

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

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Webpage: Losensky, Paul. 2012. *Sa'di*. Accessed January 1, 2014. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sadi-sirazi>.

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Why Believe That There Is a God?

Richard Swinburne ¹

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This article presents an argument for the existence of God, showing that the evident phenomena are best explained by supposing that a God causes them. The argument is based on the inductive force of four very evident general phenomena: that there is a physical Universe; that it is governed by very simple natural laws; that those laws are such as to lead to the existence of human bodies; and that those bodies are the bodies of reasoning humans, who choose between good and evil.

Keywords: Natural Theology, the Existence of God, Natural Laws, Theism.

The activity of producing arguments for the existence of God from premises “evident to the senses” has been part of the Christian and Islamic traditions from their earliest centuries—even though many in the Christian tradition have rejected it for the last two centuries. To adduce such arguments is to do “natural theology.” My own natural theology is inductive, that is it seeks to show that the evident phenomena are best explained by supposing that a God causes them, and that makes it probable that there is a God. In this article, I shall be

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able to consider only the inductive force of four very evident general phenomena: that there is a physical Universe; that it is governed by very simple natural laws; that those laws are such as to lead to the existence of human bodies; and that those bodies are the bodies of reasoning humans, who choose between good and evil. Due to length limitations, I shall not be able to discuss arguments against the existence of God, such as the argument from the existence of pain and other suffering.¹

Theism, the claim that there is a God is an explanatory hypothesis, one which purports to explain why certain observed phenomena (that is, data or evidence) are as they are. There are two

Basic kinds of explanatory hypothesis: personal hypotheses and inanimate (or scientific) hypotheses. A personal hypothesis explains some phenomenon in terms of it being caused by a substance (that is a thing), a person, acting with certain powers (to bring about effects), certain beliefs (about how to do so), and a certain purpose (or intention) to bring about a particular effect, either for its own sake or as a step towards a further effect. Thus, the motion of my hand on a particular occasion may be explained by I (a substance), in virtue of my powers (to move my limbs), my belief (that moving my hand will attract attention), and my purpose (to attract attention) cause that motion. An inanimate (or scientific) explanation is usually represented as explaining some phenomenon in terms of it being caused by some initial state of affairs and the operation on that state of laws of nature. The present positions of the planets are explained by their earlier positions and that of the sun, and the operation on them of Newton's laws. But I think that this is a misleading way of analysing inanimate explanation—because “laws” are not things; to say that Newton's law of gravity is a law is simply to say that each material body in the universe has the power to attract every other material body with a force proportional to mm'/r^2 and the liability to exercise that power on every other such body. So construed, like personal explanation, inanimate explanation of some phenomenon (e.g., the present positions of the planets) explains it in terms of it being caused by substances (e.g., the sun and the planets) acting with certain powers (to cause material bodies to move in the way

codified in Newton's laws) and the liability always to exercise those powers. So, both kinds of explanation explain phenomena in terms of the actions of substances having certain powers to produce effects. But while personal explanation explains how substances exercise their powers because of their purposes and their beliefs, inanimate explanation explains how substances exercise their powers because of their liabilities to do so.

I suggest that we judge a postulated hypothesis (of either kind) as probably true insofar as it satisfies four criteria. First, we must have observed many phenomena which it is quite probable would occur and no phenomena which it is quite probable would not occur, if the hypothesis is true. Secondly, it must be much less probable that the phenomena would occur in the normal course of things—that is, if the hypothesis is false. Thirdly, the hypothesis must be simple; that is, it must postulate the existence and operation of few substances, few kinds of substance, with few easily describable properties correlated in few mathematically simple kinds of ways.³ We can always postulate many new substances with complicated properties to explain anything we find, but our hypothesis will only be supported by the evidence if it is a simple hypothesis which leads us to expect the various phenomena that form the evidence. And fourthly, the hypothesis must fit in with our knowledge of how the world works in wider fields—what I shall call our “background evidence.”

I now illustrate these criteria at work in assessing postulated explanations. I begin with a postulated personal explanation. Suppose that there has been a burglary; money has been stolen from a safe. A detective has discovered these pieces of evidence: John's fingerprints are on the safe, someone reports having seen John near the scene of the burglary at the time it was committed, and there is in John's house an amount of money equivalent to the amount stolen. The detective puts forward as the explanation of the burglary the hypothesis that John robbed the safe, using his normal human powers, in the light of his belief that there was money in the safe, with the purpose of getting the money. If John did rob the safe, it would be to some modest degree

probable that his fingerprints would be found on the safe, that someone would report having seen him near the scene of the crime at the time it was committed, and that money of the amount stolen would be found in his house. But these phenomena are much less to be expected with any modest degree of probability if John did not rob the safe; they, therefore, constitute positive evidence, evidence favouring the hypothesis. On the other hand, if John robbed the safe, it would be most unexpected (it would be most improbable) that many people would report seeing him in a foreign country at the time of the burglary. Such reports would constitute negative evidence, evidence counting strongly against the hypothesis. I assume in my example that there is no such negative evidence. The more probable it is that we would find the positive evidence if the hypothesis is true, and the more improbable it is that we would find that evidence if the hypothesis is false, the more probable the evidence makes the hypothesis.

But a hypothesis is only rendered probable by evidence insofar as it is simple. Consider the following hypothesis as an explanation of the detective's positive data: David stole the money; quite unknown to David, George dressed up to look like John at the scene of the crime; Tony planted John's fingerprints on the safe just for fun; and, unknown to the others, Stephen hid money stolen from another robbery (coincidentally of exactly the same amount) in John's house. If this complicated hypothesis were true, we would expect to find all the positive evidence which I described, while it remains not nearly as probable otherwise that we would find this evidence. But this evidence does not make the complicated hypothesis probable, although it does make the hypothesis that John robbed the safe probable; and that is because the latter hypothesis is simple. The detective's original hypothesis postulates only one substance (John) doing one action (robbing the safe), which leads us to expect the various pieces of evidence; while the rival hypothesis, which I have just set out, postulates many substances (many persons) doing different unconnected actions.

But as well as the evidence of the kind which I have illustrated, there may be “background evidence”; that is, evidence about matters which the hypothesis does not purport to explain, but comes from an area outside the scope of that hypothesis. We may have evidence about what John has done on other occasions; for example, evidence making probable a hypothesis that he has often robbed safes in the past. This latter evidence would make the hypothesis that John robbed the safe on this occasion much more probable than it would be without that evidence. Conversely, evidence that John has lived a crime-free life in the past would make it much less probable that he robbed the safe on this occasion. A hypothesis fits with such background evidence insofar as the background evidence makes probable a theory of wider scope (e.g., that John is a regular safe-robber), which in turn makes the hypothesis in question more probable than it would otherwise be.

The same four criteria are at work in assessing postulated inanimate (or “scientific”) hypotheses. Consider the hypothesis that Newton's theory of gravitation explains many phenomena known in 1687 when Newton proposed his theory: evidence about the paths taken (given certain initial positions) by our moon, by the planets, by the moons of planets, the velocities with which bodies fall to the earth, the motions of pendula, the occurrence of tides, and so forth. Newton's theory consisted of his three laws of motion and his inverse square law of gravitational attraction. These laws were such as to make it very probable that previous observed phenomena, such as the positions of the sun and planets in 1677, would be followed by various phenomena observed in 1687, such as the positions of the planets in 1687. It would be very unlikely that the latter phenomena would occur if Newton's theory were not true. There was no significant negative evidence. The theory was very simple, consisting of just four laws, the mathematical relations postulated by which were very simple ($F=mm'/r^2$ being the most complicated one). Yet innumerable other laws would have satisfied the first two criteria equally well. Within the limits of accuracy then detectable, any law in which you substitute a slightly different value for the ‘2’ (e.g., ‘2.0000974’) would have satisfied the first two

criteria as well as did the inverse square law; so too would a theory which postulated that the inverse square law held only until AD 2969, after which a quite different law, a cube law of attraction would operate; or a theory containing a law claiming that quite different forces operated outside the solar system. But Newton's theory, unlike such theories, was rendered probable by the evidence, because it was a very simple theory, because it involved simpler mathematical numbers and relations. One number or mathematical relation is simpler than another if you can understand the former without understanding the latter, but not vice versa. Thus, '2' is simpler than '2.0000974'; and note - '0' (zero) is simpler than all numbers apart from '1.' A law holding that only one mathematical relation operates is simpler than a law containing two different mathematical relations between material bodies—for example, one holding before AD 2969 and a different one holding thereafter. There was no relevant background evidence, because there was no evidence outside the scope of Newton's theory making probable any explanatory theory (e.g., a theory of electromagnetism) with which Newton's theory needed to fit. Hence, Newton's theory was very probable on the evidence available in the seventeenth century, because it satisfied our four criteria; and so, therefore, is the hypothesis that it, together with the initial positions of the sun and planets, explains the present positions of the planets. Rephrased in a more satisfactory way, that hypothesis is the hypothesis that the sun and each of planets have simple powers and liabilities (as codified by Newton's laws) and initial positions, which explain the present positions of the planets. Although, unlike the hypothesis that John robbed the safe, it postulates, as an unexplained starting point, several substances (the sun and planets) with certain positions and velocities, it ascribes to each of them the same simple powers and liabilities, the operation of which explains their subsequent behaviour.

I stress again the importance of the criterion of simplicity. There are always an infinite number of mutually incompatible theories, which could be constructed, which predict any finite number of observed data when these would not otherwise be expected, yet make different

predictions from each other about what will happen tomorrow. Without the criterion of simplicity, it would be impossible to predict anything beyond what we immediately observe.² If the hypothesis is concerned only with a narrow field, it has to fit with any background evidence. But for many hypotheses, there may be no relevant background evidence, and the wider the scope of a hypothesis (that is, the more it purports to tell us about the world), the less background evidence there will be. For a very large-scale theory of physics (such as Quantum Theory), there will be few physical phenomena apart from those within its scope (ones which it purports to explain), and so little—if any—background evidence.

Such are the criteria for the probable truth of some postulated explanatory hypothesis. I now spell out the hypothesis of theism. Theism is clearly a personal hypothesis. God is supposed to be one person, who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, perfectly good, and everlasting. (I note that Christianity claims that God is a Trinity—three persons of one substance. For this reason Christians must regard arguments such as mine as arguments to the existence of God the Father, on whom the other two persons ultimately depend.) A person is a being who has powers (to perform intentional actions; that is, actions which he or she means to do), beliefs, and purposes (choosing among alternative actions which to perform). It is simpler to suppose that the cause of the universe has zero limits to his power (that is, is omnipotent), rather than that he can only make a universe of a certain size and duration; and it is simpler to suppose that he has zero limits (backwardly or forwardly) to the length of his life, rather than that he came into existence only a trillion years ago or will only live for another trillion years. And it is simpler to suppose that the above properties belong to God essentially, rather than that he has them only by a fortunate accident. An omnipotent person can do any logically possible action, any action which can be described without contradiction; and so he cannot make me both exist and not exist at the same time. But since it makes no sense to suppose that I could both exist and not exist at the same time, a logically impossible action is not really an action at all,

any more than an imaginary person is really a person. A truly omnipotent person would not be subject to irrational forces in forming his purposes, as so often are the choices of humans; he would be influenced by reason alone, and so by what he believes is good to do. In that sense of “perfectly free,” an omnipotent person is necessarily perfectly free. A truly omnipotent person would know all the possible actions open to him, and so know whether they are good or bad, and so, being perfectly free, would do actions only insofar as they are good. Therefore, he would be perfectly good.

But what does God's perfect goodness involve? So often, there must be before God, as there are before us, a choice between equally good incompatible actions. And, since God is omnipotent, the range of incompatible equal best actions available to him would be so much greater than the range available to us. Further, God must often be in a situation where we cannot be, of having a choice between an infinite numbers of possible actions, each of which is less good than some other action he could do. For example, elephants are good things; they can be happy and loving. So, the more of them the better (given that they are spread out among an infinite number of planets, so that they do not crowd each other out). So however many elephants God creates, God must know that it would be better if he had created more. It may be, however, that when there is no best or equally best action available to God, there may be a best kind of action available to God, such that it would be better to do some action of that kind than to do any number of actions of any other incompatible kind. For example, God can create creatures of many different types, including angels, humans, and animals. If it were the case that it would be better to create at least some humans (even if he creates no angels or animals) than to create any number of angels and animals and no humans or to do an action of any other incompatible kind, then it would be a best kind of action for God to create some humans, although there would be no best number for him to create. In that case, I suggest, God, being influenced by reason alone, would inevitably create some humans. And if there are two or more equal best kinds of action available to him, he will inevitably do some

action of one of these kinds. Since God's omnipotence only requires him to do the logically possible, the obvious way to understand God being "perfectly good" is that he will inevitably always do the best or equally best action; or if there is no such action, any action of the best or equally best kind; and if even that is not possible, some good action; but he would never do a bad action.

God's perfect goodness thus follows from his omnipotence. Given the logical impossibility of backward causation, God will not be able to cause past events, but he will be able to cause any logically possible future event. But in order to be able to know which future events are logically possible, he needs to know everything that has happened in the past—for what has happened in the past puts logical limits on what can happen in the future. For example, God cannot now immediately bring about a second world war, because such a war has already happened; and he cannot immediately bring about a fourth world war, because a third world war has not yet happened. But of logical necessity, his knowledge will be confined to knowledge of the past and of any necessary truths. He cannot know the future, for that will depend on his future choices. Hence, just as omnipotence is to be understood as the power to do anything logically possible, so omniscience should be understood as knowledge of everything logically possible to know.

I conclude that theism is a very simple hypothesis indeed. It postulates just one substance (God), having essentially the simplest degree of power (omnipotence), and lasting for the simplest length of time; all the other essential divine properties—including his omniscience, his perfect freedom, and his perfect goodness—follow from his everlasting omnipotence. God, being what he is in virtue of these essential properties, makes God a "person," in a sense somewhat analogical to the sense in which we are persons. Theism is such a wide-ranging hypothesis (it purports to explain all the most general features of the universe) that there is no background evidence; all the evidence (whether positive or negative) is within its scope. Therefore, the hypothesis of theism satisfies the third criterion superbly well, and does

not need to satisfy the fourth criterion. Hence, whether the hypothesis of theism (that there is a God) is probable on the evidence of the phenomena which I listed earlier turns on how well that evidence satisfies the first two criteria.

So, first, are the phenomena such as, if there is a God, it is probable that he would bring them about? If there is a God, he will seek to bring about good things. It is good that there should be a beautiful universe. Beauty arises from order of some kind—the orderly interactions and movements of objects in accord with natural laws is beautiful indeed, and even more beautiful are the plants and animals which evolved on Earth. Animals have sensations, beliefs, and desires, and that is clearly a great good. Humans have the power to reason and understand the universe, and that is an even greater good. But all these kinds of goodness are kinds of goodness which God himself possesses. God is beautiful and has beliefs and desires (and in my view, also sensations), and the power to reason and understand. But there is one kind of great goodness which God himself does not possess: the power bring about good or evil. God can only bring about good. Yet it would be very good indeed that there should be persons who have the free will to make this all-important difference to the world, the power to benefit or harm themselves, each other, and other creatures. So, if there is a God, we have very good reason to suppose that there will be persons who have, as I believe humans have, that freedom.³ but clearly there is a bad aspect to the existence of such persons; they may cause much evil. So it cannot be a unique best action to create such persons, but in view of the unique kind of goodness which they would possess, surely it must be an equal best action to create such persons. And, if so, it is as probable as not that if there is a God, there will be such persons; that is, persons like us humans. But if God is to create us, he must provide a universe in which we can exercise our choices to benefit or harm ourselves and each other. We can only do that if we have bodies, through which we can learn about the world and make a difference to it, and places where we can get hold of each other and escape from each other. But only if there are comprehensible regularities which we can discover, will there be ways

in which my doing this or that will make a predictable difference to me or you, and so we can have a choice of how to treat each other. Only if humans know that by sowing certain seeds, weeding and watering them, they will get corn, can they develop an agriculture. And only if they know that by rubbing sticks together they can make fire, will they be able to burn the food supplies of others. But comprehensible, observable regularities are only possible if the fundamental laws of nature are simple ones. Further, if God is to create embodied humans, the laws must be such as to allow the existence of human bodies, either brought about by an evolutionary process or created directly by God. And finally, human bodies only have a point if they are controlled by conscious persons. God could have brought about the existence of humans, and so the necessary conditions for their existence which I have just been describing, either directly in one day or one week (as an over-literal reading of the Hebrew Bible Book of Genesis would suggest), or by an evolutionary process, which brought about other good things on the way, such as the beauty of the movements of the galaxies, stars, and planets, and the existence of plants and animals. And evidently, if God caused humans, the latter is the method which he adopted. So he acted by creating matter with inbuilt powers and liabilities such that in the course of time they produced organisms in an environment which led to the natural selection of those best fitted for survival, and so ultimately to human beings. So the four phenomena to which I have referred are to be expected (that is, it is quite probable that they will occur) if there is a God; the hypothesis of theism satisfies the first criterion of an explanatory hypothesis very well.

