

# GOD AND VALUES

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Historically speaking philosophers, moralists and theologians have advanced in various periods different proofs of the existence of p Go proofs can be accepted for one reason or another. The question arises: Can one furnish a valid proof of God's existence? Even if you answer in the affirmative that will not imply that you establish God's existence. An argument that makes a strong appeal to the theologians could be expressed in classical syllogism and a valid conclusion drawn but a valid conclusion may not be a true proposition. Mere validity does not establish truth. The argument is:

If Moses is trustworthy, God exists.

Moses is trustworthy.

God exists.

Does the argument establish God's existence? Does it fulfil the constitutive and epistemic conditions of inference? Granted that Moses is trustworthy but does his trustworthiness permit us to accept his recommendation for a belief in a transempirical reality? The epistemic condition of inference is not fulfilled here. The gulf between the empirical and the transempirical cannot be bridged over by logical reasoning. Nor is the constitutive

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condition met. The relation between the constituents of the major premise is not that of implication.

I believe that God's existence has to be intuited. How do I know myself ? Certainly not by an inference. Descarte's cogito ergo sum is a fallacious dictum. He inferred thinker from thinking but the inference is not warranted by the data. Hume, too, wanted 'I' or Self but could not get behind the passing states of consciousness to an enduring self. He was thus led to deny the reality of self. Truly speaking I do not need any proof to know h that I exist. In *Payam-i-Mashriq* (Ruba'i 54, p. 38), Iqbal beautifully brings out this point:

I am silent on the question of my being and non being.

If I say 'I am', I commit myself to "a worship of myself".

But whose voice is this simple note?

Some one in my bosom says that I exist.

I intuite myself and there the matter ends. I also intuite the external world. Unless this is granted no transition can be made from thought or states of consciousness to the objective situation. Berkeley wanted to prove the existence of the external world but was led to his subjective idealism. Leibniz's reasoning about the unity of force led him to conclude that monads or metaphysical points had no windows yet he knew that there were infinite number of monads each reflecting the same universe from its special point of view. Berkeley in fact believed in the existence of

the external world but his presuppositions that ideas are passive and spirits alone active and that passive ideas cannot act upon spirits, the active substances, forced him to make his ideas (things) exist in the mind of God. Descartes's reasoning that because the senses sometimes deceive us, therefore they have to be distrusted completely, is hard to understand. His inquiry should have been directed towards sifting true perceptions from illusions and hallucinations. He was not justified in doubting the existence of the external world from the fact of illusions. His reasoning about the reality of the external world, on the basis of the veracity of God, is quite illogical. Kant intuites the existence of the external world and of the self but declares them unknowable. He held that all knowledge is through categories and the latter applied not to the things but to our thinking of them. Kant's followers made things only thoughts (the identity of thought and being) and were thus committed to objective idealism. This destroyed the distinction between the subject and the object and reduced the individual, in the words of Kierkegaard, to a mere paragraph in a system.

We, thus, find that in the history of modern thought the attempt to prove the existence of self or the external world has landed philosophers in great difficulties. The attempt to prove the existence of the self and the external world presupposes a belief in the reality of the two. The real problem of the self and the external world belongs to the field of description. Logical positivists are, I think, justified in stressing this aspect of philosophical inquiry.

We thus intuit our own existence and also intuit the existence of the external world. God has also to be intuited. The most authentic form of intuition which yields knowledge of God is technically called religious experience. But religious experience is not readily available to an individual. It presupposes certain qualities of head and heart in the recipient. The whole history of mysticism points to this fact. A novice has always been tested by the preceptor and subjected to a strict moral discipline and self-examination before he is fit to enter the various "states" and "stations" of the sufi path. The preceptor helps his disciple from falling a victim to illusions and hallucinations. Thus the recipient of religious experience is cautious and takes great care to distinguish genuine from spurious experience. The Quran too lays emphasis on the possibility of religious experience being vitiated by Satan. The following verse (xxii. 52) will make the point clear:

"We have not sent any Apostle or Prophet before thee among whose desires Satan injected not some wrong desire, but God shall bring to naught that which Satan had suggested. Thus shall God affirm His revelations, for God is knowing and wise."

