

Justice

Justice - An Excerpt from Murtada Mutahhari's Divine Justice



Murtadha Mutahhari

**Translated by
Shuja' 'Ali Mirza**

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SHARES

Authors(s):

[Murtadha Mutahhari](#) [2]

Translator(s):

[Shuja' 'Ali Mirza](#) [3]

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What Is Justice?

One of the first matters that must be addressed is the question: What is justice? What is injustice? Until the concept of justice is not clearly and exactly defined, all of our efforts will be futile and we will be prone to error. Generally speaking, the word “justice” has been used in four senses or for four situations. These will be dealt with in what follows.

A. Balance

If we take a system or collectivity into consideration that is composed of various parts and that is made for a specific purpose, certain conditions—such as the amounts of the component parts and the way that they are put together—must be met before the desired effect is reached and the system subsists and continues to play the role that it was meant to. For example, if any given society wants to subsist and endure, it must be balanced. That is to say, everything in it must be to the extent required, but not necessarily in equal amounts. A balanced society needs various specialties and fields—political, cultural, legal, and educational. These must be divided up among the people and every field must have appointed to it the right amount of manpower.

To be a balanced society, it is necessary that the right level and scale of needs is taken into consideration and the appropriate resources—human and material—are allocated. It is exactly here that the ideas of “good policy” and “expediency” come into play; or rather the idea of the “general good”, meaning the good that involves the subsistence of the “generality” or “society” and its goals. According to this perspective, the part or individual is but a means and is not taken into account independently.

Much the same can be said about balances of the physical world. For example, if a machine that is made for a particular purpose and requires various components for its structure is to be in a steady state, it must have the necessary amounts of those components and elements.

Chemical balances are also like this. Every chemical agent has a particular formula and there is a particular relationship between the elements that compose it. It is only by following the formula and the various quantities that it calls for that a certain balance reached and the agent produced.

The world is balanced and in an equilibrium. If it wasn't, then it would not subsist; there would be no particular order, economy, or continuity. The Qur'an says:

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ

He raised the heaven high and set up the balance (Qur'an, 55:7)

The commentators have said that the meaning of this verse is that a certain balance has been taken into account in the structure of the world. Each and every thing has been made using just the right amounts of the elements composing it and the right distances. In a tradition from the Prophet (S) it is said:

بالعدل قامت السموات والأرض

The heavens and the earth are maintained with justice.^{[1](#)}

The opposite of “justice” (*adl*) in this meaning of the word (i.e. balance) is “imbalance” or “inexpediency”, not “injustice” (*zulm*). Hence, justice in this first sense of the word is not the subject of our discussion and is outside its scope.

Many of those who wanted to address the criticisms of the Divine justice doctrine related to the problem evil, discrimination, and disasters, did so by recourse to the balance–imbalance paradigm of justice. They did this by sufficing themselves with the explanation that these evils, differences, and disasters are necessary for the general and overall order of the world. There is no doubt that from the perspective of universal order and the checks and balances required in its maintenance, the existence of all that subsists is necessary. But this does not answer the problem of evil and injustice.

The discussion of justice in its meaning of balance and propriety is with reference to the entire and total world order, whereas in the meaning where justice is opposed to injustice (and not imbalance or impropriety) the arguments pertain to each and every part or individual in isolation from others. Justice in the first sense talks about expediency and good of the whole, while justice in the second sense speaks to the issue of individual rights. If someone was to take the first meaning, an antagonist could argue in the following manner: I do not deny the existence of a balance and propriety in the world as a whole, but

what I say is that the implementation of this balance and the observance of this propriety necessarily brings in its wake a series of inequalities and discriminations. These inequalities and partialities are justifiable in the big picture and according to the whole, but they are inexplicable in relation to the individual or part.

Justice in its meaning of propriety and balance corresponds to the Divine attributes of wisdom and omniscience. For it is the wise and omniscient God who, due to His comprehensive knowledge and eternal wisdom, knows what component elements are needed and in what amounts and commissions those exact same amounts.

B. Equality And Non-Discrimination

Sometimes they say that a certain person is just. What they mean is that he is not partial and does not differentiate between people. Hence justice is made to be the same as equality.

This definition needs to be explained. For if what is meant is that justice requires all merits to be set aside and that all are to be regarded in one way by an act of levelling, then this “justice” is actually injustice and oppression. If an equal bestowal is justice, then an equal retention is also justice. The famous figure of speech, “Oppression given out equally to everyone is justice,” comes from such a perspective.

But if what is meant by this second sense of justice is the application of equality in cases of equal merit, then this is correct. For justice calls for such equal treatments and these equalities are the corollary of justice. But it must be noted that this meaning is based on the third meaning that will be presented next.

C. Rights-Giving To Each Thing Its Due

The third sense of justice pertains to giving to every holder of rights, his rights. Injustice then becomes transgressing, withholding, or disposing of the rights of others. This meaning is the true meaning of social justice—the justice which must be observed in human legal codes and which must be honoured by all individuals. This type of justice is based on two things: First, rights and priorities. In other words, individuals acquire certain rights and priorities with respect to one another. For example, the person who produces a product with his labour has priority with respect to that product. The source and basis of this priority is his work and activity. Similarly, a baby that is born of a mother has certain rights and priorities over the mother's milk. The basis of this priority is Mother Nature who in its purposefulness created the milk for that child.

Another example pertains to an innate character trait of man, who has been created in such a way that he makes use of conventional ideas or concepts as instruments and a means to achieve his natural ends. These notions are imperative and are specified by “musts” or dos and don'ts. One of these is: If the individuals of a society are to be personally successful, they must observe rights and priorities. This is the concept of human justice that the conscience of every person recognizes and accepts. It is this

meaning of justice which has as its opposite the reprehensible qualities of injustice and oppression.

Mawlana Rumi² says in his famous poem:

What is justice? To put (a thing) in its (right) place.

What is injustice? To put it in its wrong place.³

What is justice? Giving water to trees.

What is injustice? To give water to thorns.⁴

(If) you put the king in the rook's place, 'tis ruin;

Likewise, (if you put) the elephant (rook) in the king's place, it's ignorance.⁵

This meaning of justice and injustice, because, on the one hand, it is based on the principle of precedence and priority, and on the other hand, it is due to an innate human predilection forcing man to make use of conventions, fabricate do's and don'ts, and abstract good and evil, it is peculiar to man and does not apply to the Divine realm. For just as we previously saw, God is the absolute owner and sovereign and no existent has precedence over Him in any manner whatsoever. However, God wishes to dispose of a thing, He has a total right as that thing is dependent on God for its very being and is in His ownership. It is for this reason that injustice, in this meaning of transgressing on another's rights or violating his person or property, is inconceivable in God's case and is impossible in actuality.

D. Emanation Or Bestowal Of Being On Merits And Not Abstaining From This In Respect Of That Which Can Possibly Exist Or Be Further Perfected

We will see later on that the differentiation of existents is due to their varying potentials and abilities in receiving grace and emanations from the source and origin of being. Every existent, whatever its level, from the point of view of its potential for receiving grace, has certain merits and rights for itself. God, who is all-Perfect, all-Good, and the absolute bestower of grace, gives to each thing its possible existence and perfections. Hence justice is onto logically defined according to this perspective as: every existent acquiring the degree of existence and perfection that it merits and is possible for it. Injustice then lies in preventing an existent from receiving such grace as it merits and is its due. According to the philosophers and sages, the attribute of justice that is worthy of God and is affirmed of Him as a perfection is in this very meaning. In a similar way, the attribute of injustice that is an imperfection and is negated of God is also in the meaning mentioned above.

