THE UNCHANGEABLE ESSENCE BUT CHANGEABLE AND UNCHANGEABLE ATTRIBUTES

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In what follows, the author has dealt with the relation between the necessary being as an unchangeable Essence and His changeable and unchangeable attributes. Neither is the ascription of any changeable attribute impossible for God nor is the ascription of any kind of unchangeable attribute possible. As the change of genitive attributes does not demand the change in the Essence, it is possible to ascribe changeable attributes to the Essence. And as the real attached attributes bring about some dilemmas mentioned here, it is necessary for real attributes to be identical with the Essence. The article ends in a brief account on the cognitive form theory proposed by Avicenna and strongly defended by Mulla Sadra.

Keywords: Necessary Being, Unchangeable Attributes, Changeable Attributes, Cognitive Forms.

We are expected to proceed in the course of philosophical thought particularly metaphysics (theology) in such a way to preserve the Divine Essence (the necessary being) far immaculate from any stain of plurality, composition, change, or alteration. The Necessary Being is the pure existence and pure perfection having all features counted as absolute perfection. Furthermore, He is the provider of all perfections such as knowledge, power, life and will for others; thus it is impossible for Him to lack those perfections.

The two above ways have been chased by the Islamic philosophy in the course of knowing the attributes of the Necessary Being. The former is known as the way of *Sāddiqīn* (the most truthful people) along with its many advantages.

Muslim theologians, however, have followed another way; they say that grand designs ruling over the world suggest that there is no accident or chance in creation instead there are knowledge, power, will, and management therein.

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The Proposal

Viewing the fact that the denial theory (that God has no attributes) is unfounded, and that the ascription of attributes to the Essence is vindicated through different theological and philosophical ways or rather it is one indisputable doctrine of religion, one is required to see how multiple attributes are reconcilable with one absolutely unique and simple Essence? And to see what kind of attributes makes Him fall short of perfection and comprehensiveness?

The main point here is that the ascription of some changeable and unchangeable attributes to the Essence is wrong, because such kind of attributes would alter the Essence from fixity to change, from actuality to potentiality, from oneness to plurality, from perfection to imperfection, making Him fall short of absolute perfection excellence and fullness.

Nonetheless, one should not think that the ascription of any fixed attribute to the Essence is possible, or that the ascription of any changeable attribute to Him is impossible. As a matter of fact, the proposition "It is incorrect to ascribe the changeable attributes to the Essence" is indefinite, namely the fixed Holy Essence can have both some changeable attributes and some fixed ones.

Explanation

Divine attributes come in two categories: positive and negative. The latter stems from the negation of contingency. The former is either real or genitive. The real positive attributes derive from the necessity of being, but the genitive positive attributes come otherwise, as will be explained very soon.

The real positive attributes, according to some theological approaches, are assumed attached to the Essence, but according to philosophical approaches they are identical with the Essence.

Keeping an eye upon the above explanation, the author goes to propose three claims to be vindicated intellectually and philosophically.

1. The fixed Essence and the genitive changeable attributes

The ascription of genitive changeable attributes to the Essence is correct. In the genitive case, we have one noun, one genitive noun, and a genitive relation between them. Attributes in the genitive case "have no room in the essence of the noun, for they are no more than an attribute of relation produced from a reciprocal correlation between two things", (Beheshti, 1389, 300).

Avicenna has clarified the issue by an example, saying: "Your position on the left or on the right is no more than a relation alone", (Ibid. 299). According to this example, standing on the left or on the right are no more than attributes of relation. When changing position from left to right or vice versa, a person does not change his essence but his position and relation to other things. The Necessary Being is surely described as "Provider", "Healer", "Planner", "Guide" and so on. When a creature benefits from His provisions, healing, planning, or guidance, it is exposed to change thus the attribute of relation changes, but the fixed Necessary Essence remains unchanged. The only point to be considered here is that all such attributes originate from "Self-subsistence", so that there remain only one relation rather than many, (Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin, 1381, Vol. 6, P. 109).

God Almighty is Qayyūm, meaning He is self-subsisting and sustainer of all worlds and creatures, (Beheshti, 1387, 115). Accordingly, all genitive attributes of any relation between Him and all creatures originate from the attribute of self-subsistence.

2. The fixed Essence and real attached attributes

These are attributes of perfection. According to the approaches of Ash'arite and Karramyyah, these attributes are confined to 7 or 8 attributes[2] attached to the Essence, (Beheshti, 1390, 82).

A) The Ash'arite

The Ash'arite would say God, for example, knows things and is powerful in terms of knowledge and power outside His Essence. His Essence is thus not identical with knowledge or power as a part or whole of it; rather, God Almighty is void of any perfection or beauty in His Essence.