The next step in religious experience is that of communication and that constitutes the crux of the difficulty. Language is the medium through which communication can take place. But language pertains to sensory experience, whereas religious experience refers to transempirical reality. Hence the language of religion is vague, full of similes, metaphors, allusions and symbols. The content of the experience is not communicable. The interpretation which a mystic puts on his experience is

communicated in the form of propositions. "Since the quality of mystic experience is to be directly experienced it is obvious that it cannot be communicated. Mystic states are more like feeling than thought," says Iqbal.<sup>28</sup> The result is that the account of the religionists regarding the nature of reality differs. This fact has been emphasized by the sufis. Rumi, for instance, said that if animals were to imagine God every animal would see in Him his own magnified image. Muhammad ibn Zakariya Al-Razi, a Muslim thinker of the 9th century of the Christian era, condemned religious experience on the basis of contradictions in various religions. He had overlooked the fact that religious experience in its essence is a synthetic experience and does not easily render itself to expression in words. It is the unanalysable wholeness of the religious experience which makes its linguistic rendering an extremely difficult task. Sciences deal with static facts, with abstractions and thus can capture their data in concepts and categories. Religion deals with life in all its wholeness. Life is dynamic and not static. Hence the language difficulty. But this does not mean that the language of religion has no meaning or that the verification of religious discourse is not possible. The criterion for establishing the truth of religious discourse is different from the criterion used in verifying descriptive statements of empirical sciences. The contributions which religious propositions have made to the moral and intellectual fund of the world make it abundantly clear that religious propositions cannot be brushed aside as untrue. You judge the

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<sup>28</sup> Reconstruction (Lahore, 1962), 20.

truth of religious experience by *its fruits* and not by *its roots*, observed William James. Again, as has been pointed out by Professor C. A. Qadir in his article "God and Logic", the religious proposition pertains to eternity and its rejection is not possible on the basis of experience which spreads over a small period of time.

Thus for our knowledge of God we have to depend primarily on revelation as expressed in religious propositions. Of course, there are other sources too, e.g., the study of nature and history. Ibn Tufail showed in his romance, *Hayy bin Yaqzan*, the possibility of knowing God through a study of nature. These sources involve a purely intellectual approach and the Absolute thus arrived at, appears more akin to thought and reason and hence static. It is for this reason that we have to depend primarily on revelation for our knowledge of God. The facts of religion are genuine facts. Ghazali was justified in stressing this fact in his *Tabafut al-Falasifah*. In what follows I accept the hypothesis of God as stated in the Quran. I shall not try to harmonize religion with science or philosophy as has been the universal practice of almost all Muslim philosophers from Al-Kindi to Iqbal, Hakim and Sharif. I shall only bring out the implications of the unity of God and in this connection my conclusion is that the true import of Divine unity is difficult to grasp. There is an element of agnosticism in religion. I further contend that the Quranic concept of the attributes of God as ultimate values provides a sound basis to morality and lends meaning and significance to moral effort.

The Quran conceives of God as an individual. He is one. All things depend on Him. He neither begets nor is begotten. He is the bearer of beautiful names (attributes) and is nearer to man than his neck-vein. He has direct contact with His creatures. There are no two but He is their third, no three but He is their fourth. He is the Creator and comprehends all creation. "My mercy encompasses all things" (vii. 156). He is powerful and wise. He is not limited by anything. "He is the First and the Last and the manifest and the hidden and He is knower of all things" (lvii. 3).

The unity of God has been of special interest to Muslim thinkers. The Quran lays major emphasis on it.

- (i) "And your God is one God; there is no God but He! He is Beneficent, the Merciful" (ii. 163).
- (ii) "Say, He is only one God" (vi. 19).
- (iii) "Your God is one God: so those who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts refuse to know and they are proud" (xvi. 22).
- (iv) "And Allah has said: Take not two Gods. He is only one God: So Me alone should you fear" (xvi. 51).

It is for this emphasis that the unity of God has been the cornerstone of Muslim religious and philosophic thought. It was a cardinal principle with (i) the various schools of Muslim theology particularly the Mutazilites and the Ash'arites (ii) Muslim rationalists (philosophers) and (iii) the Sufis. Some of the Sufis conceived God as the only reality and were led to the doctrine of

the Unity of Being, *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, a pantheistic interpretation of reality.

The Quranic emphasis on the unity of God is primarily directed against polytheism. The Mu'tazilites argued that the unity of God required the denial of His attributes. They called themselves the people of unity and justice (Ahl al-Tawḥīd wa'l 'adl) and feared that admission of attributes would lead to a plurality of eternals and hence polytheism. They reduced the attributes either to relations or negations or made them God's essence. Abū Hudhayl Muḥammad al-'Alāf (748-840 A. c.), a disciple of the second generation from Wāṣil bin 'Atā, the founder of Mu'tazilism, taught that God's attributes were not in His essence but were His essence. The Mu'tazilites reduced God to an abstract unity. The Ash'arites, in conformity with the orthodox view, accepted God's attributes as distinct from God's essence but at the same time warned that they were to be accepted *bila Kaifa*, without asking 'How' and *bila tashbih*, without drawing any comparison. The Quran says, "Nothing is like Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (xlii. 11). The Philosophers (al-Fārābi, Ibn Sīnā) made the unity of God a basis for their emanationistic account of Being. The universe, which is a unity, was conceived by the Muslim rationalists as an eternal, i.e., non-temporal, emanation from God. God being the Necessary Being, His essence and existence coincided while the possible beings depended on the Necessary Being for their existence. Thus Ibn Sīnā, despite his emanationistic account of Being avoided