The philosophers believe that there is no existent that has any rights over God, so that we could speak of God being responsible for giving those rights to it; and then go on to call God "just" because He has performed all of His duties towards others to a tee. This is not the case and God's justice is His graciousness and is identical with His being. That is to say, God's justice lies in not withholding His grace

from any creature that has any capacity whatsoever for receiving it. This is the meaning of the words of Imam Ali (a) [6](#) where he says:

فَالْحَقُّ ... لَا يَجْرِي لِأَحَدٍ إِلَّا جَرَى عَلَيْهِ وَلَا يَجْرِي عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا جَرَى لَهُ وَ لَوْ كَانَ لِأَحَدٍ أَنْ يَجْرِيَ لَهُ وَلَا يَجْرِيَ عَلَيْهِ لَكَانَ ذَلِكَ خَالِصاً لِلَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ دُونَ خَلْقِهِ

A right ... does not accrue to any person unless it counts against him also, and it does not count against a person unless it also accrues in his favour. If it were to accrue (only) in favour of a person without (in turn) counting against him, then this (situation) would be solely for Allah, the Glorified, and not for His creatures. [7](#)

Now with this the only correct yardstick of justice in hand, we must look among the many examples of so called “evil”, “injustice”, and “discrimination”, to see if there really is in these instances an existent among existents that could have existed in the total order but did not acquire existence; or could have had a particular perfection in the grand scheme of things but did not receive it; or perhaps it was given something that it should not have. In other words, did God give such an existent something that is evil and a defect in place of something that is good and a perfection?

In the second volume of his book *Astir*, during the discussion of specific forms, Mulla Sadra [8](#) has a chapter entitled, “What is the Existential Modality of Contingent Existents?” In this chapter he refers to the concept of justice in the meaning and style of the philosophers. He writes:

“You previously saw that matter and form are the proximate co-causes of material things. From their mutual dependency it was concluded that there must be an efficient cause beyond the material and physical one. We will later prove in the discussion on “General Movement” that each and every motion has a metaphysical end. The metaphysical agent and the metaphysical end are two remote causes of material existents. If these two remote causes were sufficient in the existence of material things, then material things would subsist forever and annihilation or non-existence would not apply to them. Moreover, they would have all the perfections they merit from the start, their first state being the same as their last. The two remote causes are not sufficient and the two proximate ones (matter and form) are also effectual.

There is on one hand opposition between forms, and the initial states of forms are prone to decay—on the other hand, every matter has the potential for accepting opposing forms. Hence every existent acquires two opposing merits and aptitudes, one due to the form and the other due to the matter. The form calls for subsistence and maintaining the present state of the existent, whereas matter calls for change in state and taking on a form other than the first one. Because it is not possible for these two opposing “rights” or precedences to be fulfilled simultaneously, as it is not possible for matter to have simultaneous opposing forms ...

Divine benefaction causes the completion and perfection of the matter of this world—the lowest of all the worlds—by means of forms. It is for this reason that God in His Divine wisdom ordained perpetual motion and unending time. He also destined matter to be perpetually in flux—constantly changing with different forms through time, one replacing the other out of necessity and every state or form having a specific period so that it can in its turn take advantage of existence. Now because matter is common to these forms, each form has certain rights over the others and demands rights from them. Justice dictates that the matter of this form be given to the other and the matter of the second one be given to this one. In this way matter is passed on hand to hand between the forms. It is because of this “justice” and the observance of the innate merits and rights of things that we see in the world the continuity and subsistence of species and not individuals.”

Another question comes up at this point. If all things are equal before God, there is no such thing as “merits” or “rights” for there then to be “justice” as the observance of these rights. So, if we speak about justice in the case of God, it can only be as the observance and application of “equality”. This then means that justice in its meaning of the observance of rights and merits, and justice in its meaning of the observance of equality, both give the same results in the case of God. Hence Divine justice must dictate that there cannot be any differences and discriminations between created beings. But in reality, we see that there are scores of differences—whatever there is comprises contrasts, differing types, and oppositions.

The answer to this is that the concept of the rights of things in relation to the Divine revolves around the need and possibility, or perfection, of existence. Because God is the agent par excellence and the necessary bestower, He bestows existence or perfections on every existent that can possibly exist or has the possibility for any type of perfection whatsoever. Divine justice then—as we saw in the quote from Mulla Sadra—is the bestowal of universal grace to all existents that have the possibility of existence or further existential perfections, without the least bit of meanness or discrimination.

Now as to the question of the ultimate source of differences in merits and potentials: Given God's universal and infinite grace, how is it that things are essentially different – different in their potentials, possibilities, and merits or rights? We hope, God willing, to take up this discussion in the next section.

Objections And Criticisms

Let's see what questions have been posed in this regard.

The first question is: Why are there distinctions and variety in the world? Why is one person white and another black, one ugly and another handsome, one healthy and another ill? Or why, for that matter, is one being a human and another being a goat or a worm? Why are some things mineral and others plants? Why are some people angelic and some others devilish fiends? Why aren't all things the same? Why aren't all people white, or all people black? Why aren't they all ugly or all beautiful? Assuming we accept that there should be differences, why is it that the white man wasn't made black, or the black

wasn't created white? Why wasn't the ugly man made handsome or the beautiful woman ugly?

Another set of questions pertain to annihilation and nonexistence. Why do things come into existence and then become non-existent? Why has death been ordained? Why does man come into this world and then leave it before he has tasted the pleasures of this life or before having found faith in an eternal afterlife?

To throw light on the connection between this question and the issue of justice, one can quote the saying: "Utter nonexistence is better than an imperfect existence." To explain: nobody and nothing has any rights while it is non-existent. But as soon as it comes into existence, it gains the right to subsist and perpetuate. If it didn't exist at all it would have been better off and at ease as that is better than being created and being taken away as a loser; hence such a coming into being is injustice.

Another question is: Setting aside the temporal limitations of created beings, what is the reason for such imperfections as ignorance, incapacity, weakness, and poverty?

This question pertains to the issue of justice in the following manner: It is imagined that the withholding of graces such as knowledge, power, and wealth from creatures that need them is injustice. In this objection it has been assumed that the thing that has not come into being yet has no rights, but as soon as it comes into being it naturally gains the rights that accompany life and existence. Hence ignorance, incapacity, weakness, poverty, hunger, and the like, are a type of deprivation from rights.

Granted the existence of differentiation and discrimination and the fact that all things must at one point cease to exist, and given the reality that some things come into this world while not being given some of the necessities and accessories of life, the question remains: what is the purpose of disasters, plagues, and calamities that exterminate an existent half the way down the road, or that make its existence full of unease, pain, and suffering? What is the rhyme and reason behind killer-viruses, diseases, oppressions and repressions, robberies, floods, storms, earthquakes, separations, calamities, wars, oppositions, Satan, the carnal soul...?