But if there is no God, it is immensely improbable that these phenomena will occur. It is enormously improbable that each of the innumerable many fundamental particles, or rather chunks of compressed energy, immediately after the Big Bang, should just happen to exist. And it is even more improbable that each such chunk should behave in exactly the same fairly simple way as each other chunk (the way codified in the laws of Relativity and Quantum theory and the four forces). So while there are fairly simple laws, their instantiation in each

of innumerably many chunks of matter/energy would be an enormous coincidence unless caused by some external agent. And even if such an enormous coincidence occurred by chance, it is immensely improbable that those laws should be such as together with the boundary conditions of the universe (which are its initial conditions if the universe had a beginning) should have given rise to human bodies. They are “fine-tuned” to do so, in the sense that if the constants in the laws or the values of the density or momentum of the Big Bang had been different within at most one part in a million, humans would never have evolved. And even if this too occurred by chance, as far as any plausible scientific laws are concerned, the laws might just as easily have given rise to robots.

To explain the fact that human bodies are the bodies of conscious beings, there must be innumerable different laws connecting different brain events with different conscious events (different sensations, different occurrent thoughts, different intentions). One reason why there are (probably) fairly few fundamental laws of physics from which all other physical laws follow, is that these laws correlate measurable quantities of one variable (such as the position and velocity of one particle) with measurable quantities of another variable (such as the position and velocity of another particle). But, while brain events differ from each other in measurable ways, in general, conscious events do not differ from each other in measurable ways. My thought that today is Tuesday does not have a measurable value, such that it could be a consequence of some general law that a brain event with properties having certain numerical values would cause the thought that today is Tuesday, whereas a brain event with properties with slightly different values would cause the thought that today is Wednesday. And because the properties of conscious events do not have numerical values, there must be separate laws stating that a brain event with certain numerical values causes the thought that today is Tuesday, and a different law stating that a brain event with certain other numerical values causes the thought that today is Wednesday, without there being a general law from which these two lower-level laws could be derived. And, to

generalize that result, there must be a very large number of separate psychophysical laws. If we add these laws to the laws of physics, the overall psychophysical law system becomes very complicated indeed, and so again such as would be most unlikely to arise by chance. But, of course, God has reason to bring about such complicated laws in order thereby to bring about human beings. Human-type consciousness is totally improbable unless there is a creator who created physical objects inbuilt with such complicated powers to produce particular thoughts, feelings, and intentions, under particular circumstances.

Some contemporary physicists will tell you that we live in a multiverse such that many different possible universes (with different laws of nature, and different initial conditions) will eventually occur, and so it is not surprising that there is one like ours. But we could only have reason to believe what the physicists tell us, if the most probable explanation of phenomena observable in our universe is that the most general laws of nature are such as to bring about these many universes; and to postulate that is to postulate that all the particles, not merely of our universe but of the vastly bigger multiverse, behave in accord with the same very general laws, which throw up particular variants thereof in different universes—which is to postulate an even bigger coincidence. And the laws of that multiverse would have to be such as to produce at some stage a universe like ours, which in turn produces us, when almost all possible multiverses would not have this characteristic. So even if our universe does belong to a multiverse, it is immensely improbable (if there is no more ultimate explanation thereof—e.g., God) that that would be a multiverse of a kind to bring about the existence of humans. So the possible existence of a multiverse makes little difference to the force of the arguments which I have discussed.

So these four general phenomena are such as it is moderately probable will occur if there is a God, and almost certainly will not occur if there is not a God. Theism is a very simple hypothesis indeed, and simpler, I suggest, than any inanimate hypothesis which could be constructed. I conclude that arguments from the phenomena which I have discussed are strong, cogent arguments to the existence of God.

NOTES

1. For the fully developed account of my natural theology (including my treatment of arguments against the existence of God), see my *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2004; for a shorter version, see *Is There a God?* Oxford University Press, 1996, Persian translation published subsequently.

2. For a full account of the nature of simplicity, see my *Simplicity as Evidence of Truth*, Marquette University Press, 1997; or my *Epistemic Justification*, Oxford University Press, 2001, chapter 4.

3. For my defence of the claim that humans have libertarian free will—that is, freedom to make choices, either good or evil, despite all the influences to which they are subject—see my *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Are Miracles Violations of the Laws of Nature?

Andrea Aguti¹

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Classical theism holds that God rules the world not only indirectly, by the natural laws established with creation, but through actions or direct interventions that interfere with natural processes and human actions. These direct interventions are usually called miracles. Modern Western philosophy, at least starting from Spinoza and Hume, has defined miracles as “violations of the laws of nature” and criticized them on this ground. Actually, if God is the author of the natural laws, it seems contradictory that he violates them performing miracles. In the last decades, analytical philosophy of religion developed a considerable discussion on this topic. This debate has seen, on the one hand, those, like N. Smart and R. Swinburne, who defend the definition of miracle as a violation of natural laws, and those, like K. Ward, R. Larmer, and D. Corner, who reject it and sustain alternative definitions of miracle. In my article, I refer to this debate with the purpose of showing that the notion of miracle as a violation of the natural law is a coherent one from a theistic point of view.

Keywords: miracle, God, theism.

Introduction

1. Modern Western philosophy has often defined miracles as “violations” or “transgressions” of the laws of nature by God or other

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supernatural agents. In particular, Hume's definition of miracles has become more and more influential (see Hume 1902, section X, "Of Miracles"). According to Hume, a miracle is "a violation of the laws of nature" or, more precisely, "a transgression of a law of nature by particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent" (Hume 1902, 114-15). This definition relies on traditional definitions of miracle offered by ancient and medieval philosophy. According to Thomas Aquinas, for example, miracles are events that "God produces outside the usual order established in the creation" (*Summa contra Gentes*, III, ch. 101) and they can be defined as supernatural, preternatural, and contrary to the nature of certain things (see *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, q. VI, art. 2). Instances of the first and second kind occur when God actualizes either something that is not possible in any way to nature (for example, the resurrection of a dead man) or something that is possible to nature, although it is possible in a way that differs from the one that the miracle is causing to happen (for example, the instant transformation of water into wine). Miracles contrary to nature are those in which, as Aquinas says, "in nature remains a provision which is contrary to the effect that God works" (see *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, q. VI, art. 2), as it happens, for example, in the case of the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

Modern Western philosophers have restricted the meaning of miracle to violation of the natural order, and they have criticized miracles on that ground. This criticism is essentially based on two arguments. Spinoza advanced the first argument. In his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Ch. 6, "Of Miracles"), he claims that miracles are ontologically impossible, because the laws of nature are decrees of God following from the necessity and perfection of Divine nature and "nothing happens in nature which is in contradiction with its universal laws" (Spinoza 1951, 84). Then if anyone asserted that God acts in contravention to the laws of nature, he would be compelled to assert that God acted against his own nature, which is an evident absurdity.

The second argument is proposed by Hume. Contrary to Spinoza's view, Hume does not declare the impossibility of miracles from an ontological point of view, but undermines the reliability of the belief in miracles. According to Hume, the evidence in support of a miracle, defined as a violation of the laws of nature, conflicts with the evidence in support of the latter; and the evidence in support of a miracle can never be stronger than that in support of the laws of nature. The evidence for the laws of nature is universal and can be tested at any time by any person, whereas we cannot say the same for the evidence in support of miracles. So, according to Hume, the belief in miracles can never be rationally justified.

The argument of Hume has been strongly criticized by many authors,¹ and in its original form seems inconsistent with his epistemology. However, some contemporary authors revise it as follows: An unusual and amazing event that cannot be explained by natural laws (for example, walking on water) may not be a violation of such laws, because we could be able to explain this event in the future by gaining knowledge of its natural causes. Therefore, such an event is not a violation of the laws of nature; it just shows that our knowledge of natural laws (in this case, those of gravity and hydrostatics) is currently too narrow and needs to be revised and increased. Since this increase of knowledge is in principle unlimited, there is no possibility to define something in nature as miraculous. As Frederick R. Tennant wrote in his book *Miracle & Its Philosophical Presuppositions* (1925), summarizing this argument, "until we shall have arrived at something like omniscience as to Nature's constitution and intrinsic capacities, we cannot affirm any marvel to be beyond them" (Tennant 1925, 33).

This line of reasoning is basically that of naturalism, in which everything that happens in nature can be explained by natural causes. In this view, there is no room for miracles, because there is no room for

1. See, among others, Earman (2000), who considers Hume's argument as largely derivative, unoriginal and even confused.

any kind of supernatural entities; as a consequence, the epistemic argument against miracles is again combined with the ontological one.

2. In his book *The Concept of Miracle* (1970) Richard Swinburne has defined a miracle as “*a violation of a law of nature by a god*” (Swinburne 1970, 11) and defended this definition from a theistic point of view. According to Swinburne, a law of nature is not simply a description of what happens, but a description of what happens in a regular and predictable way. A law of nature is, therefore, a simple formula, compatible with the observation of certain data in a certain field of experience, which allows us to predict what will occur in this field. If a law of nature is universal, it predicts what must happen; if statistical, it predicts what must probably happen. As Swinburne notes, “any proposed law of nature will be corrigible—that is, future observations could show the proposed law not to be a true law. But in so far as a formula survives further tests, that increases the evidence in its favor as a true law” (Swinburne 1970, 25). A series of counter-instances to such a universal law of nature shows that it is not really a law of nature; but is “an occurrence of a non-repeatable counter-instance” (Swinburne, 1970, 26) enough to invalidate the law of nature or does it simply represents a violation of the latter? According to Swinburne, unless we are able to replace the law of nature with one that can predict the occurrence of new phenomena in an equally simple way as the former does, the law remains valid. We are, therefore, justified in saying that a non-repeatable counter-instance is a violation of a law of nature; that is, a non-repeatable counter-instance is “the occurrence of an event that is impossible, given the operation of the actual laws of nature” (Swinburne 2004, 277). Now, if the law is not universal, but statistical, then a non-repeatable counter-instance represents a “quasi-violation,” in the sense of a highly unlikely event given the statistical law taken into account. For example, if the event in question is the resurrection of a dead man and the laws under consideration are Quantum Laws, such resurrection should be evaluated as a quasi-

violation of Quantum Laws, because it is unlikely “that the small indeterminacies allowed by Quantum Theory would permit their occurrence” (Swinburne 2004, 281).

In order to avoid the notion of violation or quasi-violation of a law of nature, one can argue that such events are purely random, but still, as Swinburne observes, “the very fact that there are laws of nature (universal or probabilistic) operative in the relevant field and all other fields of which we know makes this very improbable” (Swinburne 2004, 281-2). This is why the notion of miracle as violation of a natural law appears to be consistent. Today, however, many theistic philosophers of religion criticize regarding miracles as violations of a law of nature. This criticism is usually supported by the following reasons.

First, quantum physics makes the notion of macrophysical natural laws much less obvious than it is commonly assumed. At the quantum level, many events happen that cannot be deterministically and even causally explained. This being the case, it turns out to be unclear what it means to violate a law of nature, and in general what the expression “law of nature” refers to. In his book *The Philosophy of Miracles* (2007), David Corner claims that when we are facing a non-repeatable counter-instance to the laws of nature, it is not necessary to speak of a violation of the laws of nature; actually, we can always understand any law as a statistical generalization which is not necessarily true but only useful in order to expand our knowledge of nature. Accordingly, a non-repeatable event might be produced by unknown natural forces or considered as a random anomaly. As Corner writes, “the universe does not fully conform to deterministic laws of the form ‘All As are Bs’” and “modern physics *already* acknowledges that some events, such as those involving subatomic particles, are not fully determined by physical forces” (Corner 2007, 29).

Second, some theists claim that the notion of a violation of the natural laws is incoherent in itself once you admit that natural laws are working. According to R. Larmer, three types of theories are usually

proposed as accounts of the laws of nature: (a) regularity theories, (b) nomic necessity theories, and (c) causal dispositions theories (see Larmer 2011, 36). Regularity theories say that laws of nature are universal generalizations that describe what actually happens in nature; nomic theories take natural laws as descriptions of the necessary connections between events; and causal disposition theories “hold that physical things have natural tendencies or powers that are a result of their nature and that the laws of nature describe these tendencies or powers” (Larmer 2011, 37). In any case, all these theories claim that talking about a violation of the laws of nature does not make sense, “since laws of nature are taken to express metaphysically necessary truths” (Larmer 2011, 37).

For this reason, according to Robert Larmer, we should make a new evaluation of the explanatory meaning of a law of nature. A law of nature merely states that in nature, given certain conditions, certain events will occur; therefore, if the conditions of nature are changed (e.g., mass and energy of physical bodies), then the laws of nature are changed too. So, as Larmer writes in his book *Water into Wine* (1996), “if God Creates or annihilates a unit or units of mass/energy, He breaks no law of nature, but He does, by creation of new mass/energy, or by the annihilation of previously existing mass/energy, change the material conditions to which the laws of nature apply” (Larmer 1996, 20). In this way, he defends the concept of miracle as “an objective event that is specially caused by God” (Larmer 1996, 40) occurring in complete accordance with the laws of nature.

Such an account by Larmer is in many respects similar to the view of Clive S. Lewis in his famous book *Miracles* (1947). Lewis defines a miracle as “an interference with Nature by supernatural power” (Lewis 1974, 5) and argues that the natural laws are not violated if God “annihilates or creates or deflects a unit of matter”. In this case “He has created a new situation at that point. Immediately all Nature domiciles this new situation, makes it at home in her realm, adapts all other events to it. It finds itself conforming to all the laws” (Lewis 1974, 63).

In a similar way, David Basinger claims that natural laws tell us that certain natural phenomena will or will not always occur given a specific set of natural conditions and given that there are no other relevant forces acting. Now, we might speak of a violation “only if a non-repeatable counter-instance were to occur under the exact set of *natural* conditions presupposed by such laws,” but a miracle is an event directly caused by God “and events directly caused by God do not, by definition, occur under just that exact set of *natural* conditions presupposed in any set of natural laws” (Basinger 1986, 15). More recently, adopting a causal dispositional theory as an account of the laws of nature, Joel Archer claims that “miracles do not *violate* the laws of nature; rather, they are events whose causal source lies outside the dispositional capacities found in the world” (Archer 2015, 93). More precisely, miracles “would be cases of divine finks and masks” (Archer 2015, 93), which have empirical effects in the world without altering or violating the laws of nature.

