء للولاء” (“*Tribulations are for God's friends*”) expresses this principle.

In a tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqir ('a), we read,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لِيَتَعَاهَدَ الْمُؤْمِنَ بِالْبَلَاءِ كَمَا يَتَعَاهَدُ الرَّجُلَ أَهْلَهُ بِالْهَدِيَةِ مِنَ الْغِيْبَةِ

*“Verily God seeks out the believer with affliction as a man seeks out his near ones with gifts when he is away from them.”*¹²

In another tradition from Imam Ja`far Sadiq (‘a) we find:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ إِذَا أَحَبَّ عَبْدًا غَتَّهُ بِالْبَلَاءِ غَتًّا

“Verily God, when He loves a servant of His, drowns him in tribulations.” [13](#)

That is, just like a swimming trainer who puts his young trainee in the water so that he will make an effort, flail his hands and feet, and thus gain practice and learn to swim, so too God places in affliction those whom He loves and wishes to convey to perfection. Even if a person reads for his whole life about swimming, until he goes in the water, he will not become a swimmer; he will learn to swim only when he actually goes in the water, practices struggling against drowning, and occasionally sees himself in danger of drowning if he isn’t careful. Man must see hardships in the world in order to learn how to escape from them; he must face difficulties in order to become experienced and complete.

Regarding some birds, they have written that when their young grow wings, in order to teach them how to fly, they take them out of the nest and into the heights of the air, and then let go in the middle of the sky; the young bird, out of necessity, struggles and makes uncoordinated movements, flapping its wings until it gets tired and is about to fall; at this time, its merciful mother grasps it and places it on her own wing until its fatigue goes away, and as soon as it has had a little rest, she once again lets it go in the air and forces it to struggle until it gets tired and she again grasps it. She repeats this until her young one learns to fly.

The Prophet (s) was invited to the house of one of the Muslims. When he entered the house, he saw a hen that had laid an egg on top of a wall, but the egg didn’t fall, or fell and didn’t break. The Prophet (s) was amazed at this. His host said, “Does this amaze you? By God Who raised you as a prophet, I have never seen affliction.” The Prophet (s) stood up and left that man’s house, saying, “Someone who has never seen an affliction is not a recipient of God’s grace.”

It has been narrated from Imam Sadiq (‘a) that:

إِنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ بَلَاءً الْأَنْبِيَاءُ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ ثُمَّ الْأَمْتَلُ فَأَلَامَتُهُ

“Verily, the most severely tried people are the prophets, then those who follow them [in their level of virtue], and so on in order of [people’s level of] virtue.” [14](#)

In books of traditions, a special chapter has been dedicated to the severity of the trial of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and the Imams of his progeny.

For the friends of God, adversity is a Divine grace that has the face of wrath, just as blessings and ease for those who are astray and far from God’s favour may possibly be punishments with the apparent form of a blessing, and wrath disguised as grace.

Pedagogical Effect Of Calamities

Difficulty and hardship are both an instructor for individuals and awakener for nations. Hardship awakens and makes more alert those who were asleep and motivates people's decisions and determination. Like a polish given to iron or steel, the more hardships touch a person's soul, the more determined, active, and sharp they make him, since the peculiarity of life is to combat hardship and, knowingly or unknowingly, become prepared to face it.

Hardship, like alchemy, has the attribute of changing the essence of things; it changes the soul of a person. The elixir of life is two things: love and tribulation. These two create genius, and from depressed and lustreless matter make lustrous and shiny gems.

All his life Sa'di has faced bitterness,
For his name to be known as sweet-tongued

Peoples who live in the heart of difficulties and hardships become strong and determined. A leisure-seeking and pampered people are condemned and wretched.

It is within nature that disgrace must come
To every nation that becomes used to ease and leisure

How beautifully has Rumi expressed the story of the imprisonment of Yusuf ('a):

The loving friend came from the ends of the earth and became the guest of Joseph the truthful,
For they had been well acquainted in childhood, reclining (together) on the sofa of acquaintance.

He spoke to him (Joseph) of the injustice and envy of his brethren:

Joseph said, "That was (like) a chain, and I was the lion.

The lion is not disgraced by the chain: I do not complain of God's destiny.

If the lion had a chain on his neck, (yet) he was prince over all the chain-makers."

He asked, "How wert thou in regard to the prison and the well?"

"Like the moon," said Joseph, "in the interlunar period (when she is) on the wane."