These then are the types of questions that are posed surrounding the issue of justice and injustice. No doubt these very same questions or ones resembling them with minor variations could be asked with regard to other theological topics. For instance, topics such as: ends and final causes, cause and effect, providence, and the Divine attributes. It is said, if creation had a purpose and end or some type of overruling wisdom in the works, then all things would have some use. Hence, a useless or harmful creature should not have been created; or a possibly useful one should not have been left uncreated. But the existence of discrimination, contrast, annihilation, ignorance, impoverishment and incapacity, shows that certain phenomena should have been created and present. Phenomena such as: equality, subsistence, knowledge, power, and the like, should have been there but were not created. On the other hand, things which are either useless or harmful were created—things such as diseases, earthquakes, etc. When all of these things are put alongside God's supreme wisdom and justice in its meaning of

equality and balance, it just doesn't add up.

These questions and issues, with slight variations, can also be posed with regards to the subject of *tawhid*, in the discussions on “good and evil.” In this case the objection put forth is: There is a double standard at play in the universe, hence there must be duality at the root of the matter. Philosophers discuss the topic of “good and evil” sometimes in the subject of *tawhid* when arguing against the theory of “Duality,” and sometimes in the subject of Providence where they speak of God's overruling and encompassing wisdom. In the latter discussion it is said that Providence dictates that all that exists must be good and perfect—the existing order and design must be the best one possible—hence evil and imperfections, things which ruin the best order scenario, must not exist; while we see that they do exist.

We are going to approach the issues and questions here from the perspective of justice and injustice, but whether we like it or not, other aspects will come into the scene and will also be resolved along with the rest. We have previously stated that the idea of justice as the opposite of injustice is to be taken in its meaning of the observance of innate merits and capacities and not in the meanings of balance or equality. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, the observance of merits and rights in the case of God corresponds to what the philosophers have seen and understood and not to what others have assumed or thought.

Justice As A Pillar Of Faith And Principle Of Religion

Doubts and objections regarding theological issues normally pertain to theologians, philosophers, and experts of the field. The substance of these debates is usually beyond the scope of laymen and both the objections and the responses are discussed on a level higher than that of the laity. But the outstanding objections and problems surrounding the issue of Divine justice are not like this, and they are current even on the lower and popular level of the masses. Both the illiterate villager and the erudite philosopher think about this topic in some form.

It is because of this that the issue of justice is situated so strategically and has special importance. This also could be a possible explanation as to why Islamic scholars (the Shia and Mu'tazilah, not the Ash'arites) have placed justice alongside the “principles of religion” and have counted it as the second root or principle out of the five principles of religion. In any case, “justice” is also one of the Divine attributes; but if the Divine attributes were to be among the principles of religion, then it would be necessary to include other attributes such as knowledge, power, will....

But the real reason why the Shia have counted justice as one of the principles of religion is something else. To explain, the Shia and Sunni do not differ on most of the Divine attributes. And even if they do differ, it is not something that has received much consideration. But with regards to justice, there are serious differences and these differences have received considerable attention and airing. To the extent that, they have become the criteria and distinguishing marks of the various schools of thought. It is by use of these criteria that we can tell a Shia from a Sunni and within the Sunnis, a Mu'tazili from an

Ash'ari. The doctrine of justice by itself was the sign of not being an Ash'ari. Justice along with Imamate were considered as the marks of the Shia. This is why it was said that the principles of religion or pillars of faith in Islam are three in number and the principles of the Shia sect are those three with the addition of the principle of justice and the principle of Imamate.

Justice And Wisdom

As we have seen previously, among the Divine attributes, there are two which bear a resemblance to each other when the doubts and objections with regard to them are considered: justice and wisdom.

By God's justice what is meant is that He does not leave the merits and capacities of any existent unattended to and hanging in the air, as it were. On the contrary he gives to everything its due. By God's wisdom what is meant is that God's creation and design is the best possible. Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi⁹ writes in verse:

Other than the judgement of truth which is the judgement,

There is no judgement which outstrips the judgement of the Truth.

Whatever there is, must be so;

That which must not be so, is not.

Divine wisdom and providence imply the existence of a purpose and meaning for the world. Whatever exists is either itself good or is a means to goodness. Wisdom is an aspect of both knowledge and will. It is the reality that throws light on the final cause of the world. Justice, on the other hand, is not directly connected with the attributes of knowledge and willpower. Justice in the meaning that was given for it, pertains to God's efficiency and role as agent. In other words, it is an attribute of act and not an attribute of essence.

The objection common to both Divine justice and Divine wisdom is the problem of evil. The issue of evil can be raised as an objection under the heading of "injustice" when it comes to justice, and under the heading of "purposeless or meaningless creations" in the case of wisdom; it is due to this that this issue is counted as one of the reasons for the inclination towards materialism. For instance, when the natural defense mechanisms of living creatures are given as an example of God's order, design, and wisdom, the question is immediately posed that why must there be dangers in the first place for there then to be a need for defense mechanisms? Why do harmful viruses even exist so that there should be a need for white blood cells to fight them? Why were sharp toothed predators created for animals of prey to require legs to escape from them or antlers to defend themselves against them? In the animal kingdom, the weaker animals of prey have been given instincts of flight from danger and fear, while the stronger predators have been given fearless voracity. For man the question arises that why do ferocity and attack instincts exist in the first place for there then to be a necessity for clever defense mechanisms?

These questions and objections, whose solutions and answers call for detailed and thorough analysis, are like a tremendous vortex that has swept up and destroyed many groups and schools of thought in its path. We must agree with the poet who said:

In this vortex a thousand ships have gone under,

Such that not even a single plank was cast ashore.

Materialist and dualist philosophies, as well as pessimistic or nihilist schools of thought usually took form in such vortices.

Dualism

From time immemorial man, especially the Arian race, has divided worldly phenomena along the lines of two poles, good and evil. Light, rain, sun, earth, and many other things have been counted as among the good, and darkness, drought, floods, earthquakes, disease, savagery, and aggression—to name a few—have been called bad and identified with the pole of evil. Of course, man has made himself the criterion of division and has known those things which are useful to him as “good,” and those things which harm him to be “bad”.

For men of former times the following thought occurred: Is the creator of the evil and bad things the same as the creator of the good and beneficial? Or are good things produced by one source and bad things by another? Is the creator of good and evil one and the same, or does the world have two sources and two creators?

A group from among them figured that the creator himself can either be good or he can be bad. If he is good, then he doesn't create evil or bad things. If he is bad, then he doesn't make good things. From this they reached the conclusion that the world has two sources or two creators. This belief became known as “dualism.”

The belief of ancient Iranians in a god of good and a god of evil—which were later called by the names Ormazd and Ahriman—took form in a similar way.

According to historical records, after the Arian race inhabited the land of Iran it began to worship natural objects, albeit good ones, such as fire, sun, rain, earth, and air. The historians report that Iranians did not worship bad things but that there did exist a non-Arian people who worshiped bad and evil objects with the aim of placating evil spirits. What existed in the Iran of antiquity was the belief in two origins, sources, or creators, and not a two-faced type of worship. That is to say, Iranians held that there were associates and partners in the act of creation, but did not hold that they should worship things other than god.

It was later on that the prophet Zoroaster made his appearance. Historically speaking, it is not clear

whether the Zoroastrian religion was originally monotheistic or dualistic. The extant Avesta does not resolve this ambiguity as parts of this book are drastically different from one another. One part, the Vendidad, is explicitly dualistic, whereas the Gathas do not really put forward the dualist argument and, according to the claims of some researchers, they champion monotheism. It is these great discrepancies that have led researchers to believe that the present Avesta is not the work of one man, but of more than one individual.