Third, the miracle as a violation of a law of nature continues today to suggest the idea, as Nancey Murphy claims, that it is unreasonable “that God should violate the laws he has established” (Murphy 1995, 343). More generally, many theists find the definition of miracle as a violation of a law of nature too narrow. For instance, Keith Ward claims that miracles are better understood when they are defined as “epiphanies of the Spirit,” which have the aim to show in a particular way that nature is not a closed physical system. On the contrary, nature can be interpenetrated and reordered by spiritual agencies (divine or human), becoming the vehicle of the Divine and his purposes. In this sense, as Ward writes, “it is quite unsatisfactory to think of miracles as just rare, highly improbable and physically inexplicable events. The theist has no interest in the claim that anomalous physical events occur. The events in which the theist is interested are acts of God; and Divine acts do not occur arbitrarily or just as anomalous and wholly inexplicable changes in the world” (Ward 1990, 176).

Following this general view on miracles, some authors point out that the definition of a miracle as a violation of law of nature does not have a ground in the Bible or in other holy Scriptures (including the Qur'ān), where miracles are rather seen as “signs”; that is, as events having a religious meaning for believers.¹ According to John Hick, for example, a miracle is “an event through which we become immediately and vividly conscious of God as acting towards us” (Hick 1973, 51). This perspective emphasizes the semiotic nature of miracles and agrees with a contextual approach to them, which is very common among postmodern philosophers and theologians. In this case, a miracle does not possess a symbolic meaning without occurring in a context in which it can be interpreted as having exactly this meaning. Among others, David Corner sustains this perspective by defining a miracle as “an instance of divine agency, connecting in some way with the interests of human beings, and mediating a relationship between humanity and the divine” (Corner 2007, 145).

Finally, some authors link the notion of miracle as a violation of natural law to an “interventionist” concept of the relationship between God and the world—that is, to some occasional and special interventions of God into the world from “outside.” Such authors criticize this concept from a theistic perspective by wondering how God intervenes in some cases rather than in others (a relevant question especially in theodicy) or questioning the very notion of “intervention.” Actually, from a theistic point of view, God is not only “transcendent” to the world but also “immanent.” Aquinas, for example, says that God “is necessarily present in everything, and in an inward way” (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 8, art. 1). So, as noted by Brian Davies, “if God is always present to his creatures as their sustainer and preserver ... therefore it makes sense to deny that he can, strictly speaking, intervene. Thus, it makes sense to deny miracles that should be thought of as cases of divine intervention” (B. Davies 1993, 193).

However, Davies himself acknowledges that “the notion of a violation of a natural law is, surely, in some sense part of what we might call ‘traditional notion of the miraculous’” (B. Davies 1993, 194). The

1. For an overview of this point in the main religious traditions, especially in monotheisms, see Twelftree (2011).

traditional notion of the miraculous means that, according to the common understanding, only unusual events that arouse a sense of wonder because they are contrary to the normal course of nature deserve to be called miracles, since a supernatural cause seems the best explanation for them.

3. If we maintain this traditional notion of miracles, the reasons brought against the definition of a miracle as a violation of a natural law are not very strong. With regard to the first objection, a theist may understand natural laws as inductive generalizations and reduce any universal, natural law to a statistical one, on the model of quantum laws, but independently on the evidence that there are many scientists who do not agree with this view,¹ such a view cannot vindicate an ontological commitment to miracles, but to anomalous events in nature only. If you consider natural laws just as inductive generalizations, then they have merely a descriptive meaning, but not a prescriptive and predictive one. An unusual event may occur in this context without violating any law, and such an event may not be an instance of a miracle. In this way, as William Craig observes, “the defender of miracles has ... at least gained a hearing” (Craig 1986, 15), but the evidence in favour of them must be weighed yet.²

1. According to Paul Davies, for example, laws of nature are universal, absolute, eternal, omnipotent, and even, in a loose sense, omniscient (see P. Davies 1992, 82-83). So, laws of nature are not inductive generalizations regarding the way physical events occur, but they are “*in* the behavior of physical things” (P. Davies 1992, 84). Moreover, if physical things are somehow built in the laws of physics, then these laws must have independent existence, and this, as Davies writes, “strongly support the Platonic idea that the laws are ‘out there’, transcending the physical universe” (P. Davies 1992, 91).

2. In my opinion, theists who defend miracles rejecting a deterministic account of the laws of nature, based on quantum mechanics, are overlooking that quantum mechanics does not claim that the principle of causality is overthrown, but the inevitable imprecision of our measurements on the atomic level only (see Jaki 1999, 46-47). In other terms, the fact that at

This kind of objection to miracles as violations of a law of nature often shows the attempt to make compatible the occurring of miracles with a naturalistic worldview. D. Corner, for example, denies a supernatural notion of causation, because it “conceive the supernatural in physical terms, with the result that we are no longer conceiving of it as anything distinct in kind from the natural” (Corner 2007, 47). If this is true, then miracles should be considered as cases of a basic or primitive action by God; namely, an action whose agent does not cause to occur, but just does. However, the notion of basic or primitive action seems unclear if it refers to the relationship between God and the world. How does God act in the world? Corner claims that divine action can supervene on non-determined phenomena at the level of micro-processes in order to bring about events at the level of ordinary human experience, but supervenience or emergence in natural processes is something that can be explained by means of natural causes; that is, in the context of materialism, epiphenomenalism, epistemic emergentism, properties dualism, and so on. In this perspective, the action of God represents a redundant cause that does not deserve to be taken into account. On the contrary, to postulate that God acts (even in a basic way) in supervenient phenomena is not really different from the postulate that he is acting within the gaps of nature.

With regard to the second objection, the thesis of Lewis and Larmer—according to which, under appropriate conditions, if God changes the material properties of some things, then he can act without violating the laws of nature—is questionable. According to the physicist Frank J. Tipler, who is against the idea that miracles are violations of natural laws, the example given by Lewis and worked out by Larmer (i.e., the creation or annihilation of units of matter by God) is not a simple “interference”; it is a real violation of the principle of conservation of mass and energy indeed (see Tipler 2007, ch. 5). It is true that Tipler himself tries to offer a scientific account of such an

quantum level laws of nature can be mainly formulated in a statistical form does not justify the assertion that deterministic laws of any kind are not operating in this field.

event in the case of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, trying to demonstrate that such a miracle is not a violation of the laws of nature, but his account seems quite speculative and many scientists will probably ignore or reject it.

Authors such as D. Basinger and W. L. Craig, who consider the notion of violation of the natural law as inconsistent, propose different definitions for miracle. According to Basinger, a miracle is “an unusual event caused by a god” (Basinger 1986, 3) or an event that is “permanently inexplicable” (Basinger 1986, 15). According to Craig, “the concept of the naturally impossible” must be retained “as the proper characterization of miracle” (Craig 1986, 17). From a general point of view, such definitions make sense; nevertheless, they are questionable in some respects. On the one hand, a permanently inexplicable event is not an event necessarily caused by a god; it may simply be an event that goes beyond our ability to explain it without possessing a supernatural explanation. Our knowledge has many limitations, and it is likely that we will be not able to overcome them in the future. On the other hand, it is true that a miracle is always something which is naturally impossible, but this is a very broad sense of miracle. For theism, nature cannot create itself. So, if we take this definition of miracle, the very creation of nature would be a miracle, maybe the greatest miracle. In a similar way, inorganic matter cannot produce living beings, so the phenomenon of life should be considered as naturally impossible and consequently a miracle. Therefore, the problem with the definition of miracle as a naturally impossible event caused by God is that, potentially, every act of God with regard to the world (e.g., to create the world itself or to order and to sustain it by means of laws of nature) might be called a miracle. However, in this way, the traditional distinction between a general providence of God towards the world and a special one would be insignificant. What exactly is the difference between the conservation of the world by God and the intervention of God in response to contingent events in the world and in human life?

Regarding the third objection, the idea of a god who violates the laws of nature, which he created, may not appear *prima facie* consistent, but we have to consider that violating a law of nature does not imply that nature and its laws should be destroyed or superseded. Miracles are not violations of the overall ontology of nature, and they do not abolish the laws of nature producing a new order and new laws of nature. As noted by Ninian Smart, miracles “are not small-scale laws. Consequently, they do not destroy large-scale laws. Formally, they seem to destroy the “Always” statements of the scientific laws; but they have not the genuine deadly power of the negative instance” (Smart 1969, 37).

Moreover, it is true that the definition of a miracle as a violation of a law of nature is not biblical, but theism supports many claims that are not strictly biblical, without contradicting the Bible or other holy Scriptures. So, if you are a theist you can certainly assume the biblical definition of a miracle as a “sign.” Nevertheless, you should be aware that, as Smart observes, a miracle “could not be a sign unless it were something rather extraordinary” (Smart 1969, 35). Likewise, it is obvious that an event can be defined as a miracle if and only if it is religiously significant, but not every religiously significant event deserves to be called a miracle. If I vividly feel the presence of God by loving my family or looking at a wonderful scenario in nature, I’m not experiencing the occurrence of a miracle, at least in the usual sense of the word.

Finally, regarding the fourth objection, for theism, God is an omnipotent person or at least an omnipotent being that possesses personal attributes. Consequently, he has volitions and acts in order to realize certain ends without finding any kind of obstacle. It follows from such a view the possibility that he directly intervenes in the world, independently of the laws of nature or occasionally in reference to contingent events in the world. So, this possibility should not be regarded at all as strange. On the contrary, it would be strange that an

omnipotent and personal God would not do something like that.¹

Certainly, we are not able to know why God intervenes in some cases and not in others, but this is not a good reason to deny that God can intervene in the world.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the definition of a miracle as a violation of a law of nature is coherent, *pace* those authors who advanced the above considered objections. According to Aquinas' distinction, among three kinds of miracles, which I mentioned at the beginning of my paper, not all miracles are strictly violations of the natural order; some of them may be evaluated very peculiar violations, and this peculiarity should not be ignored if considering the evidential force of miracle as regards to the existence and nature of God. If a miracle is a sign that testifies to the power of God over the world, the more a miracle violates a law of nature, the more the sign vehiculates God's message, because by Augustine's words, miracles remind us that God "is not held back by any difficulties or hindered by any law of nature" (*De civitate Dei*, XXI, 8, 5).

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1. George G. Stokes, a physicist of the late nineteenth century, was right when he said: "Admit the existence of a God, of a personal God, and the possibility of miracle follows at once" (quoted by Jaki 1999, 34).

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Problem of Evil in Taoism

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This paper attempts to present the Taoist understanding of evil. In the Taoist tradition, especially in Tao Te Ching, evil is divided into two categories: causal evil and consequential evil. Causal evils are those evils that are said to be the causes of other evils; consequential evils are those that are said to be the consequences of the causal evils. Causal evils originate from human will, and cause suffering. This means that evil is not equal to suffering. Lao Tzu does not clearly talk about natural suffering. He regards all evil and suffering as resulting from human actions that are not in accordance with Tao, which is the source of all life. Therefore, the way to overcome evil is to follow Tao, to actualize wu-wei in life.

Keywords: The Problem of Evil, Taoism, Lao Tzu, Causal Evil, Consequent Evil.

Introduction

The problem of evil is an old problem that has baffled man since antiquity. The core of the problem is that the existence of evil seems to

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contradict the belief in the existence of God with His attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and absolute goodness. Thus, although every worldview has to explain the existence of evil, it is an especially acute problem for theism, because—unlike atheism that affirms the reality of evil but denies the reality of God, and unlike Pantheism that affirms the reality of God but denies the reality of evil—theism affirms the reality of both God and evil.

Religious traditions are important sources for thinking about evil. Among them we can mention Taoism. Taoism is a spiritual, philosophical, and religious tradition of Chinese origin that provides special insights the problem of evil. In this paper, we will attempt to review these insights and present a fuller picture of the Taoist understanding of evil.

Taoism

First, we must have a brief overview of Taoism and the its developmental. Taoism has different meanings for different minds. “It is undoubtedly the most incompletely known and most poorly understood philosophy” (Kirkland, Barret, and Kohn 2000, xi). The confusion, I think, comes from mistranslation of the word “Tao.” Tao is the main theme of Taoism, but since Northeastern Asians have used it in many different cultural contexts, the word has been used differently in everyday life. Therefore, given that there are no clear boundaries in the different practices of Taoism, according to Creel, “the more one studies Taoism, the clearer it becomes that this term does not denote a school, but a whole congeries of doctrines” (1970, 1).

Taoism, which emerged in the 6th century B.C., is one of the two great native Chinese religio-philosophical systems and a major influence in the development of Chinese culture. The goal of Taoism as a philosophy and religious tradition, as expressed in the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu, the *Chuang Tzu*, and the *Lieh Tzu* is a profound, joyful, mystical, and practical harmony with the universe. Taoism is regarded as “the philosophy of ‘Lao and Chuang’” (Lin 1976, 7). As Needham, one of the Taoist scholars says, “the Taoists were

deeply interested in Nature but mistrusted reason and logic” (1956, 163).

Taoism is, in general, is a system of thought or philosophy or a form of wisdom to help one learn the way and practice it. According to Blofeld, “Taoism is an ancient method of human development and also a living manifestation of an antique way of life almost vanished from the world” (1978, v).

As a religion, Taoism emphasizes the alchemical relations between macrocosm and microcosm, seeking a formula for immortality by breath control, diet, exercises, sexual continence, or chemical elixirs.

The word Taoism, pronounced like Daoism, comes from a Chinese character Tao, which means the way. The way is usually further defined as the way of the ultimate reality, the way of the universe, the way of human life, and the way of nature. The main idea of Taoism is to live naturally with the flow of life. Living naturally comes about through observing the nature to learn the wisdom of life. The wisdom of life includes not forcing or controlling life, but simply being there. One of the characteristics of Taoism is *Wu wi*. *Wu wi* is the principle that the natural human mind is non-conceptual and not human-oriented. *Wu wi* looks through and beyond the human realm and our conditioned existence to see and hear the nature’s point of view. Blofeld’s view of a dedicated Taoist is one who seeks to live as closely as possible in accord with the nature. From the outset, this involves contemplating the nature’s ways, recognizing their fitness, and the perception that all of them are good in the sense of being essential to the pattern as a whole (1978, 6).

In the world, Taoism is known through the books *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang-Tzu*. The authorship and the year these books were published is still debatable, but the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao-Tzu is typically dated around the 4th century B.C., whereas Chang-Tzu is thought to have been written in the third century B.C. These two books are collections of Taoist writings and stories, though Taoism was practiced long before these books were written.

The Tao is the source of all things. It is the fundamental truth of the universe, and as such, it is a non-conceptual and inexpressible experience. It is important to realize that if you conceptualize and think about the Tao, you only move farther away from what it actually is. The Tao is realized by being it. These expressions are esoteric and leave us wondering.

As Lao Tzu comments in *Tao Te Ching* (1980, ch. 40), “Ten thousand things under heaven are born of being (*yu*). Being is born of non-being (*wu*).” For Lao Tzu, non-being is the ontological basis of being, and non-action is the ethical basis of action. Non-being in Taoism is not a negation of being, but rather the possibility of being. As the ground of being, non-being has the returning movement. Here, returning or reversal movement is identified with the unity of all beings in Tao.

Metaphysically, in Taoism, non-being, as the ground, is the ontological expression of *wu-wei*. Thus, the undifferentiated or unlimited non-being is called the supreme good in Taoist metaphysics. Also *wu-wei*, as Tao’s action, has the spontaneity. From this understanding of *wu-wei*, one knows that there are two outstanding attributes of the Tao—that is, the source of being or life and the principle of spontaneity (*tzu-jan*).

Wu-wei is the Tao’s way of returning or unity. In its movement, the Tao has procreated all beings through its creative process. Every growth and multiplicity comes from its creativity. But the completion of the Tao’s procreation is done in the Tao’s returning movement, receptivity. *Wu-wei* is a negative way or a passive way. But by taking a negative *nay* (*wu-wei*), the Tao comes to have the positive action, “spontaneity.” Just as the reality has two elements: *yin* and *yang*, the Tao’s movement has two directions: creativity and receptivity. Lao Tzu saw the evolutionary process of creation in the Tao’s creative process, and its completion in the Tao’s receptive process.