If in that period the new moon is bent double, does not she at last become the full moon in the sky?
Though the seed-pearl is pounded in the mortar, it becomes the light of eye and heart and looks aloft.
They cast a grain of wheat under earth, then from its earth they raised up ears of corn;
Once more they crushed it with the mill; its value increased and it became soul- invigorating bread;

Again they crushed the bread under their teeth; it became the mind and spirit and understanding of one
endowed with reason;

Again, when that spirit became lost in Love, it became (as that which) rejoiceth the sowers after the
sowing. [15](#)

In another place, to convey this reality he relates the state of an animal that, however much it is beaten, becomes fatter:

There is an animal whose name is ushghur (porcupine): it is (made) stout and big by blows of the stick.

The more you cudgel it, the more it thrives: it grows fat on blows of the stick.

Assuredly the true believer's soul is a porcupine, for it is (made) stout and fat by the blows of tribulation.

For this reason the tribulation and abasement (laid) upon the prophets is greater than (that laid upon) all the (other) creatures in the world,

So that their souls became stouter than (all other) souls; for no other class of people suffered that affliction. [16](#)

Then he compares the effect of tribulation in purifying the soul to the mixtures used to purify skins when tanning them:

The hide is afflicted by the medicine (tan-liquor), (but) it becomes sweet like ^ḥaif leather.

And if he (the tanner) did not rub the bitter and acrid (liquor) into it, it would become fetid, unpleasant, and foul-smelling.

Know that Man is an untanned hide, made noisome and gross by humours.

Give (him) bitter and acrid (discipline) and much rubbing (tribulation), that he may become pure and lovely and exceedingly string;

But if you cannot (mortify yourself), be content, O cunning one, if God give you tribulation without choice (on your part),

For affliction (sent) by the Friend is (the means of) your being purified: His knowledge is above your contrivance. [17](#)

Ali ibn Jahm was a poet during the era of the `Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil; he was an able poet. He fell into imprisonment and has very sublime verses about the benefits of prison, its character-building, its being a matter of pride for people who are free, and finally about what virtues imprisonment represents and fosters. Mas`udi relates them in *Muruj al-Dhahab* and we relate them here:

They said, you have been jailed; I said it matters not;

What sharp sword isn't put in its scabbard?

Have you not seen the lion, how it keeps to one side

While the lowly beasts roam about?

And the fire, hidden inside its stones,

Not flaming up unless stirred by iron

Prison, if not entered on account of a crime

Is a wonderful abode to be in

Contentment With Divine Decree

It is in view of the valuable benefits of tribulations that the quality of contentment with Divine decree and pleasure at what God brings about is born.

Sa'di says

Let the shortsighted seek comfort

And the gnostic, affliction; for his ease is in tribulation

Leave all that you have and pass by, for it is nothing

This five days of life behind which is death

All who were killed by the sword of love –

Say grieve not, for their blood–money is the Eternal Kingdom

Whatever you get from the hand of a friend, give thanks

Sa'di, seek not your own pleasure, for this is His pleasure

In some of the prayers narrated from the Imams, we read:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ صَبْرَ الشَّاكِرِينَ لَكَ

“O God, I ask of You the patience of those thankful to You.”

The patience of the thankful is not a bitter patience; like honey, it is sweet. Those who know that tribulations are what build the soul of a human being are not only happy to face them and welcome them with open arms, they even occasionally put themselves in the claws of tribulation and create troubles for themselves; they create seas and whirlpools for themselves to swim in and become well–practiced.

Rumi, after the verses we related, says:

The affliction becomes sweet (to the sufferer) when he sees happiness: the medicine becomes sweet (to the sick man) when he regards health.

He sees victory for himself in the very essence of checkmate; therefore he says, “Kill me, O trusty ones!”

[18](#)

Sa'di says :

They bring precious stones from the mouths of whales

While he who fears for his life avoids the sea

Adversity And Blessings Are Relative

We should not be inattentive to the point that tribulations are only a blessing if a person makes use of them and makes his soul reach perfection with patience, perseverance, and by facing the hardships that

create tribulations. But if a person chooses to flee and complain in the face of hardships, in such a case, afflictions are truly an affliction for him.