The attributes assumed by the Ash'arite are those unchangeable eternal and everlasting; they say that attributes of perfection and beauty are the inseparable corollary properties of the Essence, thus their viewpoint is not open to objection. The only intelligible objection to them is that the Essence treated as the void of perfection is also expected to give it, and this is impossible.

Poem: (A dry cloud which is void of water is impossible for it to be the giver of water)

Such an approach demands Divine Essence as the Most perfect to be more perfect than the very Essence, in Sadrāean outlook, or to be

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2. knowledge, power, will, life, hearing, sight, word, and survival.

brighter than the Essence in Illumination philosophy; and this is logically impossible.

B) Karrammyyah

A group of theologians who are called after the name of their leader celebrated as Karramyyah, not only did they consider the attributes of perfection and beauty as attached to the Essence, but also regarded them temporally created and not of corollary properties of the Essence thus they are not eternal or everlasting.

They allow of the ascription of changeable attribute to the Divine Essence; thus they allow of two dilemmas, i.e. real attached attributes and temporally created and changeable ones. They failed to realize that attached attributes, however they may be fixed, lead to the Ash'ari dilemma, and that the change and creation of attributes ends up in the penetration of potentiality through the Divine Essence who is absolutely necessary and leaves no room for potentiality in His Unique Essence, (Avicenna, 1380 L. A. H., 355).

Having tuned up for the attached attribute theory, the followers of Ash'ari school went to anti-rationalism. So did the followers of Karramyyah by their creation theory. However, the anti-rationalism of the latter goes far worse than that of the former.

3. The Fixed Essence and Real Non-Attached attributes

Although they went to deny attributes lest they fall in the abyss of attached attribute theory, the Mu'tazilite, who engaged with divine attributes by their pure philosophical thoughts, neither suffer from *Ta'tīl* theory (divesting God of attributes of perfection and glory), nor did they went to hold the attached attribute theory or creation theory, as did the Ash'arite and Karramyyah.

Why does Divine Essence not have attributes identical with His Holy Essence?!!

If not,

1. Divine Essence by itself cannot be a real referent of the concepts of attributes of perfection and glory; and this is not a trivial dilemma.

2. We should hold the strange view that Divine Essence is not better than all, while Divine Essence is to be the best of all, because a perfect essence by itself is better than a perfect essence by another, (Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin).

3. The attributes should emanate from a lower essence (for this so-called essence lacks those attributes in itself), this is while they are expected to come from a better and higher essence.

Avicenna and the cognitive form theory

Not only Avicenna but also all the peripatetic philosophers hold that God's knowledge of all other than Him is through the cognitive forms attached to His Essence. God's knowledge of Himself, they say, is identical with His Essence; however, His knowledge of objective material things is not identical with His essence, rather it is through the cognitive forms outside His Holy Essence. His Knowledge of all other than Him is thus empirical and through impressions.

Does the sequel of this theory not comply with the real attachedattribute theory, at least as to His knowledge of all other than Him?!!

This is why such a peripatetic theory went to create a serious dispute among philosophers such as Abu al-Barakāt of Baghdād, Suhrawardī, Khwaja Tūsi, and Sadr-u al-Muta'allehīn. In their special account and sometimes repetitiously, each of them has criticized it. Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin has purportedly answered all of them, raising a very serious objection to it. Inspired by Avicenna, Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin has at last opened a new way which is very different from those of the Ash'arite and Karramyyah.

The foremost objections raised to the peripatetic theory as to divine knowledge are:

1. That the Essence should be both active and passive, i.e. the giver and receiver of those forms should be identical;

2. That Divine Essence may be a locality of and affected by the forms;

3. The ascription of real attached attribute to the Essence;

4. That His power should be limited; and

5. That the first cognitive form is not separable from His unique Essence.

(Beheshti, 1389, 258 and 259).

The last two objections pertain to the foundations of theory. Although the answers to the rest seem rather easy, they do not suffice to organize the theory.

The first objection is only valid of the case of initiation of

passivity, but here passivity in used in a different sense. According to the peripatetic philosophy, Divine Essence is not a locality of cognitive forms and is not thus exposed to such qualifications accordingly. Thus he is immaculate from passivity qualification and development. In fact, the peripatetic so-called theory of cognitive forms is free from these three attachments.