Meaning of Evil

As a definition that can help us identify the evils discussed in the *Tao Te Ching*, we can say that evils are those things, events, or actions that

are either condemned by Lao Tzu, or have to be avoided according to him. This is based on the assumption that only evils are to be condemned or avoided. It does not mean, however, that, in Lao Tzu's view, things are evil simply because they are to be condemned or avoided (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 301).

For Lao Tzu, good means any action that is not caused by the artificial actions of the human beings. Non-artificial actions are spontaneous actions (*wu-wei*). On the contrary, "evil" means any action that is caused by the purposeful action of the human being. Willful or purposeful actions are unspontaneous actions (*yu-wei*).

What is the origin of evil? How and why does evil occur? What is the Taoist concept of evil? Lao Tzu does not articulate his answers to these questions clearly or directly, but his metaphysics of the Tao provides the theoretical ground with which to deal with those questions.

Origin of Evil

Where does evil come from? Cosmologically or cosmogonically, evil comes from the process of differentiation or separation. As examined in part I, the Tao has the bipolarity in its metaphysical structure: *yin* and *yang*. In *Tao Te Ching* (1988, ch. 42), Lao Tzu says,

Tao gives birth to one,
one gives birth to two,
two gives birth to three,
three gives birth to ten thousand beings.

Ten thousand beings carry *yin* on their backs and
embrace *yang* in their front.

Blending these two vital breaths (*ch' i*) to attain harmony.

Here, *yin* and *yang* represent two directions or two movements of the Tao: creativity and receptivity. All things come from the blending of these two movements. In the process of differentiation or procreation, the harmonious blending is called good, and the

disharmonious is called evil. Here, good and evil are relative, just as *yin* and *yang* are relative. Just as *yin* and *yang* are inevitable constituents of the reality, good and evil are also inevitable on the cosmological level.

The cosmological view is an aesthetic view. Thus, good and evil, in a cosmological sense, are neutral in value judgment. In the Taoist metaphysics, *yin* and *yang* are relative, reliable, dependable, and complementary to each other. Thus, good and evil are relative, reliable, dependable, and complementary to each other and to the Tao as a whole. In this aesthetic view, which is neutral in value, it is difficult to say that Lao Tzu was concerned with the natural evils. In the same manner, whether there are natural sufferings in Lao Tzu's thought is not an easy question to answer, partly because he does not explicitly and directly deal with this question.

Two Kinds of Evil

There are two kinds of evil. Evils that are caused by free human acts (moral evil) and those that are part of the nature (natural or physical evil).

Man-Made Evil or Moral Evil

Lao Tzu recognizes two kinds of man-made evils. The first kind is that which causes human sufferings in the world (*causal evils*). They supposedly originate in the use of the human will. The second kind of evil is the human sufferings caused by the first kind (*consequential evils*). It will be shown that Lao Tzu's philosophy of Tao is deeply concerned with eliminating these evils from the world.

The relationship between a causal evil and its consequential evil(s) can be a complex one, but Lao Tzu generally sees a simple and clear causal connection between them. I shall argue that all the causal evils that concern Lao Tzu originate in the use of the human will and that all the consequential evils are said to be sufferings of some kind. This means that not all evils are sufferings, because there are evils that are not sufferings in themselves but are the causes of sufferings (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 302).

Moreover, unlike causal evils, sufferings are not to be condemned or denounced. Lao Tzu may have taught that we should forgive people for their causal evils or to treat them in the all-embracing spirit of the Tao, but there is no doubt that causal evils are more evil than consequential evils (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 302).

As stated before, the causal evils supposedly originate in the use of the human will. On the assumption that all things produced by Tao are good, there is no good reason to say that the human will itself, presumably produced by Tao, is evil. But it is possible to say that the use of the will is the source of causal evils. Whether the distinction between the will itself and its use can be properly made will be left unanswered here. The important question we must ask is whether every use of the will is evil. This is not an easy question to answer. Generally speaking, we can say that the use of the will is evil if and only if it is used against one's true nature, the other people, or the natural world. In Lao Tzu's language, the use of the will is evil if and only if it is used against the nature of the Tao and its operations in the universe.¹ We may call this use of the will the *assertive* use of the will. On the other hand, the use of the will is not evil if and only if it is used to resist asserting something in the way described above, or, more positively, if it is used to follow the Tao and its operations in the universe. We may call this the *non-assertive* use of the will (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 302).

Natural Sufferings

Whether there are natural sufferings in Lao Tzu's thought is not an easy question to answer, but it seems that In Lao Tzu's view, there are no natural sufferings. In other words, there cannot be any physical or mental pains in the universe where the assertive will is not operative. It means that all the sufferings in the world are supposedly man-made (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 307).

Lao Tzu repeatedly says that if we would only give up our assertive will, the cause of man-made sufferings, there would be no dangers,

1. For a general discussion on the nature of the Tao and its function, see Yu-Ian (1952, 1:170-91).

disasters, and so forth. It is likely that the dangers or disasters referred to are limited only to man-made sufferings. Moreover, he maintains that if we follow Tao, “all things will take their proper places spontaneously” (*Tao Te Ching* 1963, ch. 32), and they will “transform themselves of their own accord” (ch. 37). “Heaven and earth will unite to drip sweet dew, and the dew will drip evenly of its own accord without the command of man” (ch. 32). This is because Tao is the source and principle of purity, tranquility, spiritual power, life, and peace in the world (ch. 39). In examining the *Tao Te Ching*, we cannot identify any suffering that is not explained as man-made. The fact that he does not deal with natural sufferings is evidently not because he is not concerned with them, but because no such thing can exist in his world-conception. Chuang Tzu, however, differs from him on this point. Chuang Tzu, the other major Taoist philosopher, definitely recognizes the existence of natural sufferings, which he explains as the effects of the wonderful transformation of all things in Tao (ch. 6). He advises people that the pains should be accepted as they are, and should not be regarded as evil (See Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 306-7).

Explanation of the Existence of Evil in the Universe

An important issue in Western discussions of philosophy of religion is the problem of explaining the existence of evils in a universe supposedly created by an all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing God (Hick 1963, 40-47). A similar question can be raised with regard to Lao Tzu's philosophy. If the universe is spontaneously produced from Tao, the *summum bonum*, how can there be evil in the world? On the basis of our discussion so far, we can formulate the following form of argument to express Lao Tzu's position:

1. The Tao is the *summum bonum*.
2. The Tao is the ultimate source of all things and events.
3. All things and events are good if they are not the results of some interference with the spontaneous evolution of the Tao.
4. The assertive use of the human will is an interference with the spontaneous evolution of the Tao.

Therefore, every thing or event that is caused by the assertive use of the will is evil.

Premise 4 can be revised to say that *only* the assertive use of the will is an interference with the spontaneous evolution of the Tao. In that case, all evils are either some assertive uses of the will or their consequences. Our discussion points to this stronger position.

Premises 1, 2, and 3 are the basic beliefs or assumptions of Lao Tzu's philosophy, which we shall not question here. The problem is whether premise 4 is consistent with them. It seems reasonable to say that the will itself is good, because it is clearly not a product of the assertive use of the will. Here we come to two important questions. The first is why man, who is supposedly good by nature, uses the will to assert something against the Tao. Would it not be possible to always use the will in accordance with the Tao? The second question is whether the will is "free" to interfere with the Tao's evolution.

With regard to the first question, no ready answer can be found in the *Tao Te Ching*. The question probably had not occurred to Lao Tzu. We can safely rule out any Satan figure responsible for causing man to assert something against the Tao. The answer can probably be found in Lao Tzu's idea of the Tao's decline. Even though the will itself is good insofar as it is produced by the Tao, it is probably a product at the Tao's decline, thus not an ideal product. It may have the inherent tendency to deviate from the Tao. The idea of the decline of the Tao is found in *Tao Te Ching* (1963, ch. 38), just quoted, where it is said that when the Tao is lost, *te* appears. The appearance of *te* is apparently not caused by something other than the Tao itself. A similar idea appears where Lao Tzu says, "When the great Tao declines, there appear *jen* and *i*." (*Tao Te Ching* 1963, ch. 18). Though the appearance of *jen* and *i* can be explained as the result of the assertive use of the will, the idea that the Tao declines cannot be ignored. This seems to mean that the Tao, though believed to be inexhaustible in its power, is limited in power after all. This is undoubtedly a critical issue in Lao Tzu's philosophy.

It may be argued that if *te* represents a fall from the Tao, the natural world, which is *te*, cannot be as perfect as the Tao itself. This is true, but we have argued that even though it is, in a sense, a fall from the Tao, the natural world is so full of the power of the Tao that Lao Tzu cannot see any suffering in it. All evils, according to our interpretation, come from our assertive use of the will.

The second question, whether the will is free to interfere with the Tao's evolution, is in a way related to the first question. When the Tao is full of power, it is almost impossible for the will to interfere with its operations. "If one tries to hew wood for the master carpenter, how can one avoid hurting one's own hands?" (*Tao Te Ching* 1963, ch. 74). But when the Tao is in decline, the will will be in a better position to do so. There is, however, another reason why, in Lao Tzu's philosophy, the will is in principle free to interfere with the Tao. In his conception of the universe, there are no external or eternal "laws" of nature, to which all things must conform. The principles of change are internal laws that are supposed to emerge spontaneously when the relevant conditions exist. Some kind of causality certainly exists in Lao Tzu's thought, but it is something akin to the Humean, not the Newtonian, conception of causality (Sung-Peng Hsu 1976, 313-14). It is important to note that Lao Tzu has no doubt that the will is free to interfere with the Tao. He is afraid, however, that the use of the will causes suffering in the world and turn the spontaneous universe into a mechanistic one bound by laws and virtues.

Overcoming Evil

The way of *wu-wei*, as the action of the Tao, suggests how one can confront the problem of evil and suffering in this present human life. The way of overcoming evil is to read "evil" backwards. In other words, the way of overcoming evil is a way of living. In a Taoist theology, the Tao is the source of all life. As the origin of life, the Tao originates, nurtures, and fulfills life in the world. Therefore, In Taoism, the way of overcoming evil is to follow the Tao, to actualize *wu-wei* in human life. To follow the Tao's will is the way to live everlastingly.

Then, what is the task of human beings in the midst of evil and suffering? In the Taoist tradition, human beings are the mediators between Heaven and the earth. The function of a mediator is to embrace others and live with them through self-emptying and self-sacrificing, which is the vision of *wu-wei*. The task of a mediator is to actualize *wu-wei*; that is, to recognize the interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence with the others and with the Tao or God. Thus, the vision of the Taoist theology opens its eyes not only to human cultural world and God, but also to the ecological world.

In sum, the way of overcoming evil in the Taoist theology is to engage with *wu-wei*. *Wu-wei* has the ontological basis to embrace being in non-being, as well as the ethical practicality to do something in non-doing. In the metaphysics of the Tao, *wu-wei* is the ultimate ground to embrace being. Likewise, *wu-wei* as non-action ethically embraces action. *Wu-wei* in the narrow path represents the *yin* of the Tao, and yet it embraces *yang* in itself as a whole. This receptive characteristic of the Tao provides humankind the vision to resolve the evil in this present world.

Finally, since any aspect of the world is a manifestation of the Tao, corresponding to a different participation of the Yin and Yang principles, nothing can be considered to be essentially evil in the world. Even if Yin is termed as a negative principle, it never manifests itself alone. In the *Tao Te Ching*, it is stated:

When beauty is abstracted,
then ugliness has been implied;
when good is abstracted,
then evil has been implied. (*Tao Te Ching* 1988, ch. 2)

Every positive factor involves its negative or opposing counterpart. What is usually called evil, as physical and mental manifestation, is the result of a lack of balance between the two opposing principles and corresponds to a bigger participation of the Yin principle. Evil belongs

to the nature of the world, so humans have to subscribe to the universal harmony and respect the equilibrium of the two polarities. The Tao is eternal and so are the two principles Yang and Yin. Therefore, good and evil must be eternal as necessary elements of our world.

Conclusion

Lao Tzu regards all evil and suffering as resulting from human actions and from getting out of the natural way. From this perspective, evil refers to any action that is not in accordance with the Tao. The way to overcome evil is to accept it as part of the reality and follow the Tao—to actualize *wu-wei* in human life. The Taoist metaphysics does not leave the solution for the problem of evil to the future or to the other world, but rather embraces it in this life. In the Taoist metaphysics, evil and good are two parts of the reality, as one sees it in the Yin-Yang relation. The bipolarity of the Tao, thus, provides not only the theoretical basis but also the ethical practicality to deal with the problem of evil.

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The Nietzschean Verification of the Missing God and Steps to a Completest Self

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This paper aims to present Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as a Western example that reconfirms the necessity for man's inner development up to the stage of the Completest Self (nafs-i safiyya). With the advent of Christianity and the resultant triumph of its "morality of slave" (1886, sec. 260), the "death of God" (1882) becomes the "fundamental event of Western history" and its "intrinsic law" so far (Heidegger 1977, 67). The central question is how the West shall return the lost God, and so answer adequately to the drive of the eternal return? Nietzsche's answer is expressed within the concepts of the "death before death," the "man of Greek tragedy," the "nomad" ("traveler"), and the "overman," while this paper identifies their essence in the teachings of Sufism. The "death before death" declared by Prophet Muhammad (s), the Sufi exercise Stop, the background of Sufi teaching, and the seven stages of nafs, including the Completest Self, are juxtaposed to the concepts of the German philosopher. It results that according to Nietzsche, what the West should bring from the state of absence to the state of presence is the summarizing truth of Sufism.

Keywords: "Death of God," Nihilism, "Death before Death," Sufism, Overman, Completest Self.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I do not take any particular interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. Instead, I focus on Nietzsche himself, and my task is to bring attention to his statement that God is absent. The "death of God" is the verification of the missing God, and it implies an urge for His return through man's self-surpassing for the sake of self-completeness. It is precisely this necessity that instigates Nietzschean critique of Christianity—a theme that incites the subsequent critiques of his thought and many different (mis)understandings of his idea.

Somehow neglected not only in regard to the work of Nietzsche, the deep knowledge of Sufism offers a concise reading of his key concepts. It would not be illogical to wonder if many prominent examples of Western schools of art (of theater for example), philosophical thought (including Nietzschean thought), literature, scientific theories, and so forth had never known of the existence of the Sufi authors and hence omitted the citation of this source within their works. However, my aim is not to detect the sources of the art of "productive distortion," as Nietzsche (1990) defines the "reception properly understood" (p. 166). What I argue is that the work of Nietzsche needs a Sufi commentary, as is also necessary in regard to several theories and practices that I will touch on briefly while examining the central topic. So, by offering a careful consideration of Nietzsche's goal, I hope to contribute to the debates about his relevance to the principle of the *new valuation of life*, namely the overcoming of nihilism and the necessity of God's presence.

In what follows, I will inspect his examination of the loss of God. In section 2, I explain what Nietzsche identifies as causes of nihilism. My attempt to investigate nihilism deconstructs his thought about the genesis that furnished the Christian "morality of slave." In this section, I also give introductory elements of Sufism within his ideas. In section 3, I suggest the parallels between his conceptualization of the post-Christian man and the pathways to the inner development of the Sufi masters. My aim is not to make any special pronouncements about where Nietzsche fits in the extent of the deep knowledge of Sufism. It is a hard task to form a coherent outsider view of Sufism in one paper,

and it would have been much easier if I had chosen one aspect of Nietzsche's "return of God" and approached it as one segment of Sufism. But in that case I would have prevented at least an effort to reach the inner truth of both Sufism and Nietzsche's thought. In section 4, I conclude the paper with several other parallels between Sufism and thoughts of Nietzsche.