Historical researches in this field are not definitive, but according to our Islamic beliefs we can maintain that the Zoroastrian religion was originally a monotheistic creed. This is because the majority of Islamic scholars hold the belief that the Zoroastrians belong to the category of “the People of the Book.” Specialists in history also bear this out as they say that the entry of dualist thinking into the Zoroastrian religion was due to the dualism of the Arian race before its advent.

Having said this we must add that it is only on the basis of religious authority that we can call Zoroastrianism a monotheistic religion. This is because from the historical perspective the one that we obtain by a purview of works attributed to Zoroaster—and even if we take into account only the Gathas, we cannot accept Zoroastrianism to be a monotheistic creed. Basing themselves on the Gathas, the best that the researchers and experts have said with regard to the monotheism of Zoroaster is that he believed in the essential unity of the Divine. That is, he believed that there was only one being that was self-existent and uncreated, namely Ahura Mazda, and that all other existents—including Ahriman—were creations of Ahura Mazda.

In other words, Zoroaster was of the opinion that the tree of being had only one root. But based on the saying of some other researchers we can hold that Zoroaster believed in the unity of worship. That is, he believed that only one entity should be the object of worship. But for any religion to be monotheistic, over and beyond a belief in the unity of the Divine essence and the unity of worship, a belief in the unity of creation is necessary. On this latter count the Zoroastrian religion, according to historical records, was totally dualistic. It appears that these documents teach that the opposite pole of Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit) is Spenta Mainyu (Bounteous Spirit). Spenta Mainyu is the source of good things—that is, those things that are good and must be created.

On the contrary, Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman) is the source of bad and evil things—that is, those things that should not be created and Spenta Mainyu or Ahura Mazda are not responsible for their creation. According to these ideas, even though being does not have two “roots,” it certainly does have two “branches.” That is to say the existence that begins with Ahura Mazda forks off into two branches: the branch of goodness or Spenta Mainyu and his good works, and the branch of evil or Angra Mainyu and all his bad creations. If we make the Gathas—the most original, authoritative, and monotheistic scripts that have been left by Zoroaster—the criterion for judging Zoroaster then we are still left with a problem. For where there is talk of six goods and five evils, or the fact that the existing order is not the best and does not embody wisdom, we must on this account set Zoroaster aside from the other prophets of God.

Due to this ingrained problem, the Zoroastrian religion could not hold out against the doctrine of dualism and in consequence this doctrine was once again revived after the death of Zoroaster among the Iranian people. Hence the Zoroastrians of the Sasanian period, the Manichaeans and the Mazdakites, who are considered to be offshoots of Zoroastrianism in Iran, were extremely dualistic.

In reality it must be said that the Zoroastrian religion was unable to remove the roots of dualism and pantheism from the hearts of Iranians in practice, and from the teachings of the Gathas in theory. It eventually gave in to these heretical beliefs and itself became a heterodoxy.

Islam alone was able to purge this thousand year old heresy from the Iranian mind. This is just one of Islam's shows of strength—where it was able to deeply affect the Iranian spirit and in consequence bring them salvation. This is no small feat given the fact that dualism had become the flesh and blood of the Iranians—to such an extent that some orientalists are of the opinion that it forms the basis of the Iranian psyche. Iranians were so caught up with this doctrine that they even allowed their religion to be affected by it. Hence, it was Islam that made monotheists out of these diehard Iranian dualists. Once the Iranian people acquired the truth of:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ الظُّلُمَاتِ وَالنُّورَ

All praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light. (Qur'an, 6: 1)

And once they came to also believe in this verse:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

who perfected everything that He created (Qur'an, 32:7)

And then when they had understood this meaning:

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)

When all this took place, Iranians were so overwhelmed by God, creation, the world, and being, that every fiber in their bodies burned with love and they were then able to praise the design in being in the

following way:

My pleasance with the world is, 'cause the world is His Pleasance.

I am in love with the whole world, 'cause the whole world is His.

I drink with pleasure the bitter cup of poison, 'cause perhaps the cup-bearer is He.

I forbear with affection the pains, 'cause the cure is also from Him. [10](#)

After the advent of Islam, the Iranians stopped believing in a source or force of evil. They went on from there and with a mystical outlook they obliterated evil from the total universal order. They said:

“Fundamentally evil does not exist,” or alternatively, “Evil is that which is not.” Ghazali [11](#) (who was an Iranian) says:

ليسَ في الإمكانِ أبدَعُ ممَّا كانَ

There isn't in the realm of possibility anything more marvellous than what exists.

It is such men, trained and nurtured by Islam, who are able to foster such sublime thoughts. They realize that calamities, pains, and sufferings are ugly and unwanted from one perspective, and that from a higher perspective and with a deeper insight, they are all graces and beauties. Hafiz, [12](#) who was appropriately given the title “the Expounder of the Unseen,” eloquently explained many deep philosophical and mystical concepts by way of allegories, metaphors, and parables. In one poem he explains the difference between the two perspectives—the superficial, limited, and common perspective, and the deeper, comprehensive point of view from above, as it were, which he calls the opinion of the *pir* or shaykh meaning the perfect man or mystic. He does this by using puns and a play on words.

پیر ما گفت خطا بر قلم صنع نرفت

آفرین بر نظر پاک خطا پوشش باد

Said our *Pir*: “On the Creator's pen, passed no error:”

On his pure sight, error-covering, plaudits be! [13](#)

In other words, from the point of view of the *Pir*—one that is not alloyed or sullied by limitations and superficiality—the world is seen to be a single manifestation of God. All mistakes, lapses, and unseemly things, which appear to people of limited vision, are obliterated for him. The world is the shadow of God. God in His essence is absolute perfection and absolute beauty. The shadow of beauty cannot be but

beautiful. In the case of a beautiful body, if we look at a single part or limb by itself and without taking into consideration the fact that that limb has a certain place in the body and that along with the other parts it makes up one single body, we will not perceive the body's correctness and perfection. We might even end up thinking that if it was some other shape, it would have been better. But as soon as we look at it comprehensively and as a part among parts of a beautiful whole, our perspective will change, and that which we previously thought to be incorrect and unseemly will have entirely disappeared.

In another couplet, as is generally and usually his habit in every ghazal, Hafiz explains the reasons and methods behind his use of metaphors, allegories, parables, and various plays on words. [14](#)

Of the number of mirror-holders of (the Beloved's) line and mole, my eye became:

Of the number of the kiss-snatchers of (the Beloved's) bosom and back, my lip be. [15](#)

In the first line of this couplet, he speaks of the station of “the essence of certainty” (*'ayn al-yaqin*), where seeing everything as good in itself, he sees in the world reflections of His eyebrow, mole, and eye. In the second line he hopes to attain the station of “the reality of certainty” (*haqq al-yaqin*).

Other ghazals of Hafiz repeatedly refer to this truth that after having arrived at the station of Reality, the mystic does not see anything other than perfection, beauty, and grace. For instance, he says: [16](#)

By its grace, Thy beautiful face explained to us a verse of the Koran:

For that reason, in our explanation, is naught save grace and beauty. [17](#)

To the world's work, never was attention mine;

In my sight, Thy face its happy adorer thus is. [18](#)

Hafiz was a man whose world view was essentially mystical. He put unity in place of the multiplicity of the philosophers; manifestation and emanation in place of their causality; and love and beauty in place of their reason and necessity. He saw the world to be the “the unique manifestation of absolute beauty.” How could such a man think along the same lines as say Khayyam [19](#) or Abu al-‘Ala [20](#)? Hafiz takes the three elements which compose his mystical vision of the world—unity, manifestation, and beauty—and puts them to verse in the most poignant and eloquent manner: [21](#)

When, into the mirror of the cup, the reflection of Thy face fell,

From the laughter of wine, into the crude desire of the cup, the Arif fell.