The reality is that the blessings of the world, like tribulations, can be a source of ascent and felicity, and they can be a source of wretchedness and helplessness. Neither is poverty absolute wretchedness, nor is wealth absolute good felicity. How often has poverty caused the development and perfection of human beings, and how often has richness been a source of ill-luck and misery! Safety and insecurity are the same way. Some individuals or nations, in times of security and luxury, fall victim to worldliness and gluttony, and as a result fall into abasement. And many other nations, through the whip of hardship and hunger, get into motion and achieve power and honour. Health and sickness, honour and lowliness, and all other natural gifts and trials are also included in this law. Blessings, and likewise trials and tribulations, can be a gift—because each of them can be put to great use—and they can also be considered an affliction and misery—since it is possible for each to become a cause misery and descent. One can reach felicity both through wealth and through poverty; and through both it is also possible for a person to reach wretchedness.

Thus, for a blessing to be a blessing depends on how a person reacts to it, whether he or she is thankful or ungrateful. And similarly, for an adversity to be an adversity depends on how a person reacts to it, whether he or she is patient and forbearing or weak hearted and indecisive. In this way, one thing acquires two varying states with respect to two people; that is, it is a blessing for one and an adversity for another. This is the meaning of the statement, “Blessing and adversity are both relative.”

What should be called a calamity is that which is a nonmaterial Divine punishment; that is, the evil consequences of human actions. These are actual afflictions and adversities in that first, they are an effect of the intention and free will of man himself, and second, they are not a preliminary for any type of good or perfection. For example, hardheartedness is an affliction for a person, as has been said in a tradition:

ما ضرب الله عبداً بعقوبة أشد من قسوة القلب

God has not struck any [of His] servants with a punishment worse than hardheartedness. [19](#)

In the stories of the prophets, it is related that a man said to Prophet Shu‘ayb (‘a), “Why is it that I commit all these sins, but God does not punish me?” He replied, “You have been subjected to the worst of punishments without you knowing it.” Rumi explains this story in these words:

In the time of Shu‘ayb a certain man was saying, “God hath seen many a fault from me.
How many sins and trespasses hath He seen me commit!
And (still), God in His kindness does not punish me.”

In answer to him God Most High by the mysterious way spoke clearly into the ear of Shu‘ayb,

Saying, “(Tell him), Thou hast said, ‘How many sins have I committed! And (still) God in His kindness hath not punished me for my trespasses.’

Thou art saying the opposite and reverse (of the truth), O fool, O thou that hast abandoned the road and taken to the wilderness!

How oft, how oft do I chastise thee, and thou unaware!

Thou art lying (bound) in chains from head to foot.

Thy rust, coat on coat, O black pot, hath marred the visage of thy heart.

Layers of rust have collected upon thy heart, so that it hath become blind to (the spiritual) mysteries.”[20](#)

That is, your thinking is backwards. If God had involved you in an apparent punishment, which you would have felt to be a punishment, and if you were worthy of such a requital, it would be possible for that punishment not to actually be a punishment, but a Divine grace and mercy; for it might be a cause for you to wake up and take heed. But the punishment which you are currently involved in and which is a corollary of your actions is one which is entirely a punishment and nothing else.

Actual afflictions are the results and effects of a person’s actions, and it is with regard to these very effects and results and punishments that the Qur’an says,

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

and We did not wrong them, but they used to wrong themselves. (Qur’an, 16:118)

Rousseau has a book called *Émile* which is about raising a child. It is an interesting book. Émile is the name of a fictional child whom he places under his care in the book and looks after from all aspects, physical and emotional. In all cases, Rousseau’s idea is to put Émile in contact with and in the grasp of nature and to raise her in the lap of hardships.

He believes that the most unfortunate children are those whose parents pamper them and don’t let them taste the heat and cold of the world or feel its highs and lows. Such children become oversensitive to hardships and are indifferent towards pleasures. Like the narrow trunk of a small tree, they shiver in the face of every breeze, and the smallest bad event upsets them, to the extent that a small incident may make them contemplate suicide. And on the other hand, whatever pleasurable things they are given, they do not get excited or aroused. Such people can never perceive the taste of blessings; they have not tasted hunger for them to appreciate the flavour of food. The best foods are for them of less value and less satisfying than the barley bread that a village boy or girl may eat.

Why did Sadiq Hidayat commit suicide? One of the factors in his suicide was that he was an aristocrat. He had more pocket money than he needed but lacked a proper and methodical way of thinking. He was devoid of the gift of faith. He thought of the world as being pleasure-seeking, pointless, and foolish like himself. The pleasures that he knew and was familiar with were the dirtiest of pleasures; and of those

pleasures nothing worthwhile remained for life and existence to have the value of waiting for them. He could no longer derive enjoyment from the world. Many others like him lack systematic thought and are devoid of the gift of faith, but unlike him are not satiated and highborn, and life is still attractive for them, and so they are not pushed to commit suicide.