2. "The Death of God" and the Causes of Nihilism

"The death of God" is the fundamental principle of nihilism; namely, a psychological state (Nietzsche 1968, sec. 12) wherein "the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (sec. I.2). In the opinion of Gillespie (1995), "[n]ihilism, according to Nietzsche, is a consequence of the fact that God and all eternal truths and standards become unbelievable" (xi). This consequence is important, and it is also important to stress that Nietzsche's meaning of nihilism does not refer to a simple negation of the metaphysical realities. Nor is his nihilism the mere atheism of an atheist. In place of this, I would suggest that Nietzsche's nihilism encloses an "engineering" of theism and atheism, resulting in a synthetic motivational force that lacks the identity of both these concepts. Thus, nihilism is the "altered" directive force beneath each Western cultural schema that shapes man's course of action and thought, wherein both theism and atheism have been "genetically modified." Man of the West may trust God and go to church, but he cannot escape either nihilism or the "death of God," since the grounds of everything existing have been reset in terms of both of these intermingled concepts. Trust in God becomes irreducible to a set of judgments and behavioral dispositions once the "genome engineering" abolishes the higher values and this world becomes a mere tool. So, the believing man in the era of the "death of God" is surprisingly out of this world. This idea is comprised within the old saint of Zarathustra's prologue: "Zarathustra ... said to his heart: 'Could it be possible?! This old saint in the forest has not yet heard of it, that God is dead!'" (Nietzsche 1891, part 2).

God for Nietzsche is *the belief*, the ground and the safe-guarder of all order (ethical, societal, cognitional, philosophical, scientific, and so forth) necessary for the survival of everything: “What is *belief*? How does it originate? Every belief is a considering-something-true” (1968, sec. 15). But when “God is dead” and “every considering-something-true ... is necessarily false” (sec. 15), man's survival depends upon his own power. It is man himself who defines his own existence once man abolishes God's existence. The *truth* depends on what *man* can do, and he can do nothing, something, or everything. Since *man's performing* is the axis by which to evaluate the truth, God is unimportant. It is precisely this primacy of man's (cyber) *performing* (in the sense of the etymology of this word: old Fr. *parfournir* “encircling,” “finishing up”) where the “death of God” seems to be most obviously perceived. Yet paradoxically, this *is* the “age of consummate meaninglessness” that fulfills the essence of the modernity (Heidegger 1991, 174).

Nihilism is “passive” when it designs man's acceptance of the nothingness of all values, his blocking, and pessimism: “Pessimism is a preliminary form of nihilism” (Nietzsche 1968, sec. I.9). “Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: ... *passive nihilism*” (sec. I.22) is the emptiness of a man who is exhausted by his incapability to interpret the world. This is the “last man” who has embraced the meaninglessness, left without any force to pose higher values. But nihilism is “active” when it is “a sign of increased power of the spirit” (sec. I.22). This “active nihilism” is the very proof of the ontological link between everything existing and the will to power, an endless yearning to release its strength: “*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing beside” (sec. 550). The will to power of the active nihilism establishes *new* values. By establishing *new* values, the *old* values are *surpassed*. It is from here that Nietzsche's “nihilism as the ‘inner logic’ of Western history” (Heidegger 1977, 67) becomes an affirmation of the world and a fundamental legality.

At this point, the Nietzschean “death of God” becomes explainable in terms of the archetype of “death and resurrection” as described at the

archetypal theory of C. G. Jung (1958)—the theory itself originating from Sufi master Ibn al-‘Arabi (as cited in Landau 1959, 40 et seq.). In Jung's view, “the death of God (or his disappearance)” (1995, 58) is a recurrent “symbol,” found in many civilizations from antiquity to nowadays. This recurrence refers to the vast presence of a typical spiritual state: the loss of the highest value giving life and meaning, and the need for its renewal (58). Jung is uncertain about the laws upon which one or the other aspect (death/resurrection) within this sole archetype appears, yet he states, “I only know—and here I am expressing what countless other people know—that the present time is the time of God's death and disappearance” (58). In Christianity, the motive of death and resurrection is posed as central. It is represented with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and it expresses, in the words of Nietzsche, an ontological data of the will to power. Same as the explanation of the recurrent myth according to Jung, the man-God (Jesus Christ), after the death, is “not to be found where his body was laid. ‘Body’ means the outward, visible form, the erstwhile but ephemeral setting of the highest value” (58-59). Also, according to the myth, Christ rises again in a “miraculous manner” (58-59). So, God as the highest value dies, but he is resurrected as transformed: on the cross, the Christian God “ceases to appear as a Jew” (Deleuze 2002, 153). The crucified Christ becomes the legislator of the New Testament.

It is precisely the issue of the Old/New Testament which replaced the life-affirming virtues with the annihilating compensatory forms—including the pathos of distance, the ideology of suffering, the inward turn of self-mastery, the principle of *ressentiment*, and so forth—thus transforming Christianity into “the greatest misfortune of humanity” so far (Nietzsche 1895, sec. 51). “[E]very respect for the Old Testament!” states Nietzsche (2007, sec. 3.22); “I find in it great man, heroic landscape, and something of utmost rarity on the earth, the incomparable naivety of the strong heart; even more, I find a people” (sec. 3.22). But, “in the New Testament ... I find nothing but petty sectarian groupings ... and [it] is neither Jewish nor Hellenistic” (sec. 3.22). In *Will to Power* (1968), Nietzsche writes: “[I]t is in one

particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one [i.e., the “morality of slave”], that nihilism is rooted” (sec. 1). Master morality, as contrasted to the slave morality, emphasizes strength and excellence; it is life-like; and it is the foundation upon which the great civilizations were built (2007, 174-81). Through the inversion of values, that which is not in nature’s essence has become “natural.” The *Antichrist* (1895) offers a summary of the genesis of this “inversion”: “The whole of Judaism appears in Christianity as the art of concocting holy lies, and there, after many centuries of earnest Jewish training and hard practice of Jewish technic, the business comes to the stage of mastery” (sec. 44). The central figure appearing in the New Testament that gave birth to the distortion was Paul: “Paul was the greatest of all apostles of revenge” (sec. 45). Yet, insists Nietzsche, “without the Roman Caesars and Roman society, the insanity of Christianity would never had come to rule” (1968, sec. 874). So, the Christian stories of miracle and divine incarnation growing out of the resentful perception of life that the weak (“slave morality,” “Chandala morality,” 1895, sec. 45) had created turned into tools to measure reality. The Christian God became (a logical conclusion) deduced by non-empirical argumentation. The rational path towards God's cognition ended up with the consciousness about the impossibility of that cognition. In the terminology of Sufism, this impeded the loss of “basic trust” as a non-conceptual confidence in the goodness of the universe (Almaas 1998, 21-32). Yet fortunately, it rested conserved at the Sufi symbol of *enneagram*, designed to maintain in visible form certain eternal truths believed by the Sufis to summarize the human soul in its search of completeness. In the words of I. Shah, “According to the Sufis, the main counterbalance to the power of formalized Christianity was the continued experience of the real tradition of which it is a distortion” (1979, 50).

As a result, “[a] time has come, when we have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years: we are losing the center of gravity by virtue of which we lived; we are lost for a while” (1968, sec. 30). Man is lost “for a while,” stresses Nietzsche, and this confirms that his critique of Christianity should be understood as an introduction to an

agenda which tells what should man of West do in order to overpass the actual decadent state.

3. Nietzsche's Quest for the Return of God: Quest for Sufism

What has happened, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim', the concept of 'unity', or the concept of 'truth' ... Briefly: the categories 'aim', 'unity', 'being' which we used to protect some value into the world—we pull out again, so the world looks valueless.

—Nietzsche (1968, sec. 12)

The central question is how to restore the categories of aim, unity, and being. Nietzsche's answer is given through three symbols of the post-Christian man: 'man of Greek tragedy,' "nomad" ("traveler"; "wanderer"), and "overman." They include the force of affirmation, consciousness on diversity, and freedom. These are the main principles that an individual should incorporate, so that understanding come to him. The "three man" of Nietzsche return us back to the very core of the deep knowledge of Sufism.

3.1. The *Pain* and the "Death before Death": Nietzsche *Vis-A-Vis* Prophet Muhammad (s)

The man of Athenian tragic drama is full of pain: "It is the heroic spirits who say 'Yes' to themselves in the midst of tragic cruelty: they hard enough to experience suffering as a pleasure" (1968, sec. 852). This pain has nothing to do with pessimistic pain, because the "[p]rofound suffering makes you noble, it separates" (2002, sec. 270). As Deleuze points out, "Nietzsche notes that the *Birth of Tragedy* remains silent about Christianity, it has not *identified* tragedy. And it is Christianity which is neither Apollonian nor Dionysian" (2002, 14). The ontological pain of Dionysus, immanent to everything existing, stands at the opposite corner of the pain of Christ. The difference consists in different

interpretations of pain. The pain of Christianity accuses life, “testifies against it,” and “makes life something that must be justified” (15). The pain of Dionysus considers life as holy, and so his life justifies the suffering (15). The man of the ancient Greek theater points up the difference between the ceasing of an individual's life, on the one hand, and the eternal return, on the other hand, while Christianity turned “the death bed into a bed of agony” (Nietzsche 2003, sec. 80). And, the eternal recurrence, rejected by the slave morality, is the very secret of the power of life; as Zarathustra spoke: “[T]his secret spoke Life herself to me. ‘Behold’, said she, ‘I am that which must ever surpass itself’” (1891, sec. 34).

I argue that Nietzsche's life-affirming pain, extracted from the ancient Greek theater, can be identified in the Sufi exercise(s) Stop, Pause of Time, Freezing of Movement, and Pause of Time and Pause of Space that the dervish must carry on in order to attain higher states of his being. (The exercises themselves are associated to the concepts of *period* and *moment* of Sufi teaching—they themselves associated with a momentary cognition.) While working with his disciples, the Sufi teacher in a certain moment suddenly calls dervishes for a complete suspending (freezing) of all their physical action: “Stop!” The freezing of movement causes a bodily pain. The pain caused by freezing of movement is considered necessary “to leave the consciousness open to the receipt of special mental developments whose power is drained by muscular movement” (Shah 1979, 126). The exercise Freezing of Movement stops temporarily the ordinary associative processes; the exercise Pause of Time and Pause of Space enables the operation of constructive “time” to take place (313-14). In sum, the Sufi exercise Stop, which makes explicit precisely the necessity of the kind of pain identified by Nietzsche, has been traditionally passed down by the Sufi master Attar (126). It is for the reasons of this pain and its subsequent effects that this exercise constitutes the most famous “technique of actor's inner-development” of the Western 20th century schools of theater (Hoxha 2002; 2009), even though the source of Sufism has never been quoted by them (2009, 127). The exercise Stop is a pillar of

Barba's theater anthropology, the exercise Stop and Go in Meyerhold's theater, the exercise Life in Pause in Stanislavski's System, and the exercise pause in Time in Vaktganov's theater (127-28).

The man of Athenian tragic drama “dies” to be “born again,” because the affirmation of life must go through death (1891, sec. 21). The “death before death” is a condition to freedom (sec. 21), as it is for the Sufi, who believes that by practicing alternate detachment and identification with life he becomes free. To die voluntary in battle and sacrifice a great soul is the best, says Nietzsche (sec. 21), and one should “die at the right time” (sec. 21).¹ It is the way al-Ghazali relates how he battled with his Commanding Self (as cited in Shah 1979, 170). All the more, I hold, this Nietzschean “voluntary death in a battle” is precisely the meaning of Greatest Jihad; namely, the “individuation process” in the terminology of Jung (Hoxha 2001). All life is struggle, says the Sufi, but a struggle must be a coherent one, because Sufism, even though natural, is also a part of higher human development, and conscious development at that (Shah 1979, 59). Similarly, Nietzsche insists that the “struggle of the man” should not be left to a chance, the proof of which is his work. To sum up, in the context of pain and struggle implying the individuation process, the concept of “death before death” gets its general sense.

Namely, Nietzsche's statement that man must “die before he dies” or that he must be “born again” in his present life was declared by Prophet Muhammad (s): “Die before you die!” The “death before death” (or the death and rebirth while alive) denotes the death of ego within both the message of Prophet Muhammad (s) and the saying of Nietzsche. For the purpose of the “death” of one's own ego (in one's own struggle to become Sufi), “death” is a technical term that marks the grades of initiation, a series of psychological and other exercises (including the

1. “Die at the right time: so teaches Zarathustra. The consummating death I show to you, which becomes a stimulus and promise to the living. ... Thus should one learn to die (emphasis added). ... Thus to die is best; next best, however, is to die in battle, and sacrifice a great soul. ... My death ... the voluntary death which comes to me because I want it (1891, sec. 21).

exercise Stop) that the dervish has to experience. According to Shah (1979, 59), the three “deaths” are the *white death*, the *green death*, and the *Black Death* (421). They include three outstanding factors: abstinence and control of physical functions, independence from material things, and emotional liberation through exercises such as Playing a Part in order to observe reactions of others (421).

The three deaths involve specific enterprises carried out in human society, leading to these spiritual experiences marked by them and the successive transformations which result from them (Shah 1979, 421). The Sufi continues his action in society, as should do the Nietzsche's “overman,” after he experiences the meaning of being-a-nomad.

3.2. Nietzsche's “Nomad” (“Traveler”; “Wanderer”): The Background of Practical Teaching of Sufis

There is *only* a perspective seeing; *only* a perspective “knowing,” and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of these thing, our “objectivity” be.
—Nietzsche (2007, III. 12)

A man, never having seen water, is thrown blindfolded into it, and feels it. When the bandage is removed, he knows what it is. Until then he only knew it by its effect.
—Rumi, *Fihī ma fih*

Ultimately, the Seeker becomes transformed into a Finder.
—Persian proverb

In *The Wanderer* (1880), Nietzsche tells about the new meaning of life of a man who becomes a “nomad” (the term itself used in sec. 211): “ [H]e certainly wants to observe and keep his eyes open to whatever actually happens in the world; therefore he cannot attach his heart too firmly to anything individual; he must have in himself something wandering that takes pleasure in change and transitoriness” (sec. 638).

The “traveler” is conscious that each truth is a point of view limited by certain circumstances of a given will to power, so he is aware about the endless (un)truths. It is for this reason that “facts do not exist, only interpretations” (1968, sec. 481); or, even, that “[t]here is no truth” (sec. 616). Heidegger explains that “his saying that there is ‘no truth’ means something more essential, namely that truth cannot be what is initially and properly decisive” (1977, 66). But why it is so and why this statement does not eradicate the truth come visible if commented with the words of Rumi, when he takes a saying of Prophet Muhammad (s) and says: “The worst of the sages is the visitor of princes; the best of princes is the visitor of sages” (Rumi 2002) and explains that “the inner meaning of ‘visiting’ depends upon the quality of the visitor and the visited” (Shah 1979, 52). It is the issue of the *perspective* from which the “visiting” is viewed, and hence “[i]t’s through ambiguity that the truth is protected from appropriation by the unqualified” (Jaspers 1997, 19). It is from this complexity that Saadi says: “I fear that you will not reach Mecca, O Nomad! For the road which you are following leads to Turkestan” (Shah 1971, 357). So, Nietzsche denies that any mental act can be separated from their many features, and he “believes that behavior consists of long, complicated events with neither obvious beginnings nor clear ends” (Nehamans 1985, 77). I suggest that what these “unobvious beginnings and ends” of the German philosopher tend to communicate are comprised within the chapter 112 of the Quran (*al-Ikhlās*); viz., Allah as the final objectivity: “He begets not, nor is He begotten. And absolutely nothing is like Him!” Thus, they confirm that Nietzsche’s “true” world must be independent not only of our capacities but also of our interests or standards of rational acceptability (Clark 1990, 11). Next, “[a]ll being is for Nietzsche,” states Heidegger, “a Becoming. Such Becoming, however has the character of action and the activity of willing” (1991, 213). He insists that the will is essentially dependent on evaluation (Nietzsche 1998, sec. 260), and that all elements are inextricably connected with one another (2002, sec. 19). The “nomad” is conscious that he should *surpass* his own fragmented perspective (“path”) through the “death” of his ego-delusions, for the

virtue, his “dearest Self,” to be returned to him (1891, sec. 27). As it is for the Sufis, who “teach that there is only one underlying truth within everything that is called religion” (Shah 1979, 55). In sum, the “nomad” comprises the perspectivism, which, for its turn, “rules out assumption that there must be higher perspective” (Clark 1990, 144). As such, Nietzsche's perspectivism *is* the meaning of the Sufi story of the *elephant in the dark*: the truth derived by our senses is fragmented, because it includes one part of the actual reality, while other parts remain excluded. The Truth is undefinable for Nietzsche, as is Sufism itself (Nicholson, 1914, 25)—the Sufis themselves “appearing in historical times mainly within the pale of Islam” (Shah 1979, 55).