With that splendor that in the mirror, the beauty of Thy face made,

All this picture into the mirror of fancy fell.

All this reflection of wine and varied picture that have appeared

Is a splendor of the face of the Said that, into cup fell.[22](#)

The use of the word “error-covering” in the first verse of Hafiz quoted has misled some people into making a mistake. They have not taken into consideration that the devices of equivocality, ambiguity, and plays on words are often used by mystical poets. They sometimes use a sentence or word that has two senses, or even use a word in the opposite meaning from its apparent one—these being some of the beauties of rhetoric. Other verses and poems of Hafiz provide contextual support for understanding the real meaning of this couplet. Moreover, assuming we accept the fact that he had complaints against creation, is it possible that he would discredit the *Pir* given all the respect that he has for this term and bearing? For in this case his purport would be that the *Pir*'s claim that no error passed on the Creator's pen is either a lie or that the *Pir* is a simpleton who does not know what he is saying.

In some of his other couplets, Hafiz has expounded the real story behind evil—in that it does not imply the division of creation—in the best of manners. We will recount this matter in the appropriate place. Hence, the supposition that Hafiz, in the verse under question, was finding fault with creation and was disparaging the *Pir* is a layman's supposition.

Satan

It can be argued that Zoroastrianism has the dualist conception of Ormazd and Ahriman, and that Islam for its part has the beliefs of God and Satan as two opposing poles. What is the difference between the Ahriman of Zoroastrianism and the Shaytan or Satan of Islam?

There is a world of difference between the conception of Ahriman in the Zoroastrian or Mazdakite creeds and the idea of Satan in Islam. This calls for some explanation.

According to the teachings of the Avesta, there is an entity known as Angra Mainyu or Ahriman who is responsible for the creation of all evils, calamities, and bad or harmful things; things such as disease, ferocious beasts, stinging and biting animals, snakes, scorpions, and even barren lands, droughts, and the like. These things are not attributed to the great god Ahura Mazda, or to Spenta Mainyu, the arch rival of Angra Mainyu.

From some segments of the Avesta it appears that Ahriman is an ancient and eternal being like Ahura Mazda himself and is not created by him. Ahura Mazda discovered Ahriman but did not create him. But from other parts of the Avesta, especially the Gathas which are the most authoritative part of the Avesta, it comes to light that Ahura Mazda created two beings: Spenta Mainyu or “Holy Wisdom” and Angra Mainyu or “Unholy Wisdom” (Ahriman).

In any case, what is apparent from the Avesta and has been, and is, the belief of the Zoroastrians is that created things in the world are divided into two groups of good and bad. The good are those that exist

and must exist and it is good that they exist—their existence being necessary for the world order. The bad are those things that exist, yes, but should not exist—their existence being the cause of the imperfection of the world. These latter things, the bad or evil things, are by no means the creation of Ahura Mazda. They are rather the creation of Ahriman, regardless of whether Ahriman himself is the creation of Ahura Mazda or not.

Hence no matter how you look at it, Ahriman is the maker and creator of a great many of the things in the world. A whole section of the created order is his realm and he is an eternal entity—an Ancient. He is either Ahura Mazda's counterpart or associate. on the level of essence, or is Ahura Mazda's creation but his associate and partner on the level of creation.

In the Islamic world view though, the world or created things are not fundamentally divided into two groups or categories—good and bad. There is in this perspective no created thing that “should not have been created” or “was created badly.” On the contrary, all things are created beautiful—everything being in its right place. In addition, all things are the creation of God in His essence.

In Islam, the realm of Satan is the legislative level (of human volition and act) and not the ontological level. That is to say, Satan can only affect human existence and cannot influence anything outside the human realm. Even within the human realm, Satan's range and free scope is limited to influencing human thought, not the body. In affecting human thinking, Satan is limited to temptation, suggestion, and the portrayal of false ideas in the imagination or fantasies of men. The Qur'an speaks of these Satanic devices by using terms such as *waswasah* (whispering or temptation), *taswil* (seduction or enticement), and *tazayyun* (to make to seem beautiful and a part of decorum). Satan has these methods, but he cannot create anything, nor can he have any type of existential control over man. That is to say, he cannot be an irresistible force which overpowers man and makes him do bad things. Satan's authority and control over man is limited to the situation where man himself desires to give himself over to him.

إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَهُ سُلْطَانٌ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ. إِنَّمَا سُلْطَانُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ

Indeed, he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord His authority is only over those who befriend him.... (Qur'an, 16:99–100)

In reply to those people who hold Satan responsible for their misguidance, the Qur'an quotes Satan on Resurrection Day saying:

وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَن دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي ۖ فَلَا تَلُمُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ

I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. (Qur'an, 14:22)

The philosophy and wisdom behind even this amount of dominion that Satan has over man can be found in man's free will. Man's ontic level dictates that he be free. A free being must always be at a proverbial fork in the road and in the position to choose between two options for his freedom to be fully realized and actualized.[23](#)

From the World are coming two cries in opposition to each other; (bethink thyself) for which (of them) thou art adapted.

It's one cry is the (means of) quickening the devout with (spiritual) life; and its other cry is the (means of) cajoling the graceless.[24](#)

In the Islamic world view, no existent has any independent role in the creative act. The Qur'an does not attribute independence to any existent whatsoever. All existents play only mediating roles and act as the instruments through which the Divine will and Providence act. The Qur'an gives credence to the intervention of angels in the application of God's will on earth, but it does not allow even this for Satan. Hence by all the more reason, it repudiates the existence of independent creative powers for him—setting him apart from the Avestan Ahriman who possessed such powers alongside Ahura Mazda.

From this we can conclude that the translation of the word “Satan” or *Shaytan* (in Persian literature) as “Ahriman” or “*div*”, is totally wrong and a great mistake. The word “Satan” or “*Shaytan*” does not have an equivalent in Persian and hence it must not be translated and must be kept as is in any translated text.

According to the Qur'an, Satan is not by any means a “pole” that is contrasted with and antipodal to the Divine pole. He is not even a pole or antipode to the angels who are, by Divine sanction, the intermediaries of creation and the executors of the Divine will in its creative aspect.

Generally speaking, the notion of jinn that our people have is different from the picture that the Qur'an presents. In the Qur'an, jinn are like men in that they are morally responsible and answerable for their actions, but unlike men, they are “unseen” and “spirits”. Lay people think them to be of the rank of angels, but the Qur'an puts them alongside mankind. The Qur'an explicitly states that Satan is of jinn. According to the Islamic world view, angels have executive powers in the existential world order; as opposed to jinn who have no such powers. Putting jinn and angels on the same footing, as is done in (Persian) Islamic literature, is due to a historical mistake that was made by Muslims and is attributable to the cultural baggage and ideas of the Zoroastrian tradition.

Now, to return to the discussion at hand, it must be said that in opposition to the Zoroastrian, the Manichaeen, and the Mazdakite world views which can be said to be bipolar, the Islamic perspective is unipolar. In the perspective of the Qur'an, Satan is the embodiment of:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

who perfected everything that He created (Qur'an, 32:7)

And he is also the example of:

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)

Satan's existence, as well as his evil and misguidance, are all based on and according to wisdom and expediency. It is due to this very wisdom and experience that Satan is a relative evil and not a real or absolute evil.