If the likes of Hidayat complain about the world and view it as ugly, they have no other choice; their luxurious lives demand as much. They are unable to sense the agreeable taste of Divine gifts. If they had taken Sadiq Hidayat to a village, thrown him behind an ox and plough, and made him taste hunger and nakedness, lashing him with a firm whip when necessary, and then when he was famished with hunger placed a piece of bread in front of him, then he would well understand the meaning of life; and water, bread, and the other material and nonmaterial conditions of life would have value and meaning for him.

In the first chapter of the *Gulistan*, Sa'di mentions the story of a man who sat with his servant on a boat. The servant had never seen the sea and was distressed and uneasy, to the extent that his agitation disturbed the other passengers of the boat. There was a wise man aboard; he said that he knew the solution and told them to throw the servant overboard. The servant, seeing himself face-to-face with death in the crashing and merciless waves of the sea, strove hard to reach the boat and save himself from drowning. After some fruitless struggling, and when he was about to drown, the wise man told them to rescue him. After this the servant was calm and said nothing. They asked the wise man about this; he said, "It was necessary for him to fall into the sea to know the value of the boat."

Without doubt, familiarity with sufferings is the condition of benefiting from pleasures. Unless a person goes to the depths of the valley, he doesn't perceive the might of the mountain. The fact that suicide is more common among the leisured class is partly because normally faithlessness is more common among them and partly because the wealthy class doesn't perceive the pleasure and value of life. Too much pleasure and comfort make a person callous and turn him into a numb and foolish being. Such a person commits suicide over insignificant things. The "philosophy of nihilism" in the west is partly a result of the loss of faith, and partly an effect of too much luxury. The west is sitting on the tablecloth of the east and sucking its blood; why shouldn't it speak of nihilism and emptiness?

Those who attribute suicide to sensitivity should know what kind of "sensitivity" this is. Their sensitivity is not of the form of taste and perception; it does not mean that they have a finer understanding and perceive things that others don't. Their sensitivity means they are unfeeling and numb towards the beauty of the world, easily lose heart in the face of difficulties, and are unable to face them. Such people may as well commit suicide, and so much the better that they do. They are a disgrace to humanity, and so much the better that human society be made pure of their unclean existence.

I once had a distant familiarity with someone and used to think he was among the luckiest of people. Every sort of material object was available to him. Money, wealth, position, fame, he had everything. We spoke about having children. He said, "I never wanted, and don't want, to have children." I asked why.

He said, "It's enough that I came into this world. Why should I bring about the suffering of another being? For him to suffer as I have?" This surprised me at first, but later as I became more familiar with him, I realized that he was being honest. In all his comfort and luxury, he saw nothing but pain and suffering. Usually people who we think have freed themselves of all suffering are in greater suffering than everyone else.

Yes, adversities and tribulations are great blessings for which one should be grateful; they are blessings in the apparent form of wrath. Similarly, sometimes wrath is manifested in the form of a blessing. One must, in turn, be grateful for these manifestations of wrath. But, in any case, one must bear in mind that for a blessing to be a blessing or an adversity to be an adversity depends on our reaction to it. We can change every adversity into a blessing, let alone those things that also happen to have the apparent form of a blessing. And we can turn every blessing into an adversity and misfortune, let alone those things that are in the clothing of misfortune and adversity.

Reconciliation Of Contradictories And Opposites

From the discussions we have had in this section, we reached the conclusion that the basic formula of the creation of the universe is the formula of opposition, and the world is nothing but a collection of opposites. Being and non-being, life and death, continuance and annihilation, sickness and health, youth and old age, and finally felicity and perdition in this world are together. In the words of Sa'di, "Treasure and snake, flower and thorn, grief and happiness are together."

Rumi says,

Pain is a treasure, for thee are mercies in it: the kernel becomes fresh when you scrape off the rind.
O brother, (to dwell in) a dark and cold place, to endure patiently sorrow and weakness and pain,
Is the Fountain of Life and the cup of (spiritual) intoxication, for those heights are all in lowliness.
That Spring is implied in autumn, and that autumn is (fulfilled) in the Spring: do not flee from it.
Be a fellow-traveller with grief, agree with desolation, seek long (lasting) life in thy death (to self). [21](#)

The changeability of the matter of the world and the occurrence of development originates from conflict. If not for conflict, there would be no variety and evolution, the world would not play a new role in every instant, and new pictures would not take shape on the pages of the world.