In what follows, I suggest that the “nomad” is an angle to view the very essence of Sufism, which is “both a teaching and a part of organic evolution” (Shah 1979, 45). Nietzsche's perspectivism *is* also the Sufi claim according to which the whole cannot be studied by means of the parts, and the fact that a thing cannot study all of itself simultaneously; as Sufi master Pir-i Do-Sara states, “Can you imagine a mind observing the whole of itself—if it were all engaged in observation, what it would be observing? Observation of self is necessary while there is a self as distinct from the non-self part” (verses 9951-9957, as cited in Shah, 1979, 55). Or, “[t]he pathways into Sufi thinking are, it is traditionally said, almost as varied as numbers of Sufis in existence” (39). But even Sufi writings are not just literary, philosophical, or technical. Sufi writings are a variety of many sources—similar to Nietzsche's discourse, which is “changeable, different, and nonlinear” (Blanchot 1949, 278-90); that is, a discourse that overcomes the epistemology (science) through its passage into the discourse of art (Cox 1999, 65). This (coincidence) can be perceived as a concrete in-world manifestation of the fact that “[t]he essential unity of all religious faith is not agreed on throughout the world, say the Sufis, because most of the believers are not all aware as to what *religion* itself essentially *is*. It does not have to be what it is generally assumed to be” (Shah 1979, 65). Expressed in words of Jalaluddin Rumi (2002): opposite things work together, even though nominally opposed.

Nietzsche's "nomad" ("traveler") is the very dervish-hood as well; that is a certain condition or phase of being a Sufi. In this context, Nietzsche's "traveler" is aware that he is in search of, and in progress towards, his final harmony and integration with all creation. As the dervish who, in his struggle to become Sufi, learns the principles of truth from the deep knowledge of Sufism, the post-Christian "nomad," in his struggle to become "overman," learns Nietzsche's *truth* that is comprised in Einstein's relativity theory,¹ which was discussed almost one thousand years before Einstein in Hujiwiri's technical literature (*Kashf al-mahjub*) about the identity of time and space in applied Sufi experience (as cited in Shah 1979, 38).

3.3. Nietzsche's Overman: The Complete Sufi

I teach you the overman. Man is something to be surpassed. What have you done to surpass him? All beings thus far have created something beyond themselves.

—Nietzsche (1891, Prologue, 3)

Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving to a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of the need for specific organs

—Rumi (as cited in Shah 1979, 34)²

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1. In discussing mechanism in physics, Nietzsche gives a characterization of things in general: "A quantum of force is designated by the effect it produces and that which it resists" (1968, sec. 634).
 2. Shah continues: "The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of the transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends upon it" (1979, 61).

Nietzsche's overman is a necessity imposed by the situation where the man actually is, and he is also all a man can be. He “is” and “shall be the meaning of the world” (1891, sec. 3). He is “faithful to the world” (sec. 3), and this world should “some day become the overman's” (sec. 4). Overman is the evolutionary nature of human effort, who accepts the eternal return of the same, the will of the whole that justifies each existence. This aspect of human nature, true both in the individual and the group, is described by Jalaluddin Rumi as follows: “I died as inert matter and became plant. And as a plant I died and became animal. I died as an animal, and became a man. So why should I fear losing my ‘human’ character? I shall die as a man, to rise in ‘angelic’ form” (Rumi 2001, III, Story XVII).

The overman is strong enough to stand the consequences of the openness to the will to power and to affect history indefinitely, which is not the case with the Christian man. Thus, the overman implies the “tragic hero” and the “nomad” (“traveler”), and he also overpasses nihilism. In what follows, Nietzsche's overman is an in-formed (put-in-form) “alchemy of happiness” of master al-Ghazali: in order to develop higher faculties, the conscious must be transmuted, rather than suppressed or distorted. When this transmutation within the overman takes place, follows the state in which “[t]rue devotion is for itself: not to desire heaven nor to fear hell,” as Rabia al-Adawia stresses (Shah 1968, 47.). Or, as Nietzsche says, “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not in the future, not in the past, not for all eternity. Not only to endure what is necessary, still less to conceal it ..., but to *love* it” (2004, 39. ii par. 10). This can be made precise by Jalaluddin Rumi's analogy of human love as a reflection of the real truth, which is not love as an end in itself, nor a human love as the ultimate possibility in the potential of the human being. As Rumi affirms: “Wherever you are, whatever your condition is, always try to be a lover” (Shah 1971, 357).

Hence, the overman is the new way of feeling, thinking, and evaluating (Deleuze 2002, 163). He is the state of man's self-completeness, wherein ego-delusions are surpassed. He *is* the process

of human development that in Sufi teaching takes place through seven stages of preparation, each making possible a further enrichment of the being under the guidance of a practiced teacher named also as “seven men.”¹ The seven-fold Sufi process would be metaphorically confirmed by Nietzsche while talking about overman as follows: “[A] nation is a detour of nature to arrive to six or seven great men” (2002, sec. 126).

Ultimately, in Sufi terminology Nietzsche's overman is the Complete Man or Complete Sufi: *nafs-i-safiyya wa kamila* (the purified and complete *nafs*). He can be also called a Master of Time: “master of starting and stopping, who modifies cognition.” The sage Shibli calls this individual “the one who escaped from being under the sway of *hal*, the rapturous but generalized joy” (Shah 1979, 314). In both cases (of the Complete Man and the overman) the “death before death,” the death of ego, is a condition leading toward Jungian process of individuation—a process of self-transforming for the sake of self-completeness. The individuation process is realistically comprised within Complete Sufi and Nietzsche's idea of overman, and it/this is symbolically expressed within the archetypal symbol of Jesus.

The overman is the knowledge of the essential Self. As Sufis emphasize: “He who knows his essential self, knows his God” (as cited in Shah 1979, 314). The knowledge of the essential self is the first step toward the real knowledge of religion. The real knowledge of religion, not the devalued religion, is the very essence of Nietzsche's agenda for the Completest Self.

1. The seven degrees in the transmutation of the individual's consciousness, the technical term of which is *nafs*, are as follows:

1. *nafs-i ammara* (the commanding *nafs*)
2. *nafs-i lawwama* (the accusing *nafs*)
3. *nafs-i mulhama* (the inspired *nafs*)
4. *nafs-i mutma'inna* (the serene *nafs*)
5. *nafs-i radiya* (the fulfilled *nafs*)
6. *nafs-i mardiyya* (the fulfilling *nafs*)
7. *nafs-i safiyya wa kamila* (the purified and complete *nafs*) (Shah 1979, 445).

4. Conclusion

Numberless waves, lapping and momentarily reflecting the sun—all
from the same sea.

—Master Halki

The Sufi commentary on Nietzsche's work is important, because what he requires is precisely Sufism: the transformation of the mind from its “acquired incoherence into an instrument whereby human dignity and destiny may be carried a step further” (Shah 1979, 58). This commentary is important, also because the ineffable Sufism grasps (and overcomes) all the variety his works. The overman of the German philosopher is mentioned briefly in his work, and this proves that the moral values he attains are not his goal *per se*, but rather a by-product of his inner development—as it is, the inner evolution and the psychological integration of the Sufi master a reflection of his being. For Nietzsche, the capacity of man's development is within himself, as it is for Sufi thought and action. When this evolution is attained consciously—in the case of Sufis, through Sufi method and experience—it gives rise to an objective knowledge about the problems of humanity. This objective knowledge, which is essential, allows the disclosure of the root of the problems. Thus, the correction in the direction of the *love* of the Christian man, in terms of Sufism and appropriately with Nietzschean thought, would be: “You must improve yourself on a higher level if you are to be able to help other people” (Shah 1998, 118).

There are several other parallels that can be drawn between Sufism and Nietzschean thought. Several examples suggest themselves: “presence” and “absence” of God in Nietzsche's thought *vis-a-vis* “presence” and “absence” (*shuhud* and *ghayba*) in Sufi teaching; the approach which Sufis call “problem-solving by non-linear thinking” (Shah 1982, 13); the way in which Nietzsche examines the *birth of tragedy* and the “the way to study the lives of former sages” (13), whereby the comparison between different dimensions of knowledge is

extracted; the acquirement of objectivity; “observing basic motivation” at Sufis (13) *vis-a-vis* the “will to power” of Nietzsche; “illustration of the inward state”; “knowledge distinguished from opinion”; employment of “why analogies”; “being ‘useful in reality, not in appearance’”; allegorical speech; “making effective use of negative characteristics”; “the creating of an air of mystery”; “anger”; “courting criticism and reactions to it” (Shah 1982, 13); and so forth.

The presupposition that the elements of Sufism have always been present in their entirety within the human mind entails the concept of synergy of the rigorous sciences, as is the concept of *al-tawhid* (Hoxha 2002). It is most likely that the oneness of God is the essence of Nietzsche's “eternal return,” for it seems that the sentence of the *sage* in the Sufi story about the absence/presence of the Master of Khorasan could equally speak for Nietzsche: “I am the only remaining of that same master of yours! Only one in a thousand people want to learn. ... The rest of them ... long ago decided that our late Master was insufficient to their needs” (Shah 1992, 62). It is Nietzsche's life as “background of his thought” (Kauffman 1974, 21-71)—his Sufi-like battle with his commanding self.

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The Origin of Islamic Mysticism in the Light of the Personal Unity of Existence

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The question of the origin of Islamic mysticism has been one of the major concerns of many researchers in the field of mysticism in the recent decades. Some have maintained that Islamic mysticism is an imported product: a combination of Eastern spiritual traditions or a mixture of Manichaeism and Alexandrian philosophy. However, in order to find out the real origin of Islamic mysticism, the best way is to investigate the main questions of Islamic mysticism and to trace them in the Islamic culture and tradition. Reflecting on the personal unity of existence, the most important principle of Islamic mysticism, the author shows that Muslim mystics have been so inspired by the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams that there remains no need to look for the origin of Islamic mysticism outside the Muslim tradition.

Keywords: personal unity of existence, manifestation, Islamic mysticism, the oneness of God, encompassing distinction.

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Introduction

One of the questions that have occupied the minds of many scholars is the question of the origin of Islamic mysticism. Is Islamic mysticism an imported phenomenon, or is it a product of the Muslim tradition, formed by various Islamic constituents?

On this subject, different views and ideas have been suggested, which can be divided, in a general way, into two groups:

1. The views of those who look for the origin of Islamic mysticism beyond the borders of the Muslim tradition. Some believe that Islamic mysticism was taken from Christian mysticism (Davani 1381 Sh, 72); in the view of these people, it was Christian mysticism, reflected in monasticism that surfaced in the name of Sufism. The main evidence offered by this group is the common concepts between the Islamic and Christian mystic traditions, such as asceticism, trust, remembrance, silence, and divine love. Some others believe that Islamic mysticism was taken from Indian mysticism, especially the Upanishads. The evidence they offer is also the common concepts between the two traditions, such as annihilation, personal unity, the way of purifying of the soul, and introspection (Badawi 1381 Sh, 35). A third group holds that Islamic mysticism is grounded in Neoplatonism, following the acquaintance of Muslim scholars with the Greek philosophy and the thoughts of Plotinus in particular (40). Some others have also looked for the roots of Islamic mysticism in Persian and Zoroastrian mysticism and Pahlavi philosophy (31).

2. The view that Islamic mysticism has a genuine origin and is rooted in Islamic sources and teachings. Surveying the Islamic tradition makes one familiar with a great amount of theoretical and practical teachings and fascinating spiritual paradigms that could have easily led to the development of mysticism among Muslims (Badawi 1381 Sh, 44-48).

In this article, we attempt to show that there are so many references to knowledge and spiritual wayfaring in the holy Qur'an and the

Prophetic tradition that one cannot but attribute the origin of Islamic mysticism to the Islamic tradition itself. Therefore, in order to study the evidence and to prove the Islamic origin of Islamic mysticism, we will have a look at the viewpoint of the Muslim revelation on the most fundamental and important teaching of Islamic mysticism, the *personal unity of existence*, to show that not only the revelation endorses the teachings of Islamic mysticism but also it has inspired Muslim mystics in advancing the doctrine of personal unity, which is the foundational ground for other mystical teachings, such as the Perfect Man and the order of the world of existence.

For this purpose, first, the holy Qur'an and traditions, which we believe were the main sources of Islamic mysticism, are surveyed. Then, the doctrine of the personal unity of existence, the answers to the objections made to it, and some of its technical terms (such as the *absoluteness of the divisible, manifestation and appearance, and encompassing distinction*) are discussed. Finally, with reference to these mentioned terms, we study the evidence in the holy Qur'an and tradition in support of the personal unity of existence.

Revelation in the View of Muslim Mystics

It is important to discuss the view of Muslim mystics on the Qur'an and tradition in order to show the way mystics employed the holy Book and tradition and their criteria in evaluating the validity of their beliefs.

Muslim mystics have introduced certain criteria for assessing the truth or falsehood of their teachings:

1. The unveiling of the mystic. A criterion for mystical knowledge is the unveiling and intuition of the mystic. Yet, in order to verify the intuitions, the supervision of a mentor or master of *wayfaring* is necessary.
2. The Intellect. The intellect illuminated by the light of the heart that is free from impurities is itself a clear criterion for assessing the truth or falsehood of the mystical findings.

3. Revelation. From the viewpoint of mystics, the most essential instrument for identifying the truth or falsity of the mystical knowledge is the revelation. In mysticism, the essential means of receiving the truth is unveiling and intuition; the purer the soul, the purer the intuition and the higher the degree of its representation of the reality. On the other hand, among human souls, the souls of the prophets are the purest; and among the prophets, the purest soul is the soul the Seal of the Prophets, for he possessed the most perfect and balanced physical and spiritual temperance (Qaysari 1381 Sh, 101); therefore, his insights and intuitions were the most perfect. Thus, mystics hold that the holy Qur'an is the most perfect revelation and that all mystical unveilings and perceptions are to be measured against the standard of the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Propheta and the Imams. On the difference between true intuitions and void fancies, Qaysari writes that there are certain standards for distinguishing a true unveiling from a mere fancy, among them "the holy Qur'an and Prophetic hadith, which are the perfect Muhammadan unveilings" (111).

Understanding the Concept of the Oneness of Existence

The oneness of existence means that existence is confined to the One, and at the same time it is a kind of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. This is not what is maintained in Transcendental Philosophy, where unity refers to the origin of existence and diversity to its degrees; rather, existence is one reality, which is also the only degree of existence, appearing in diverse appearances and manifestations. Therefore, the diverse beings are not chimeras or illusions but manifestations of the Real, and their being representations is the only basis of their reality.

Since diverse beings are the manifestations and representations of the Real, they are not void or illusory, though when considered by themselves, they are no more than illusions. It is only when they are seen as signs and mirrors that they become representations of the Real. According to this view, unity and existence are essentially interrelated:

oneness is the attribute of existence, and existence is associated with oneness. In this regard, Ibn Arabi writes: “Whenever you look at existence in an analytic and general way, you understand that unity is its permanent companion and associate” (Ibn Arabi 1370 Sh, 63).