What is even more amazing is that according to the Qur'anic logic, God Himself gave Satan his position and post as the "misguider". God addresses Satan in the Qur'an and orders him:

وَاسْتَفْزِزْ مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصَوْتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِم بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ وَعِدْهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا

Instigate whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, and share with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them!' But Satan promises them nothing but delusion... (Qur'an, 17:64)

It appears as if Satan was ready to accept his post of misguidance, for we find him saying:

فَبِمَا أَغْوَيْنَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

As You have consigned me to perversity 'I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path' (Qur'an, 7: 16)

ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear, and from their right and their left, and You will not find most of them to be grateful. (Qur'an, 7: 17)

For certain, the meaning of "misguidance" and the scope of Satan's influence and authority in his position is just as we have already mentioned. That is to say, there is no obligation or coercion in the works. All that there is, is *waswasah* (whispering or temptation), *taswil* (seduction or enticement), *da'wah*

(invitation), and *tazayyun* (to make to seem beautiful and a part of decorum).

A word of caution and necessary reminder is in order here. In saying that Satan does not have recourse to the existential and ontological level of the world, we do not mean that he has no role whatsoever on this plane. For is it even possible for there to be an existent existing on this plane and not having any effects or role in it?! What we do mean though, is that Satan is not an independent creator of any part of creation; he is not an antipode to God; he does not have any part to play in the vertical hierarchy of existence like the angels who have been given executive and managerial duties with respect to created beings; and finally, his authority and command over man is not of such a level and extent that he could force or coerce him to do his bidding. The Qur'an believes in an existential role for Satan and jinn, but generally not any greater than the role of man.

The real intention behind this discussion is to show that the Qur'an has approached the question and issue of Satan²⁵ in such a manner that it does not harm its basic principles in the least bit. For instance, the principle of the unity of the Divine Essence, as exemplified in the verse:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

Nothing is like Him (Qur'an, 42:11)

Or the principle of the unity of Divine creation, as in the verses:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

Look! All creation and command belong to Him. (Qur'an, 7:54)

قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

Say, 'Allah is the creator of all things, (Qur'an, 13:16)

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ

nor has He any partner in sovereignty (Qur'an, 17:111)

Philosophical Pessimism

Another consequence of the issue of evil is the philosophy of pessimism. Pessimistic philosophers usually come from a materialist background. That there is a causal link between materialism and the philosophy of pessimism cannot be denied. Why? Clearly, it is because materialism is impotent and helpless when it comes to the problem of evil.

According to the perspective of transcendental philosophy, existence is equal to the good and evil is relative. From this point of view, underlying every apparent evil is a good. For the materialist school, there is no such thing.

A pessimistic outlook on the world brings with it distress and suffering. It is a source of sorrow that a man should think that the world is without feeling, sentiment, and purpose. Once a man, who sees himself as a small insignificant issue and child of the world and has a goal in life, understands that the very world which created him and his thoughts and which taught him to have a goal, itself doesn't have a purpose, he is shaken to core. Moreover, if a man, who thinks that there is no justice in the world and that discrimination and oppression exist in nature, were to be given all the blessings and treasures that the world has to offer, he would still be pessimistic and unhappy.

The efforts of such a person for his personal happiness and for the prosperity of mankind are marred by a sense of hopelessness and heavy heartedness. For, if the world itself is based on injustice and oppression, man's struggles for justice become meaningless. And when the cosmos is without purpose, our having a goal and purpose is both inconsequential and idiotic.

The fact that believers and people of faith have calm demeanours and peace of mind is due to their perception of the world as an ordered and purposeful whole based on wisdom and knowledge. They do not see it as being senseless, chaotic, and without purpose. They firmly believe in its justice—that it supports the cause of truth and the people of the truth; they don't see it as being intrinsically unjust and either supporting the oppressors or remaining neutral on the issue. With regard to evil and the bad things that take place in the world, the monotheists know that nothing is by accident and chance and that there is a rhyme and reason to everything. They believe that these bad things are either just punishments or purposeful tests that lead to rewards.

What about those that don't have faith? What placates them? They turn to suicide (as their final placebo). As one of them put it, they “embrace death with ultimate bravery.”

The World Health Organization recently published some statistics on suicide and found that its incidence was on the rise among intellectuals. According to their report, the suicide rate has reached high proportions in eight European countries. One of these eight countries happens to be Switzerland—a nation that we think to be the example of prosperity. The report goes on to say that suicide has become the third most important factor of death—meaning that its casualties outnumber the victims of cancer—and

that its incidence among the educated class is greater than in the uneducated.

The same report states that the suicide rate is greater in developing nations (then the underdeveloped)–the very nations that are currently going through a crisis of faith. In West Germany, twelve thousand people lose their lives annually due to suicide, while sixty thousand are saved while attempting it.

This is the state of affairs of those who have lost their faith in God, the all-knowing Lord of the worlds.

Many factors or causes for the phenomena of suicide have been mentioned: attracting attention, breakup of lovers, defeat in financial rivalries, losing social standing or competitions, poverty, drug addiction, feeling smothered, and nihilistic attitudes. These have been mentioned as causes, but the cause of these causes is just one thing: lack of faith. William James in the second chapter of his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience–A Study in Human Nature*²⁶ has this to say about a materialist author, Marcus Aurelius, and also about Schopenhauer and Nietzsche:

“... melancholy, according to our ordinary use of language, forfeits all title to be called religious when, in Marcus Aurelius's racy words, the sufferer simply lies kicking and screaming after the fashion of a sacrificed pig. The mood of a Schopenhauer or a Nietzsche ... though often an ennobling sadness, is almost as often only peevishness running away with the bit between its teeth. The sallies of the two German authors remind one, half the time, of the sick shriekings of two dying rats. They lack the purgatorial note which religious sadness gives forth.”²⁷

Nietzsche,²⁸ whom William James counts among the philosophers of pessimism, was famous for his philosophy based on might–or the “will to power”. He is known for claiming the following:

‘Kindness and tender-heartedness must be put aside. Kindness is from weakness. Humility and obedience are debasement. Patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and sufferance is due to a lack of ambition and laziness ... killing the (carnal) self, for what? The self must be encouraged. What is worshiping others for? One must will the self and must worship the self. The weak and feeble must be left to die ...’²⁹

By adhering to such ideas, Nietzsche had effectively turned the world into a jailhouse for himself. In the latter part of his life he saw these sentiments bear their just fruits. In a letter that he wrote to his sister during his final days, he says:

‘Every day that passes bears heavily on me. Though I have been ill for many years and have experienced the extreme limits of depression and affliction, I have never been so desolate and hopeless as I am now. What has happened? Exactly what should have happened. The differences that I had with all and sundry has made me lose their trust. Now we both sides see that we were in error. God how lonely I am! There is nobody with whom I can have a laugh and a cup of tea. There is no one who will admit to be my friend.’³⁰

Schopenhauer³¹, whom William James also mentions, believed:

The principal motif of human life is suffering and vulnerability. Pleasure and happiness, and indeed the avoidance of pain, are not positive but rather negative realities. The higher a living existent is in the hierarchy of life, the more it suffers. This is due to its greater sensitivity and the fact that it remembers the pains of yesterday and better predicts the sufferings of tomorrow ... momentary pleasures are followed by a life of sorrows. If you don't marry you suffer, if you do you have a thousand woes. One of the biggest tribulations is falling in love. People think that procuring a wife is one of the greatest delights, whereas in reality it is source of many miseries. If you socialize you are beset with troubles, if you remain aloof from people you come to loath life. No longer any need to worship, no divinities in the works. In short, while there remains any life in the body, there is no release from suffering and difficulties. Life is through and through just dying. Rather, life is just a death that is being postponed moment to moment. In the end death occurs while life is seen to have been of no use whatsoever.³²

The Islamic world also had, and has, figures that saw the world as gloomy. Their reactions vis-à-vis nature and natural phenomena were characterized by sullenness, gloom, and even anger—or in the words of William James by “peevishness.” The famous Arab philosopher and poet Abu al-‘Ala' al-Ma'arri, as well as the poet Khayyam belonged to this group. We say, “the poet Khayyam” here because scholars do not believe that the pessimistic poems could have been written by Khayyam the philosopher and mathematician. This is because the reasons for complaining and crying that Khayyam the poet espouses, are matters that Khayyam the philosopher would have already solved and put behind him.³³

In our time and following in the footsteps of the West (and for other reasons not appropriate to mention here) a group of pessimistic writers has appeared that is poisoning the youth and making them apathetic and indifferent to life, and sometimes even leading them towards suicide. This group is being encouraged and ushered on by overt and covert powers. Their numbers are increasing daily. Sadiq Hidayat belongs to this group. His writings bear resemblance to—as in the words of William James—the “kicking and screaming ... a sacrificed pig”, or the “sick shriekings of ... dying rats.” In stark contrast to figures such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Abu al-‘Ala', and Khayyam, are the “optimistic” philosophers and sages. The sages of the Divinities are usually from this latter group. The great mystic Mawlana Rumi is the representative, par excellence, of this group. All of his utterances give evidence to an incredible love, rapture, and spiritual presence. According to this mystic, man is the thriving centre of pleasure and felicity in this world, but with this condition that he consciously takes advantage of this centre. For, there is no sorrow in the world that cannot be converted into a beatitude or pleasure. Rumi disparages those who seek to derive pleasure exclusively from wine, women, and song. He addresses man in these terms.³⁴

The wine that is bubbling invisibly in the jar bubbles thus from longing for thy face.

O thou who art the whole sea, what wilt thou do with dew?

And O thou who art the whole of existence, why art thou seeking non-existence?

Thou art lovely and beautiful and the mine (source) of every loveliness: why indeed shouldst thou lay thyself under obligations to wine?

The tiara of *We have honoured (the sons of Adam)* is on the crown of thy head; the collar of *We have given thee* hangs on thy breast.

Thou seekest knowledge from books–s–oh, ridiculous! Thou seekest pleasure from *Halwa* (sweetmeats)–oh, ridiculous!

What is wine or music or sexual intercourse that thou shouldst seek delight and profit therefrom?

('Tis as though) the sun sought to borrow (light) from a mote, (or) a *Zuhra* begged for a cup (of wine) from a small jar.[35](#)

Rumi also says:[36](#)

I am exceedingly enamoured of His violence and his gentleness

'tis marvelous (that) I (am) in love with both these contraries.[37](#)

The other mystical poets such as Sa'di and Hafiz also take this route. It is true that words with double meanings are found in the poems of Hafiz and others, but those who are familiar with their parlance and idioms know full well that there is nothing other than goodness in their ideas.

Now all this is not limited to mysticism (*irfan*) and Sufism. This way of seeing things is a feature of faith in general. Disbelief and faithlessness are types of deficiency which in its own turn brings about an imbalance. It is this imbalance that creates suffering. Faith on the other hand, has this ability to transform sorrows and suffering into pleasure and happiness.

When those who have been nurtured by Islam come across a difficulty or a calamity, they pay attention to the following truth:

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

those who, when an affliction visits them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah and to Him do we indeed return. (Qur'an, 2: 156)

As a real-life example of what such nurturing can do, we will quote an incident that took place to a Muslim couple–Abu Talhah and his wife Umm Salim–who were companions of the Prophet (S).[38](#)

“Abu Talhah loved his son very much. His son fell ill. When the child's death was imminent, Umm Salim

feared that Abu Talhah would be greatly troubled and anguished (by the death of their son), so she sent him off to the Prophet (S). When Abu Talhah had left the house, the child died and Umm Salim shrouded him with a cloth and put him away in some corner of the house. She then approached the house members and told them to not tell Abu Talhah anything (of what took place). Then she prepared a meal and put on some perfume. Just then Abu Talhah returned from his visit to the Prophet (S). He asked, "What's my son doing?" She replied, "He's resting." He said, "Do we have something to eat?" She got up and brought the food for him. Then, (a while later) she made advances to him and he lay with her. Once he was assuaged, she said to him, "Abu Talhah, would you be angry if we had somebody's belonging with us for safekeeping and we returned it to him?" He said, "Glory be to God, no, not at all." She said, "Your son was a trust with us that God has taken back." Abu Talhah said, "I have a greater obligation to be patient than you." He got up from his place, performed his ghusl (ritual bath), prayed two cycles (raka'at), and then went off to see the Prophet (S). He informed him of what she did. The Prophet (S) said to him, "May God bless you both in your (fruitful) coition." Then the Prophet (S) said, "Praise be to God who has placed in my nation a person like Sabira of the Sons of Israel...."³⁹

These then are the workings of faith and religion in the smoothing of difficulties and hardships, and even in transforming them into pleasures and felicities.

William James, in the book that was previously mentioned, writes about the different sects and groups of religion and pure morality in the following way:

'At bottom the whole concern of both morality and religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe. Do we accept it only in part and grudgingly, or heartily and altogether? ... Morality pure and simple accepts the law of the whole which it finds reigning, so far as to acknowledge and obey it, but it may obey it with the heaviest and coldest heart, and never cease to feel it as a yoke. But for religion, in its strong and fully developed manifestations, the service of the highest never is felt as a yoke. Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which may fill any place on the scale between cheerful serenity and enthusiastic gladness, has taken its place The *anima mundi*, to whose disposal of his own personal destiny the Stoic consents, is there to be respected and submitted to, but the Christian God is there to be loved; and the difference of emotional atmosphere is like that between an arctic climate and the tropics, though the outcome in the way of accepting actual conditions uncomplainingly may seem in abstract terms to be much the same.'⁴⁰

Coyness Or Objection?

Discussions on the problem of evil, and sometimes objections to the very existence of evil, take up an important part of our literature. Poets in particular, whether in jest or in all seriousness, frequently apply themselves to this subject. But of course, that which has been said on this topic must be taken with a pinch of salt—as it is not all a serious objection and complaint against creation, and there is usually a tongue in cheek attitude at play. Some poems contain what may be called the “dissimulation of mystics.”

Many quatrains attributed to Khayyam are of this type. To repeat, it is not known for certain whether these poems are the work of Khayyam the philosopher. All that which has been brought under questioning and objected to in the poems of Khayyam the poet, are things that Khayyam the philosopher would have already solved and put behind him. Hence these poems are either not from the pen of Khayyam the philosopher, or they are and must be considered as either tongue in cheek and satirical jabs at exoteric religious puritans, or as the dissimulations and “coquetry” known to exist among the mystics. In any case, Khayyam says in the quatrains attributed to him![41](#)

The stars, who dwell on heaven's exalted stage,

Baffle the wise Diviners of our age;

Take heed, hold fast the rope of mother wit.