The peripatetic philosophers opine that Divine Essence is neither passive nor developed nor exposed to qualification. It leads to passivity, if only those cognitive forms infiltrate to the Essence, the case of which is otherwise here. It leads to development, if only the Essence is void of perfection in itself to be developed by those cognitive forms; on the contrary, the Essence has all perfection in itself. It leads to the exposition of Essence to qualification, if only those forms affect Holy Essence, like the white color that affects a material body, or knowledge for human minds. Conversely, those cognitive forms are the corollary properties that come after the Essence in rank. Neither is the Essence exposed to the qualification by those attributes nor are those forms qualifications, (Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin, 1346, 54).

While he recognizes the Essence as the origin of many cognitive forms, Avicenna considers them as the correlates entailed by the Essence coming after it in rank. They are not located in the Essence nor do they sustain the Essence[3]. These forms come orderly; they have both hierarchical and horizontal orders, because the whole world has both vertical and horizontal orders. It is now clear that the cognitive forms have both hierarchical and horizontal orders, and it is absurd for the cognitive systems of Necessary Being -which according to Avicenna are the sufficient reasons for this objective system- to lack such orders. Avicenna's acknowledgement of this nice and precise point that the cognitive forms are entailed by and come after the Essence in rank compelled Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin to defend his theory and to answer the objections of passivity, development and exposition to qualification.

In Sadrāean metaphysics, the correlates entailed by the quiddity are mentally-posited like the very quiddity itself; the correlates of mental existence are mental, and those of objective existence are objective; the Necessary Being is coincident to both the pure existence and objective external being; the correlates entailed by the Holy Essence are likewise of objective external existence. As a result, one may conclude that those cognitive forms are external and objective

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3. "This plurality is entailed by and comes after the Essence, and is not located in the Essence to sustain it; it comes orderly, too", (Avicenna, 1339, 137).

entailed by the Essence coming after it in rank. How may one say that the cognitive forms of the Holy Essence are mental?! (Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin, 1346, 53).

The above objections are the most significant ones leveled at the peripatetic view as to Divine knowledge. If they give out that those cognitive forms are not mental or accidental, but objective and entailed by the Essence, they may discard those objections.

After many close examinations of the cognitive forms, considering both the peripatetic philosophy -that holds cognitive forms- and Plato -who proposed the theory of Ideas- Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin has declared that he has taken a bit and left out a bit from each, (Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin, 1381, Vol. 6, P. 223).

Platonic Ideas are the very cognitive forms which are objective and located in the world of contingency and are not the correlates entailed by the Holy Essence. Nonetheless, the peripatetic cognitive forms are the correlates entailed by the Essence and subjective; they are not located in the contingent world but have a higher locality, for they come from the status of necessary world, rather than that of the contingent world.

Having embraced the attached cognitive forms which have no influence on the perfection of the Essence, Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin purified them from the peripatetic subjectivity and accidental property, considering them to be objective. As he had assumed the contingent world in constant trans-substantial motion, contrary to the Platonic philosophers, Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin considered them as coming from the status Holy Lord Almighty, lest they be touched by the constant changes of contingent world or material substances. The beings of contingent world, Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin argues, come into being in terms of the creation of the Creator; conversely, divine cognitive forms exist in terms of the existence of God Almighty, for they are the correlates entailed by the Essence, and an implicate exists in terms of the existence of the implicant, rather than its creation.

Taking into account the strong points and leaving out the weak ones of the two theories, Sadr-u al-Muta'allehin went to suggest his own theory as one novel product of transcendental metaphysics. Avicenna was the precursor designer of transcendental metaphysics, because he had regarded the peripatetic philosophy as inadequate and used to seek for a metaphysics which includes both discursive method and that of mystical experience, to be called transcendental metaphysics, (Avicenna, 1338, 160).

Ending remarks

As knowledge and power are two real attributes belonging to the noun rather than the genitive noun, Avicenna has differentiated between them. He argues that whenever the object of power and the relation of the agent to it change, the power itself does not change; thus it is possible to describe the fixed Essence as having power. This is not the case, however, with knowledge. When the object of knowledge changes, the knowledge itself changes accordingly, and as a result it is absurd to describe the fixed Essence as having such knowledge, (Beheshti, 1389, PP. 289-292).

This point gave rise to some scholars to consider him as denying God's knowledge of all other than the Essence; nonetheless, this accusation is wrong. "Not only did he not deny God's knowledge, but also he has vindicated it in such a way to be safe from change or alteration. As a matter of fact, his account of God's knowledge does not cover the particular details, lest He changes by their change. The object of power is universal as the object of knowledge is universal. Still Avicenna does not intend to deny that God knows the particular details. The object of knowledge, he argues, is universal of unique instance; thus He knows particular details, (Ibid., P. 293-294). Indeed, there is a difference between sense perception and intellectual perception. The former changes by the change of what is perceived; and this is not the case with intellectual perception. God's knowledge is of intellectual perception, rather than sense perception.

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