In order to explain this point further, it is important to have a brief look at the basic parts of the argument for the personal unity; namely, absoluteness of the divisible, manifestation and appearance, and encompassing distinction.

1. Absoluteness of the Divisible

Mystics maintain that the Exalted Real is not qualified by any determination or restriction. They ask, what is in the Real that sustains its essence? Is He sustained by its knowledge, manifestation, or hiddenness? In their view, the divine essence is not to be qualified by any determination or limitation. For example, the name Manifest is against the name Hidden. If we say that He has only the name Manifest, then He is not Hidden, and if we say that He has only the name Hidden, He is not Manifest. Therefore, manifestation and hiddenness are restrictions and determinations. The Exalted Real in the position of essence is absolute and free from manifestation, hiddenness, knowledge, or any other restriction. Otherwise, the Exalted Real could not be present both in the position of manifestation and in the position of hiddenness. If He is present everywhere, He cannot be present in one place and absent in another. The quality of the *absoluteness of the divisible* keeps the Essence free from any particular determination.

2. Manifestation and Appearance

As was said, the Exalted Real is *existence qua existence*, and His reality is an absolute reality without any determination, Absolute by the absoluteness of the divisible. In this sense, when we refer to the state of the essence of the Real, we should say that it is a state with no determination, a state of absoluteness that has the unity of absoluteness. Therefore, in the state of the essence, there is no determination. Now, the question is how determinations appear.

In the discussion on manifestation and appearance, we initially answer the question of how the Absolute Being appears in the form of determinations by saying that, according to mystics, in the position of the absoluteness of the divisible, there is no *particular determination*; that is, in that position, the determination by the name Knowledge, for example, is not distinct from the determination by the name Power, and neither one of them is prior to the other, so one cannot say that His identity is either Knowledge or Power. However, according to mystics, the essence of the Real has certain states, such as hiddenness and manifestation, and what is hidden becomes manifest. Notwithstanding, in all states, all manifestations are Himself. There is indeed no more than one entity that accepts all these states. When the merging states and relations here turn into entities—that is, when they become manifest—they accept the terms particular to them. Hence, the question of manifestation and appearance gains importance. Mystics argue that in the state of the essence, all manifestations exist, but there is no determination. However, as soon as they leave the essence, they are determined and separate from each other. Considering the above-mentioned points, it can be said that manifestation occurs when the Absolute becomes qualified and accepts determination: “The Absolute becomes determined through one of the determinations” (Ibn Turka 1360 Sh, 158).

3. Encompassing Distinction

Mystics have explicit words on the identity of God and beings: “Truly, the Real is the reality of every known object” (Qaysari 1381 Sh, 1086); “Glorified is He who has manifested the things, while He is their reality” (Ibn Arabi n.d., 2:459). For mystics, the essence is indeed in the heart of everything, and, therefore, it is the reality of all things, since manifestation means “the Absolute becoming qualified” (Davani 1381 Sh, 158); the Absolute exists in the heart of every qualification. So, in all these contexts, it is said that the Glorified Real is the reality of all things.

One may ask now, what kind of reality this is. Is the reality in our discussion the same as the conventional reality, or it is another kind of

reality with its own terms and corollaries? Because mystics see in the conventional definition of reality certain terms which do not exist in mystical reality, they concluded that reality needs explanation. In other words, what is meant when it is said that the Exalted Real is the reality of all things but at the same time different from them? It is the answer to these questions that contributed to the formation of *encompassing distinction* theory. According to this theory, all realities are the manifestations of the Real. Now, what is the difference between the Exalted Real, the creatures, and beings?

Evidently, this discussion is very serious, for the belief in the identity between God and creatures is explicitly against the Qur'anic verse "There is nothing like Him" (Qur'an 42:11), and Muslim mystics, who believe that they are the spiritual children of the Prophet, do not accept such a view and strongly stand against it. Rather, they believe in two kinds of distinction: *oppositional* distinction and *encompassing* distinction (Ibn Turka 1361 Sh, 125).

The oppositional distinction is the distinction between two things which have distinct accidents, such as length, color, and weight. In the oppositional distinction, one of the two sides has a feature which the other does not have, and vice versa. Sa'in al-Din holds that this distinction is particular to those accidents which are superadded to the essence (Ibn Turka 1361 Sh, 125). On the other hand, the encompassing distinction should not be understood as absolute separation between God and the creatures. Here, the difference is not oppositional; since the Real has the absoluteness of the divisible, He is the reality of all things, for the Absolute is in the heart of all things, and things exist by His qualifying relational aspect.

But this identity does not mean that the Real is, for example, only a tree, for although He is the reality of the tree because of this absoluteness, He is not a tree or anything else because of the same absoluteness.

From the above, we may infer that the difference between God and creatures is not a difference of separation or division. If there is even a

difference, it is a difference in attribute, for one is Encompassing and Absolute and the other is encompassed and restricted. The beautiful explanation of Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, in *Nahj al-balaghah*, reveals a difference in attribute, rather than a difference of separation between the Real and the creatures: “He is with things, but not by way of fusion; and He is other than them, but not by way of separation” (*Nahj al-balaghah*, Sermon 1).

The Personal Unity of Existence from the Perspective of the Qur’an and Traditions

In this section, we quote and discuss some of the verses of the Qur’an and traditions, which have certainly inspired Muslim mystics in their spiritual wayfaring and have been used as a touchstone for identifying the validity of their mystical experiences. These verses and traditions can be divided into different groups, and from each group a key expression can be extracted as follows:

1. “The Face of God”

Before discussing and analyzing this expression, it would be illuminating to discuss the third verse of Sura al-Hadid, in which contradictory attributes are ascribed to God: “He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He is aware of everything” (Qur’an 57:3). Knowing that the pronoun “*huwa*” (He) before adjectives indicates restriction, the right way to interpret this verse is to say that both aspects of manifestation and hiddenness are God Himself. Therefore, there is no distinction between Him and the beings of the hidden world and the manifest world to speak of a causal relationship. It is only He who is seen in the two realms of manifestation and hiddenness. From a conventional perspective, things are manifest and God is hidden, whereas in the view of the mystic, God is both the apparent side of things and also their hidden side, which is their imaginal, intellectual, and nominal forms. Therefore, no matter whether our perception is sensory or intuitive, it is not the thing itself or its graded and intensified aspects that are perceived; rather, both kinds of knowledge, so far that the heart of the mystic is present, are the knowledge of God, as He is the Absolute indivisible existence. On the

basis of this interpretation, “the Face of God” is the very presence of the Real, which pervades all existence: “To Allah belong the east and the west: so whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah! Allah is indeed All-Embracing, All-Knowing” (Qur’an 2:115). From this verse, one may infer that both the immaterial and material worlds are owned by God, and accordingly everywhere is the place and manifestation of His “Face.” This ownership, which is real ownership, necessitates an *illuminating relationship* between the owner and the owned, rather than a relationship in which the owned has an independent existence from the owner as in causal relationship. In other words, there is an illuminating relationship between God and creatures in the sense that creatures are one of the existential aspects of God, rather than being independent and parallel entities. It is because of this pervasive existence that God is called “All-Embracing,” which refers to both the vast domain of the essence of the Real and the vastness of His existence. Following this vastness, God is aware of everything, and thus He is called All-Knowing. Such attributes make it necessary that we understand the relationship between God and creatures as one of manifestation. In other words, the abode of being is the manifestation of God, whose simple and vast presence manifests Himself, in a secret way, to Himself.

Moreover, the verse “Everything is perishing except His Face” (Qur’an 28:88) suggests a mystical intuition where the objectivity of the world of creation and command (in other words, everything) vanishes and is replaced by the All-Embracing existence of the Real, which is called “the Face of God.” This mystical experience, which manifests the annihilation of all things and, in a sense, the flow of the Real, is the concern and occupation of the People of God. Imam Ali says in this regard, “I have never seen a thing except that I saw God before it, after it, within it, and along with it” (Attar n.d., 1:258). To see God before and after and within and along with a thing indicates that the mystic in the domain of plurality (things) seeks the Exalted Real, and through his genuine experience dissolves the diversity in the glory of the oneness of His existence.

2. The Oneness of the Real

What kind of oneness is the unity that is attributed to God? Is it similar to the unity that is attributed to other things, or is the oneness of the Real a different kind of unity?

One of the most significant distinctions made in the Islamic tradition is the distinction between uniqueness and oneness. In the language of mystics, one refers to a single being, which is divisible and can be multiplied and followed by an infinite chain of numbers, whereas the unique can neither be divided nor followed by other numbers. Therefore, Muslim mystics hold that the unity of oneness is numerical unity, but the unity of uniqueness is the true and real unity. The first kind of unity contains plurality, but the second kind of unity indicates pure unity, and, thus, it is confined to the existence of the Exalted Real.

Therefore, when it is mentioned in the holy Qur'an that "there is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth, nor of five but He is their sixth, nor of less than that or more but He is with them wheresoever they may be" (Qur'an 58:7), the verse refers to the oneness and might of God, which are compatible with His name "All-Embracing," rather than the Exalted Real being added to a group and adding to its number. The verse means that there is no plurality except that it is obliterated by the power and dominance of the unity of the Real. This description confirms perfectly well the view of the encompassing distinction emphasized by Muslim mystics. Therefore, "those who say Allah is the third of the three are disbelievers" (Qur'an 5:73), for the trinity means that God is one, beside other "ones." Therefore, to bring the two verses together, it should be said that the encompassing distinction dominates the relation between the Real and creatures; that is, while God encompasses all things by His *mighty unity*, He is distinct from them and transcends them.

At the end of this discussion, it is important to mention the four meanings of "one" from the perspective of Imam Ali. Answering the question of an Arab during the Battle of the Camel regarding the oneness of God, the Imam offered four meanings for the oneness of God, two of which may be attributed to God, whereas the other two may

not be attributed to Him. The two meanings which can be attributed to God are “the one with no likeness or similitude” and “the one which is indivisible” (whether in existence, the intellect, or the fancy). The two which cannot be ascribed to God are the “numerical one,” as presupposed in the trinity, and the “conceptual one” as the oneness of the genus or species (Saduq 1398 AH, 83).

In this sense, the unity of God is a kind of unity beyond the chain of numbers, whether in respect of progression or in respect of divisibility. Therefore, God is unique in the sense that He has no likeness or similitude: “There is nothing like Him” (Qur’an 42:11). Thus, uniqueness is the indivisible existence that repels any other being from His domain. The force and firmness of the mentioned uniqueness in the first verse of the Sura al-Ikhlās (Qur’an 112) is so strong that the Muslim mystic finds no way other than holding the theory of absoluteness of the divisible.

3. “Venous Closeness”

In one verse of the holy Qur’an, there is a deep expression on the relation and distance between the Exalted Real and His servants, which cannot be understood except in a state of unveiling and mystical meditation: “We have created man and We know what his soul tempts him to, and We are closer to him than the jugular vein” (Qur’an 50:61). Here the jugular vein is a figure of speech that indicates all the things that are close to man. So, the verse indicates that God is closer to man than anything close to man. The supplement to the meaning of *venous closeness* is to be found in Sura al-Mulk: “Does He know not what He has created, and He is the Subtle and the Aware” (Qur’an 67:14). According to this verse, God is the “Subtle” and the “Aware,” encompassing by His knowledge all His creation; since He is Subtle, He knows the interior aspect of things; and because He is Aware, He knows their exterior aspect. However, the knowledge of God is not separate from His existence, so His existence too pervades the interior and exterior of all things. It is because of this extreme closeness that the existential distance between the Real and creatures fades away, and the

relation of causality between the two is replaced by that of “manifestation.” This point is explained most eloquently in the words of Imam Ali: “He has soared so high that there is nothing higher than Him, and He has come so near that there is nothing nearer than Him” (*Nahj al-balaghah*, Sermon 49). In this concise statement, Imam Ali brings together the transcendence and immanence of God. Moreover, in the following statement, the Imam speaks of God’s absoluteness of the divisible: “He is in all things, but neither merged with them, nor separate from them” (Kulayni 1365 Sh, 1:138). The Real is all things, and not one or a group of things to be countable or divisible. His existence has absoluteness of the divisible; if He was this or that thing (“merged with them”), He would be a thing; and if He was absolutely distinct from things (“separate from them”), He would be none of them. The distinction between the Real and creatures is of the kind of *difference by attributes*, and, therefore, creatures cannot be separate from the Real, though the Real exists and can remain separate from the creatures: “for Allah is independent of the creatures” (Qur’an 3:97).

So, the expression “jugular vein” is made complete by the notion of the *companionship* of the Exalted Real with the creatures, which is its philosophical expression: “He is with you wherever you are” (Qur’an 57:4). This companionship, which is preceded by the state of absolute hiddenness, should never be understood as a “comparison” between the Real and the creature: “He is with every thing but not by comparison, and different from every thing but not through separation” (*Nahj al-balaghah*, Sermon 1). In the state of absolute hiddenness, according to a Prophetic hadith, “God was, and nothing was with Him” (Majlisi 1404 AH, 1: 198).

4. “The High in Ranks”

On the manifestation and appearance of the Real in the divine graded order, a verse in Sura al-Ghafir is an indisputable evidence: “Call upon Allah while making your religion pure for Him though the disbelievers dislike it. He is High in ranks and is the owner of the throne” (Qur’an 40:14-15). In this verse, the divine name “High in Ranks” attributes to God high degrees. Some argue that what is intended in this holy verse

by “High in Ranks” is “He Who elevates the ranks”; that is, God raises the ranks of humans. Qaysari, however, comments that it is because of the names and acts of God that the degrees of existence are raised (Qaysari 1381 Sh, 13). Whether in the level of the interior or that of the exterior, the degrees are the loci of the manifestation of divine names.

5. The Unity of Acts

In the tradition of Islamic mysticism, there are three kinds of unity, which result from three kinds of annihilation: *unity of Essence*, which is the result of the annihilation of the mystic in the Essence and his total unawareness of diversity; *unity of attributes*, which results from the annihilation of the mystic in divine attributes and his referring all attributes and names manifest in the world to the attributes and names of the Exalted Real; and *unity of acts*, emerging when the mystic sees no action in the abode of nature other than that of the Real. In the last level, which shows the annihilation of the mystic in the divine actions, the mystic does not see God as the final cause or as the head of the chain of causes; rather, he sees God in every action and its enactment.

Therefore, when God ascribes to Himself the act of “throwing,” He guides the Prophet and his followers to the unity of acts: “You did not shoot when you shot, but it was Allah Who shot” (Qur’an 8:17). By denying the causal agency of the Prophet and ascribing it to God, this verse indicates the presence of the Exalted Real in the same place where the act of shooting took place. The same notion is also seen in the following verses: “Do they know not that it is Allah Who accepts the repentance of His servants and takes the alms,” (Qur’an 9:124), and “Take from their riches alms to purify them and make them grow” (Qur’an 9:103). According to the first verse, it is God Who takes the alms, whereas the second verse indicates that it is the Prophet who receives the alms.

Therefore, although the agency of the Prophet is not denied, it is made clear that with the presence of the Exalted Real in all places and positions, including the place of the soul of the Messenger of God, the true agent of taking alms is God. Likewise, it is only God Who provides

for creatures: “Truly it is Allah who is the Provider and he is the Powerful, the Strong” (Qur’an 51:58). Once again in this verse, the pronoun “*huwa*” (He) indicates the confinement of the attribute of “providing” to God. As is implied in the verse, only God is the “Provider”; no earthly creature or angel (e.g., Israfil, who is known to be the heavenly agent of provision and providing) could be the true Provider. This points to the notion of the absoluteness of the divisible, since it indicates that God has occupied all the places of creatures, and in a hidden way He does whatsoever He likes.