If we wish to give the issue a philosophical color, we should say that the ability of matter to accept various forms, and the mutual conflict of forms with one another, is a factor in both destruction and creation; destruction of the past and creation of the future; removal of the old forms and bringing in new ones. Both destruction and abandonment on one hand and variety and evolution on the other are an effect of conflict, because if a thing were not to be destroyed, there would be no meaning for its parts to be composed anew or evolve. Unless the parts and elements fight and influence each other, a middle composition and new compound will not come into being. So it is correct for us to say, "Conflict is the source of good, and the pillar of the world and the order of the universe are based on it." In the first

section of this book, when we spoke of the essence of justice, we related the meaningful words of Mulla Sadra in the second volume of *Asfar* about how two demands exist in matter (*mawadd*) and forms and how those very conflicting demands necessitate the continuous change of images. Now we relate another of his statements.

Elsewhere, Mulla Sadra says,

لولا التّضاد ما صحّ دوام الفيض عن المبدأ الجواد

"If not for conflict, the eternal grace of the Benevolent Origin [God] would not exist."[22](#)

The world of nature is full of links and breaks, cuts and stitches, and this is a corollary of the peculiar make of the universe. The matter of the universe is like capital that circulates, and the profit it generates is due to its circulation. If the universe were fixed and unchanging, it would be like stagnant capital which neither produces profit nor results in loss.

A specific capital that circulates within a market sometimes results in profit and sometimes in loss; but if we look at the total of capital, then no longer is there any loss, and the circulation of capital definitely results in gain and increase.

In the order of the world as well, for all its matter to be put to use, which takes place through the formula of the potentiality of matter and the conflict among forms, is without doubt profitable and conveys the world towards perfection. In dialectic logic, the issue of "conflict" has been given extraordinary importance and became the basis of the dialectic worldview. But much before the appearance of this philosophy, the philosophers and gnostics of Islam paid attention to the principle of conflict and expressed interesting views in this regard; and even from some quotations from Greek philosophy it appears that attention to this principle had precedent in Greece as well.

ʿAllāma Ṣāwī relates in *Tafsir al-Jawahir* [a commentary on the Qur'an] from Socrates that he used the "principle of conflict" as a proof of life after death.

ʿAllāma Ṣāwī writes: When they wished to put Socrates to death, in the last moments of his life, he reasoned as follows to prove that there is life after death:

"We see that in the world opposites are constantly created from one another: beauty from ugliness, justice from injustice, wakefulness from sleep, sleep from wakefulness, strength from weakness, and so forth... everything comes into being from its opposite. Death and life and non-being and being as well will be within this general law; and for this reason out of death, another life must come into being, or else, the general law of nature will be contradicted."

About the development of opposites within each other, Rumi says

(When) he came to himself, he said, "O Sea of bliss, O Thou who has stored (transcendental) forms of consciousness in unconsciousness.

Thou hast stored a wakefulness in sleep, Thou hast fastened (attached) a dominion over the heart to the sate of one who has lost his heart.

Thou dost conceal riches in the lowliness of poverty, Thou dost fasten the neckless of wealth to the iron collar of poverty.”

Contrary is secretly enclosed in contrary: fire is enclosed in boiling water.

A (delightful) garden is enclosed in Nimrod’s fire: revenues grow from giving and spending;

So that Mustafa (Muḥammad), the Kind of prosperity, has said, “O possessors of wealth, munificence is a gainful trade.”

Riches were never diminished by alms-giving: in sooth, acts of charity are an excellent means of attaching (wealth) to one’s self.

The sweet fruit is hidden in boughs and leaves: the everlasting life is (hidden) under death. [23](#)

At the bottom of the sea there are pearls (mingled) with pebbles: glories are (to be found) amidst shames. [24](#)

From the day when thou camest into existence, thou wert fire or air or earth.

The Transmuter did not leave thee in thy first (state of) existence: he established a better (state of) existence in place of that (former one);

And so on till (He gave thee) a hundred thousand states of existence, one after the other, the second (always) better than the beginning. [25](#)

When you consider, this world is all at strife, mote with mote, as religion (is in conflict) with infidelity.

One mote is flying to the left, and another to the right in search.

War of nature, war of action, war of speech—there is a terrible conflict amongst the parts (of the universe).

This world is maintained by means of this war: consider the elements, in order that it (the difficulty) may be solved.

The four elements are four strong pillars by which the roof of the present world is (kept) upright.