These augurs all distrust their own presage.[42](#)

Heaven multiplies our sorrows day by day,

And grants no joys it does not take away;

If those unborn could know the ills we bear,

What think you, would they rather come or stay?[43](#)

Since all man's business in this world of woe

Is sorrow's pangs to feel, and grief to know,

Happy are they that never come at all,

And they that, having come, the soonest go![44](#)

Ah! wheel of heaven to tyranny inclined, '

It was e'er your wont to show yourself unkind;

And, cruel earth, if they should cleave your breast,

What store of buried jewels they would find![45](#)

This objection to and censure of the heavens that be, is in fact a criticism of something higher. This is because the astrological heavens are not anything in themselves for them to be possibly accused of wickedness or delinquency. This is perhaps why it is said in a tradition:

قال رسول الله(ص): لا تسبوا الدهر فإنّ الدهر هو الله

Do not curse Time, for surely Time is God Himself.[46](#) [47](#)

Khayyam also says:[48](#)

The Master did himself these vessels frame,

Why should he cast them out to scorn and shame?

If he has made them well, why should he break them?

Yea, though he marred them, they are not to blame.[49](#)

Behold these cups! Can He who deigned to make them,

In wanton freak let ruin overtake them,

So many shapely feet and hands and heads

What love drives Him to make, what wrath to break them?[50](#)

There is a chalice made with wit profound,

With tokens of the Maker's favor crowned;

Yet the world's Potter takes his masterpiece,

And dashes it to pieces on the ground![51](#)

Nasir Khusraw[52](#) is a poet who should in reality be called a philosopher. He was on one hand, intellectually meticulous and philosophically beyond such diatribes, and on the other hand, his strong religious convictions did not allow him to complain about Providence. This said, we do find couplets in his Diwan which are of this type. We can put this down to either tongue and cheek humour, or to the dissimulation current among mystics. As examples of this we can quote some verses.[53](#)

O God, if by your Divine mandate you made the substance of man beautiful all,

What then in the Roman countenance and African face, is the reason for beauty and ugliness? Why the Indian appearance and the Turkish countenance—one (dark as) the depths of hell and the other, the face of heaven?

Why is one felicitous, the other a wretch—one an ascetic, the other a priest enrobed?

Why these contrasts in creation—for You were the mother and embellisher of all?

Accepted then, due the world's disloyalty, a group you exalted, and another made abject,

Why still, are the affluent given loads and loads, And the poor have nothing but troubles and troubles?

Nasir Khusraw has a lengthy and famous poem which starts with the following couplet:

الهی طول و عرض عالمت را

توانی در دل موری کشیدن

In this poem he says.[54](#)

All my pains are from the Bulgarian (beauties), what endless longing must be endured.

It is not the fault of the Bulgarians, I will tell all, if you could only listen.

O God, to tell the truth, sedition is from You, but I speak not out of fear.

The elegant lips and teeth of the Turks of upper China, You should not have made so fine;

Because upon (seeing) their hands, lips, and teeth—one bites (his) teeth, hands, and lips (in astonishment) .

By clamour you put the deer to flight; while the hound you strike (and incite) to (take up the) chase.

Some experts in the field have claimed that this poem has been changed, and that it is not the work of Nasir Khusraw.

About forty years ago, a poet from Shiraz wrote a ballad on this subject. In response to this ballad, Sarhang Akhgar wrote an open letter in *Akhgar* magazine, inviting the literati to give their opinions on the poem. Many people—clergymen, lay people, men, and women—from all parts of the country wrote back with their replies. Some of these replies were in verse and some in prose; some of them were in support of the Shirazi balladeer and some against. All of these letters were collected and published in a book with the title, *Asrar e Khilqat* (Secrets of Creation).

As to the worth and importance of these replies—this is a topic which I don't want to get into at present. It must be noted though that some scholars made noteworthy points in their letters.

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1. Tafsir al Safi, vol. 2, p. 638 or vol. 5, p. 106. [1]
 2. See Endnote 5. [1]
 3. Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu 'ddin Rumi* (Delhi, Adam Publisher, 1992), vol .6, p.402, vr. 2596. [1]
 4. Nicholson, vol. 5, p.67, vr. 1089. [1]
 5. Nicholson, vol. 6, p.401, vr. 2594. [1]
 6. See Endnote 6. [1]
 7. Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 216. [1]
 8. See Endnote 7. [1]
 9. See Endnote 8. [1]
 10. Shaykh Muslih al-Din Sa'di. [1]
 11. See Endnote 9. [1]
 12. See Endnote 10. [1]
 13. Henry Wilberforce Clarke, trans, *Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi*, In Persian with English Translation, Ghazal 105. [1]
 14. See Endnote 11. [1]
 15. Clarke, Ghazal 105. [1]
 16. See Endnote 12. [1]
 17. Clarke, Ghazal 10. [1]
 18. Clarke, Ghazal 22. [1]
 19. See Endnote 13. [1]
 20. See Endnote 14. [1]
 21. See Endnote 15. [1]
 22. Clarke, Ghazal 111. [1]
 23. See Endnote 16. [1]
 24. Nicholson, vol. 4, p. 362, vr. 1622. [1]
 25. See Endnote 17. [1]
 26. This book is the text of William James' lectures which he gave at the prestigious Gifford lectures on natural religion at the University of Edinburgh at the turn of the twentieth century and was translated into Farsi under the title, *Din wa Rawan*. [1]
 27. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience – A study in Human Nature*, Lecture 2. [1]
 28. See Endnote 18. [1]
 29. Muhammad Ali Farughi, *Sayr e Hikmat dar Urupa* (The story of philosophy in Europe) (Tehran: Kitabfurushi e Zawwar Publications, 1966), vil. 3, ch. 5, p.201–202. [1]
 30. Furughi, vol. 3, ch.5, p. 205. [1]
 31. See Endnote 19. [1]
 32. Furughi, vol. 3, ch. 1, pt. 4, p. 85. [1]
 33. See Endnote 20. [1]
 34. See Endnote 21. [1]
 35. Nicholson, vol. 5, p. 214, vrs. 3570–1, 3573–74, 3578,3580–3581. [1]
 36. See Endnote 22. [1]
 37. Nicholson, vol. 1, p. 86, vr. 1570. [1]
 38. See Endnote 23. [1]
 39. Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 79, p. 151. [1]
 40. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience—A Study in Human Nature*, Lecture 2. [1]
 41. See Endnote 24. [1]
 42. Edward Henry Whinfield, trans, *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*. The Persian Text with an English Verse Translation (London: The Octagon Press, 1980), first published 1883, quatrain 214. [1]
 43. Ibid, quatrain 240. [1]
 44. Ibid, quatrain 387. [1]

- [45.](#) Ibid, quatrain 25. 
- [46.](#) Taj al-Din Sha'iri, Jami' al-Akhbar (Qum: Radi Publications, 1984), p. 161. 
- [47.](#) See Endnote 25. 
- [48.](#) See Endnote 26. 
- [49.](#) Whinfield, quatrain 126. 
- [50.](#) Ibid, quatrain 42. 
- [51.](#) Ibid, quatrain 290. 
- [52.](#) See Endnote 27. 
- [53.](#) See Endnote 28. 
- [54.](#) See Endnote 29. 

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