In the same way, the glorious aspects, negative sides, and even Satanic forces also belong to God: “He who seeks glory, truly all glory belongs to Allah” (Qur’an 4:139), and “When we intend to destroy a city, we order its rich and they will do evil in it. Then it will deserve our punishment and we will destroy it completely” (Qur’an 17:16). This verse clearly states that the order to do evil is also issued by God. In another verse, the name “Planner” is attributed to God: “They planned but Allah is the best planner” (Qur’an 3:54). According to these verses, both aspects of glory and evil in existence are absolutely divine, and even Satanic powers which tempt people to deviation and mischief are in the hand of the Real. Therefore, the verse “You will not unless Allah wills” (Qur’an 76:30) indicates that, according to the unity of acts, in the position where man does the deed voluntarily, it is the will and the desire of the Real that is manifested, as is attested by the Prophet (reported by Imam al-Sadiq): “He who imagines that God commands evil and corruption indeed lies about God, and he who thinks that good and evil occur without the will of God has denied His domination, and he who thinks that sins are committed without the divine power also lies about God. And he who lies about God, God will place him in hell” (Kulayni 1365 Sh, 1: 159).

Conclusion

Considering the evidence presented in this article, we may infer that Islamic mysticism has its roots in the words and actions of the leaders of Islam, rather than in other faith traditions, such as Christianity or Hinduism. Although it takes time and effort to prove that mystical

traditions define their particular practices and customs according to their particular religious law and rites, it can be argued that Islamic mysticism is indebted to the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, and the theory of the personal unity of existence in Islamic mysticism is, no doubt, the best evidence to support this claim.

From the perspective of Muslim mystics, the three fundamental notions of absoluteness of the divisible, manifestation, and encompassing distinction stand against such ideas as the incarnation, the trinity, and the notion that existence is illusory. Moreover, the verses and traditions show that unity, existence, and manifestation are all attributed to God.

In a similar way, concepts such as the face of God, the word of the Exalted Real, venous closeness, the most High in Ranks, and unity of acts confirm what we have said. Although the contribution and role of the mystics of other religions in keeping the continuity of the path and demonstrating the truth cannot be ignored, we should admit that if the goal of mysticism is to realize the oneness of existence in the soul and spirit of the believers, Islamic mysticism has had a genuine contribution in this regard.

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The Holy Qur'an.

A Historical Analysis of the Quranic Concept of Lapidating Devils with Meteors ¹

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The Quranic concept of lapidating devils with meteors has received a variety of interpretations throughout Islamic history. In the past, it was interpreted to mean heavenly meteors thrown at devils in order to prevent them from giving ear to heavenly tidings. However, in the fourteenth century AH and as a result of modern scientific achievements, different non-literal interpretations were suggested. These interpretation and their place in the contemporary Quranic exegesis will be studied in this article.

Keywords: meteor, star, devils, jinn, allegory.

1. Statement of the Problem

In different verses, the Quran indicates that devils are lapidated with meteors so that they cannot listen to heavenly news (See Quran 15:16-

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18; 37:6-10; 72:8-9; 67:5). This has received a variety of interpretations throughout Islamic history: classical exegetes interpreted it literally, but modern commentators usually favour non-literal interpretations for it. The cause of this exegetical disagreement is that modern commentators have tried to adapt their interpretations to the findings of science, according to which, meteors are simply scattered stones around the earth's atmosphere. As these stones approach the gravity of the earth, they get increasingly drawn into the atmosphere; and upon entering it, they burn and form meteors (Najafi 2011, 136).

2. Literature Review

The discussions on the concept of lapidating devils with meteors are usually centred on the discord between this Quranic concept and science. Some commentators, such as Sayyid Qutb, believe that the literal meaning of the verses should not be forsaken in favour of human science, especially that lapidating devils with meteors is a metaphysical matter, which falls outside the realm of science. Others, such as Allamah Tabatabai, regard the literal meaning of the said verses to be incompatible with science, and interpret them figuratively. And still others, such as Misbah Yazdi, while agreeing with the use of science in the exegesis of the Quran, believe that a function of meteors is in fact to drive devils away from listening to heavenly news.

3. Lapidating Devils with Meteors in Babylonian Thought

The beliefs and conceptions of the Arabs before Islam were deeply influenced by the Babylonian/Chaldean planetary ideology. Chaldeans were known as the pioneers of astronomy. They were the first people who invented some elementary tools for observing the stars; they determined the place of stars, recognized constellations, and determined the position of the sun and moon. Some other ancient civilized nations, including Indians, Greeks, and Egyptians also borrowed the science of astronomy from Chaldeans. In the fifth century BC, Iranians dominated Chaldea and occupied its cities. Consequently, many Chaldeans escaped from their motherland and took refuge in the neighbouring countries, specifically the Arabian Peninsula. (Zaydan 2011, 403).

4. Lapidating Devils with Meteors in the Age of Ignorance

Among the Chaldeans who immigrated to Arabia, there were astronomers and magicians who taught Arabs astronomy and astrology, though there was some familiarity with Indian astronomy among the Arabs prior to that time. As time passed, Babylonian thought also influenced the Arab culture and belief system, and formed the foundation for the belief in the direct influence of the heavens and stars on human life. Arab sorcerers also added fuel to the fire, and after some time, sorcery became an essential part of the Arab astrological ideology in the Age of Ignorance (Zaydan 2011, 403).

Arab sorcerers usually informed people of future occurrences, interpreted dreams, remedied maladies, and resolved conflicts among the commons. There was a general belief that sorcerers were in contact with jinn, and managed to acquire heavenly information through these demons who could give ear to the heavens (Ali 2001, 12:334). Ibn Abbas is quoted as saying,

During the Age of Ignorance, there were some magicians who were accompanied by jinn. Those jinn ascended to the heavens and listened to heavenly tidings. Then, they descended to the earth and informed their companions of what they had heard. Sorcerers provided their audience with the collected tidings, which were either about the past or the future. After Prophet Muhammad [s] was chosen as the prophet of Islam, jinn were banned from their previous doings and the heavens became protected against their spying.

(Shami 1993, 108)

Some figures of the Age of Ignorance, such as A'waf ibn Jaza', Aws ibn Hajar, and Bishr ibn Abi Hazim, referred in their poems to shooting with stars. They used to regard the fall of a star or a meteor as the sign of a grand man's death or birth. There is a tradition, attributed to the Prophet (s), that he was once sitting among a group of his Companions when a falling meteor was suddenly seen in the sky. The Prophet (s) asked them: "What would you deem such a phenomenon in the Age of Ignorance?" They answered: "O Messenger of Allah! Upon seeing such

a meteor, we would say that a king passed away or a great man was born” (Ali 2001, 12:336).

The word “*shihab*” in Arabic originally refers to a flame of fire, and since a meteor appears like a flame of fire, this word was used to refer to it (Farahidi 1410 AH, 3:403; Ibn Manzur 1995, 1:509). The word was also used with the same meaning in the Arabic literature before and after Islam. For instance, Aswad Nahshili, a poet of the Age of Ignorance, said in one of his poems, “He threw up the spear, and then the spear continued to move as if it had been a burning meteor (*shihab*)” (Ibn Manzur 1995, 15:204). This usage of “*shihab*” semantically conforms to the Quranic usage of the word.

Bishr ibn Abi Hazim also once used the word “*kawkab*” (star) to refer to a meteor: “His donkey and the donkey kid moved so fast, and he followed them as fast as a meteor (*kawkab*)” (Alusi 1415 AH, 7:271).

5. Lapidating Devils with Meteors in Traditions

The traditions related to lapidating devils with meteors are of two types.

a) Traditions related to the lapidation before the Prophet’s mission

During the Age of Ignorance, there was a belief that meteors are stars that could move and fall down. In accordance with a narration by Aminah, the Prophet’s mother, upon the Prophet’s birth, a light appeared in the sky and some meteors fell. Observing this phenomenon and conceiving it as a sign of the end-time, the Quraysh consulted with Walid ibn Mughayra about the cause of the aforesaid light. Walid told them, “Look at those stars that direct you in the darkness of the sea and land. If they are ruined, it is the end-time; but if they are fixed at their positions, an event has occurred” (Saduq 1405 AH, 196). According to another source, searching for the cause of the mentioned phenomenon, the Quraysh consulted with a Jewish resident of Mecca, and based on biblical tidings, he informed them of a great man who, upon his birth, devils would be repulsed from the heavens. He told them that this grand man is a son of

‘Abd al-Muttalib, and the final and best prophet” (Qummi 1367 Sh, 1:374). A narration by Zajjaj mentions the story in a similar way. These narrations point to the fall of meteors as a miracle of the Prophet (Shawkani 1993, 3:151).

A narration also quotes the Prophet as saying, “The fall of a meteor is not related to the death or birth of anyone; rather ... Jinn listen [to the news of the heavens], and they get shot” (Ibn Hanbal 2008, 1:218; Baghawi 1992, 5:161).

Additionally, Awfi quotes Ibn Abbas as saying, “The heavens were not warded during the interval between Jesus and Muhammad, but when Muhammad was chosen, the heavens were highly protected and devils were lapidated” (Ibn Hajar n.d., 8:516). The Quran also indicates that the lapidation existed since the beginning of the time as a function of stars: “And verily We have beautified the world’s heaven with lamps, and We have made them missiles for the devils” (67:5). In another verse, we read, “[The jinn who had listened to the Quran said:] We had sought the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders and meteors” (72:8). According to this verse, with the Prophet’s mission, the protection of the heavens with meteors became more severe.

b) Traditions related to the lapidation after the advent of Islam

In these traditions, the themes of the previous category are mentioned with the emphasis that the fall of meteors to protect the heavens against jinn was restarted with the Prophet’s mission. For instance, Ibn Abbas is quoted as saying,

Some people of the Age of Ignorance were priests who claimed to be in contact with jinn. These jinn listened to heavenly news and conveyed it to the priests; the priests then gave the news to the people. Consequently, when the Prophet told the people about the unseen, they would say, “We have heard this previously.”

Devils had access to heavenly news till they were prevented from ascending to the heavens with the beginning of Jesus' mission; however, they still had access to four heavens. But they were repulsed from all seven heavens with the beginning of the Prophet's mission. After that, they would be targeted by meteors if they wished to ascend to the heavens. (Samarqandi 1416 AH, 2:253; Tha'labi 1994, 5:234).¹

In the literary works of the Age of Ignorance, nothing can be found on the concept of lapidating devils with meteors, except simply the idea of stars moving in the heavens and falling. However, it is unlikely that the Quran mentions the concept without the prior familiarity of its audience with it, because the purpose was to exonerate the Prophet from the accusation that he was receiving revelation from jinn, and that requires a prior belief of the audience in the ability of jinn to convey heavenly news.

6. Lapidating Devils with Meteors in Modern Commentaries

Due to the apparent inconsistency between the Quranic understanding of the function of meteors and modern scientific achievements, Quranic interpreters have taken various approaches in understanding the idea of lapidating devils with meteors. Some interpreters regard the verses in question to be pointing at a reality that falls beyond the reach of science, without contradicting it. For instance, Sayyid Qutb says,

Likewise it is not possible to object or argue about the meteors; they move in line with the system of the universe, both before and after the Prophet's mission, according to a law that astrologers try to interpret through theories which may be true or false. Even if these theories were true, they would not be against lapidating devils with meteors, as the fall of meteors is in accordance with the heavenly providence on which the system of existence is based. (Sayyid Qutb 1991, 6:3730)

1. See also Ibn Kathir (1419 AH, 7:5), Maraghi (n.d., 29, 98), and Tabari (2002, 23:46-47).

He also rejects the presence of symbolism in these verses. He states that those who see such verses as symbolic do not regard God to be infallible in His words; they just try to read their own concepts into the Quran. According to Sayyid Qutb, the right method of interpreting the Quran is for the exegete to understand the word of God without any presuppositions or prejudices, and try to base his thoughts on what the Quran and traditions provide. Only where the Quran is silent can he can rely on his own intellect and experience (Sayyid Qutb 1991, 6:3730).

Darwaza inclines towards the approach of Sayyid Qutb. In his commentary on Sura al-Jinn, he writes,

The presence of jinn and similar beings and the manner in which they listen to the heavens are unseen matters known to us through the Quran. We should believe in these and other unseen facts that the Quran has put forth, even though our senses do not feel them and our reason does not understand them. We shall shun dealing with whatever is not mentioned by the Quran, and we are not supposed to add to it. Human mind has always been incapable of understanding all the secrets and powers of existence (Darwaza 1961, 3:11).

Other interpreters have considered these verses to be symbolic in nature. Allamah Tabatabai states that the classical explanation for the eavesdropping of jinn and the function of meteors relies totally on the idea that the heavens are composed of firmaments which face the earth, and that many angels dwell in the said firmaments. There are some angels in the first heaven who have meteors in their grasps. They ambush the devils who try listen to heavenly news, and throw meteors at them. However, according to Allamah Tabatabai, the literal meaning of “heaven” and “meteor” is not meant in such verses; rather, a sort of allegory or symbolic sense is meant—as is the case with several other Quranic expressions, such as “empyrean,” “throne,” “tablet,” and so forth. What is meant by “heaven” seems to be the kingdom of God, and when it is said that devils try to get close to the heaven to listen to heavenly news and then they are targeted by meteors, it is meant that

they attempt to get close to the world of angels to attain the news, but the angels repulse them by an immaterial light which the devils cannot withstand (Allamah Tabatabai 1993, 17:187).

In his commentary on Sura al-Saffat (Quran 37), Ayatollah Javadi Amoli writes,

Indeed angels prevent the devils from listening to heavenly tidings; therefore, to regard these verses literally or figuratively depends on whether angels are regarded to be material or immaterial. If angels are considered immaterial, it is right to regard such verses as symbolic; however, if angels are regarded as material, the above verses should be taken literally. (Javadi Amoli 1392 Sh)

Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi believes that if the verses in question referred to material meteors, there would be no problem, since the presence of natural causes does not rule out the role of immaterial causes. It is possible to assume that angels can control the course of meteors, and after the Prophet's birth, God determined that if devils try to eavesdrop, angels throw meteors at them. This is similar to when people pray for rain, and God employs natural causes to fulfil their prayers. Therefore, there is no need to reject the literal meaning of such verses (Misbah Yazdi 2013, 2:309).

7. Conclusion

Muslim exegetes have given various interpretations for what the Quran means by lapidating devils with meteors. In the pre-modern period, the meaning of this Quranic expression was considered to be clear: Meccan unbelievers accused the Prophet of receiving the revelation from the jinn. The Quran responded to their accusations by saying that jinn had no access to the heavenly tidings, as the heavens were protected with meteors.

However, in the modern period, any relation between meteors and devils has been denied by scientists, and meteors have been considered to be simply stones that are scattered in the sky, burning and

transforming into fire upon entering the earth's atmosphere. These scientific developments changed the way the interpreters of the Quran understood the verses in question.

Some commentators regard the idea of lapidating devils with meteors as related to the immaterial world, which falls beyond human understanding; therefore, they refrain from interpreting it. However, this attitude cannot explain how mentioning an unfathomable idea could function as a response to the accusations of Meccan disbelievers of the time of the Prophet. Other interpreters maintain that it is possible that the meteors actually drive away the jinn from the abode of angels, but this theory is not acceptable either, as angels are not material beings to live in the material sky.

Others have suggested non-literal interpretations for these verses. They believe that these verses do not refer to material meteors or heavens, but to the fact that jinn are not allowed to enter God's throne. This would mean that during the first fourteen centuries of Islam, the verses of the Quran were misunderstood, which is not in line with the fact that the Quran is the guide for all mankind.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the right interpretation is to say that the Quran employs the idea of lapidating devils with meteors, which was familiar to its original audience, in order to reject the accusation by Meccan unbelievers that the Prophet received the revelation from devils. However, what the Quran in fact states in the form of that familiar idea is that devils are incapable of ascending to the spiritual world of angels to receive heavenly news. Thus, in this theory, both the literal meaning of the verses in question, which was what Muslims understood in the past fourteen centuries, and the purity of the Quran from unscientific claims are preserved.

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