Each pillar is a destroyer of the other: the pillar (known as) water is a destroyer of the flames (of fire).

Hence the edifice of creation is (based) upon contraries; consequently we are at war for weal and woe.

My states (of mind and body) are mutually opposed: each one is mutually opposite in its effect.

Behold the surging armies of my “states,” each at war and strife with another. [26](#)

Ibn Khaldun, as quoted by ‘Ali al-Wardi in the book *al-Mahzala*, says,

إِنَّ التَّنَازُعَ عُنْصُرٌ أَسَاسِيٌّ مِنْ عُنَاصِرِ الطَّبِيعَةِ الْبَشَرِيَّةِ.

“Conflict is a fundamental element of human nature.”

Hegel, the well-known German philosopher, a portion of whose words we quoted earlier, has a particular

view about opposites which is known as “Hegelian dialectics” and is excessively relied on by those with claims to philosophy. He says,

“Every condition of thought or of things, and every concept or state in the world is strongly pulled towards its opposite, and then merges with it to form a greater and more complex whole... Every state and every effect necessitates an opposite which evolution must conciliate and convert to unity.”²⁷

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has indicated the law of opposition in numerous places in his sermons. In sermon 184 [of *Nahj al-Balagha*] he says,

بِتَشْعِيرِهِ الْمَشَاعِرَ عُرِفَ أَنْ لَا مَشْعَرَ لَهُ وَبِمُضَادَّتِهِ بَيْنَ الْأَشْيَاءِ عُرِفَ أَنْ لَا ضِدَّ لَهُ وَبِمُقَارَنَتِهِ بَيْنَ الْأَشْيَاءِ عُرِفَ أَنْ لَا قَرِينَ لَهُ ضِدَّ النُّورِ بِالظُّلْمَةِ وَالْوُضُوحَ بِالْبُهْمَةِ وَالْجُمُودَ بِالْبَلَلِ، وَالْحَرُورَ بِالصَّرْدِ، مَوْلَفَ بَيْنَ مُتَعَادِيَاتِهَا، مُقَارَنَ بَيْنَ مُتَبَايِنَاتِهَا، مَقْرَّبَ بَيْنَ مُتَبَاعِدَاتِهَا، مَفْرَقَ بَيْنَ مُتَدَانِيَاتِهَا

Here, the Imam (‘a) makes use, in recognition of God, of the principle “He is like nothing else” and makes a negative comparison between God and the world.

The translation and meaning of the passage is,

From the fact that God created the sensory organs it becomes known that He has no sensory organs. (In other words, the fact that He has placed a means and a place for perception in His creations is proof that His own perception is not through any means or any place.) From the opposition He has placed between existent things it is known that He has no opposite. From the parity He placed between things it becomes known that He has no peer. He placed opposition between light and darkness, clarity and ambiguity, dryness and wetness, hot and cold. He conciliates conflicting natures, brings together things that are separated, brings near things that are far from each other, and separates things that are near each other.

In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balagha*, he says of the creation of Adam (‘a):

مَعْجُونًا بِطِينَةِ الْأَلْوَانِ الْمُخْتَلِفَةِ وَالْأَشْبَاهِ الْمُؤْتَلِفَةِ وَالْأَضْدَادِ الْمُتَعَادِيَةِ وَالْأَخْلَاطِ الْمُتَبَايِنَةِ

Here, after explaining that God formed Adam’s dust from various parts of the earth and then blew a spirit into him, the Imam (‘a) describes the created human:

“admixed with various natures, harmonious and similar parts as well as conflicting opposites and separate components.”

The Philosophic Basis Of Opposition

In a world formed by movement, opposition must necessarily predominate, since as philosophers have

said, “Motion is not possible without the existence of obstacles.” [28](#) Motion is effort and struggling, and effort takes place when there is friction and collision.

To explain this in another way, it can be said that no natural motion is possible without force. A body will only move towards its natural place if it is not in its natural place; but when it is in its natural place, it will be inert and motionless. The human being as well rushes towards perfection when he lacks it. Human felicity is always in wanting something, and want occurs when there is lack and deprivation. [29](#)

Dialectic logic, to the extent that it relies on the principle of opposition and the principle of the interconnection of the parts of nature, is acceptable. These principles were given attention by Divine philosophers from the earliest days. What separates our path from theirs, and in reality is considered the basic kernel of dialectic thought from Hegel onward consists of other issues; among which is that thought, like matter, is under the sway of the law of motion and opposition and so on. The laws of motion, opposition, and mutual influence are correct to the extent that they relate to nature, and they are philosophical principles. But when they wish to make knowledge subordinate to these laws—and it is for this reason that they call it “logic”—it is not acceptable, though this is not the place to discuss this point.

[30](#)

Summary And General Conclusion

This concludes our discussion of evils from the aspect of Divine justice. We discuss the issue of death in a separate section with a special view. Here, we consider it necessary to summarize and state the general principles that have been mentioned so far in addition to what was said at the end of section four.

1. The attribute of “wisdom,” or “being wise,” with regard to God and man is true in two different senses. For a human to be wise means that he or she has a reasonable aim in every action, and in every action chooses the highest and most worthy goals and the best tools. But God is the absolutely free of need and seeks no goal; no perfection can be conceived which He lacks, for Him to seek it. For Him to be Wise means that He conveys beings to the perfections appropriate to them, to the extent possible for them. His action is to originate—which means to convey things to being, which is a perfection—or to plan and make complete and lead things to their secondary perfections, which is another form of conveying things to their perfections.

Some questions and objections come about because of a false comparison of God’s being Wise with a human being’s being wise. Usually when it is asked, “Why has such-and-such a thing come into existence?” the questioner has thought to himself, “What aim did God have in doing this?” without realizing that if we consider God to have goals like people do, it means that, like people, God compensates with His actions for His shortcomings and perfects Himself. If one realizes from the beginning that God’s being Wise means that His actions have a goal, not His Essence, and the wisdom of every created being is the goal hidden in its creation, and God’s Wisdom entails Him leading created

beings to their natural goals, the answer will be clear from the start.

2. Divine bounty, meaning the bounty of being that incorporates the entire universe, has a peculiar order; that is, antecedence and posteriority and cause and effect are supreme in it. And this order cannot be controvened; that is, it is not possible for any being to stay back from its own position and occupy another's position. The evolutionary course of beings, and especially the evolutionary path of the human being, does not involve a turning away from one's own position and occupying another's. Instead, it denotes the "existential breadth" of man. The corollary of having levels and degrees is that a form of difference in terms of deficiency and perfection and strength and weakness exists among them, and such differences are not discrimination.

3. The works of God are general, not particular, and necessary, not coincidental.

The other source of mistakes in this area is a comparison of God's actions with human actions in terms of it being thought that it is possible for God's actions, like people's, to be particular and coincidental.

The human being, by virtue of being a creation among God's creatures and a part of the overall order with his intention being a plaything of particular and accidental causes, decides, for example, to make a house in a particular time and place—and of course, under particular conditions. He collects an amount of bricks, cement, iron, sand, and lime, which have no natural connection with each other, and with a series of artificial compounds links them together in a particular form and makes a house.

How about God? Is God's firm work of the form of making an artificial and temporary link between two alien things?

The creation of artificial and temporary links is appropriate for a creature like the human being, who first, is a part of the existing order and is subject to its laws; second, who wishes to make use of the existing powers and properties of things; third, whose intention is a plaything of particular causes (such as protecting oneself from heat and cold by means of a house); and fourth, whose causation is limited to causation of motion, not creative causation. That is, he doesn't create anything, but instead links existing things by means of moving them around. But God is a creative actor; He is the Creator of things with all their powers, strengths, and properties; and those powers and properties act in the same manner in all cases.

For example, God creates fire, water, and electricity, while man, by forging a sort of artificial link, makes use of existing water, fire, and electricity. He creates this artificial link in such a way that he uses it in one moment or instance in which it is useful for him (for example by turning on the electricity), and, in another moment when it is not useful for him he doesn't make use of it (for example, by turning off the electricity). But God is the Creator and Originator of these affairs with all their properties and effects. The corollary of the existence of fire is that it warms or burns. The corollary of electricity is that it gives light or creates motion. God did not create fire or electricity for a specific person, and it is meaningless for Him to have done so, for example for it to warm his cottage but not burn his clothes. God created fire, which

has the property of burning. So in terms of the infinite Divine wisdom, fire must be taken in view in its entirety in the order of being to see whether its being in the entire universe is beneficial and necessary, or extraneous and harmful—not in its particularity, as to whose house it warmed and whose storage area it burned.

In other words, in addition to the fact that goals must be considered the goals of God's action and not His essence, we should know that the goals of God's actions are universal goals, not particular ones, and they are necessary ones, not accidental.

4. For a thing to come into being, it is not enough for God's causality to be complete; the potentiality of the recipient is also necessary. The non-potentiality of the recipient is a cause for beings to remain deprived of certain gifts. Evils that are of the form of non-being, which were indicated earlier, such as inabilities, weaknesses, and ignorance, in terms of their relation to the Divine Essence—that is, in terms of the entirety of the system (not in terms of their relation to human beings, or the particular and accidental aspects of the order)—spring from deficiencies of potentiality.

5. God, just as He is necessarily existent by essence, is necessary from all aspects; thus, He is necessarily bountiful and necessarily existent. It is impossible for a being to have the possibility of existing or of reaching perfection, and for God not to show His bounty and bestow existence. In certain instances when it appears that a being has the potential for a certain perfection but remains devoid of it, that is a possibility in accordance with particular and accidental causes, not a possibility in terms of the universal and necessary causes.

6. Evils are either non-beings or beings that are a source of non-being in other things, and they are evil inasmuch as they are sources of non-being.

7. The evilness of the second type of evils lies in their relational and relative being, not in their in-itself being.

8. That which actually exists, is created, and has a cause is real existence, not relational existence.

9. Evils are all created subordinately and figuratively, and not in actuality.

10. The universe is a single indivisible unit; removing some of its parts and keeping some of them is a false supposition and a game of the thought.

11. Evil and good are not two separate formations; they are mixed together. Non-beings and beings, relational beings and real beings are inseparable from one another.

12. Not only are non-beings inseparable from beings and relational beings from real beings, but real beings themselves are also linked and inseparable by virtue of the principle of the indivisibility of the universe.

13. Beings have one ruling in terms of their individuality and independence, and another ruling in terms of their being a part and member of a body.
14. Wherever the principle of linkage rules, individual and independent being is suppositional and derivational.
15. If not for evil and ugliness, there would be no meaning for good and beauty.
16. Evil and ugliness manifest good and beauty.
17. Evil is a source of good and adversities are a source of felicities.

- [1.](#) Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.
- [2.](#) This poem has also been attributed to Baba Afṣal.
- [3.](#) Clarke, Ghazal 64.
- [4.](#) The prophet Joseph, who was the epitome of human beauty.
- [5.](#) A medieval literate known for his ugliness.
- [6.](#) The prophet Moses.
- [7.](#) Aaron of the bible.
- [8.](#) Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 524, vr. 4830.
- [9.](#) The word “fanṣab” can mean either “appoint” or “make effort”; in this discussion, the author relies on the latter meaning.
- [10.](#) Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 45
- [11.](#) This point does not contradict the negation of hardship in religion, which is an established principle, because the meaning of negation of hardship is not that training and duty do not exist in religion. Instead, the meaning is that commands that prevent human advancement and conflict with proper activity do not exist in religion. Religious laws have been written so that they neither encumber nor encourage laziness.
- [12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, part one, p. 56, from al-Kafi
- [13.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, part one, p. 55, from al-Kafi
- [14.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, part one, p. 56, from al-Kafi
- [15.](#) Nicholson, vol. 1, p. 172, vr. 3157-68.
- [16.](#) Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 277, vrs. 97-101.
- [17.](#) Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 277, vrs. 102-7.
- [18.](#) Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 278, vrs. 108-9.
- [19.](#) Irshad al-Qulub, al-Daylami
- [20.](#) Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 396, vrs. 3364-71.
- [21.](#) Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 396, vrs. 2261-5.
- [22.](#) al-Asfar, vol. 3, p. 117
- [23.](#) Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 454, vrs. 3567-73, 3576.
- [24.](#) Nicholson, vol. 3, p. 50, vr. 866.
- [25.](#) Nicholson, vol. 5, p. 49, vrs. 789,791-2.
- [26.](#) Nicholson, vol. 6, p. 260, vrs. 36-7,46-51,53.
- [27.](#) Durant
- [28.](#) ‘Abi’iyyat al-Shifa’, section 1, article 4, chapter 9. also al-Asfar, “al-Umur al-`Amma,” level 8, chapter 14
- [29.](#) Refer to the article “Aṣl al-Ta’add dar Falsafe-ye Islami” by the author, in the periodical Maqalat va Bar-rasiha, ed. 1 (found in vol. 1 of the author’s book Maqalat-e Falsafi)
- [30.](#) Refer to vol. 1, 2, and 4 of Usul-e Falsafe va Ravish-e Ri’alizm and the epistle “The Rising and Revolution of the Mahdi (a) from the Viewpoint of the Philosophy of History” by the author

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