committing himself to a pantheistic interpretation of reality by making the universe dependent on God for existence.

Iqbal explains the unity of God and the multiplicity of His attributes on the pattern of human personality. Despite the multiplicity of selves, human personality is a unity. This unity or integration of ego course, a matter of degrees. For Iqbal the moral ideal is the attainment of a perfectly integrated ego. The moral worth of an action is determined by its tendency to promote integration of personality. "There are no pleasuregiving and pain-giving acts; there are only ego-sustaining and ego-dissolving acts. It is the deed that prepares the ego for dissolution or disciplines him for a future career."<sup>29</sup> With God the unity achieves perfection. This attempt to understand unity of God in terms of perfected integration of ego is not to fashion God after the image of man, warns Iqbal; it is only to affirm that Divine Life is not a chaos but an organised principle. It is our habit of pictorial thinking which lends anthropomorphic colouring to our concept of God.

Ever since the time of Hume, the sciences have tended more to restrict their field to the observable, to phenomena. The scientist believes in the unity of the universe, regards it a cosmos and does not consider it justified to step beyond the phenomenal to transempirical reality. Idealist thinkers lay emphasis on the unity of intellet or reason but cannot go beyond reason. But for religion the unity of the universe and the unity of reason point to an ultimate unity which alone could explain the two opposing

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<sup>29</sup> Iqbal, Reconstruction, 119.

unities of matter and mind. In the words of the Quran the experience within and without is symbolic of reality described by it as "The First and the last, the visible and the invisible (lvii. 3). God is, therefore both immanent and transcendent. He is immanent in that the universe is a visible expression of His creative activity. He is transcendent in that the universe does not exhaust the creative activity of God.<sup>30</sup>

A complete comprehension of the unity of God is a difficult task. The degree of unity depends on the degree of individuality. With man individuality is a relative affair. We become conscious of our own self in opposition to the not-self. God can afford to dispense with all the worlds says the Quran. This implies that the universe is not to be conceived as confronting God as His another. The Quran is careful to state that all things depend on God. There is no spatial notion involved in the concept of dependence. A conclusion depends on its premise, a work of art depends on the artist, and idea depends on the mind which conceives it, and these objects in no way limit their subjects. To have to form a complete notion of the unity of God is beset with difficulties. We can only have an approximation to it. I fully endorse the view of Dr. K. A. Hakim that "there is an element of agnosticism in all true religion and even in the deepest religious experience."

## II

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<sup>30</sup> K. A. Hakim, Islamic Ideology, 48-9.

The Quranic attributes of God represent ultimate values. These constitute the ideal and control and guide the process of social evolution. The unity of God implies the unity of the Moral Law or the interrelatedness of values. Social progress is a fact. Man today is wiser by his past experience. In all ages man has been gradually moving towards a fuller realization of a social order calculated to secure wellbeing. At no time in the recorded history of man, any group took upon itself the promotion of evil as its end. It is true that social progress has not been uniform. There have been periods when social order was greatly upset but man emerged from every ordeal with greater determination to promote peace and harmony. The Quran too takes a teleological view of the universe and the man. Let me quote a few verses relevant to the point.

And we did not create the heavens and the earth and that which is between them in sport. We created them not but for a serious end, but most of them understand it not (xliv. 38, 39).

Do you then think that we have created you in vain, and that you will not be returned to us (xxiii. 115).

And everyone has a goal to which he turns, so vie with one another in good works (ii. 148).

That the attributes constitute ideals is clear from the following verses:

And that to thy Lord is the goal (liii. 42).

God desires the perfection of His Light (ix. 32).

(We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring (ii. 138).

Some of the attributes of God which the Quran describes are Life, Power, Wisdom, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Love and Justice. "He is Allah the creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names" (lix 24). In philosophical terminology the verse implies that God is the locus of all ultimate and intrinsic values. His Being guarantees the objectivity of values. But as God is nearer to man than his neck-vein, one carries value-consciousness with him. It is the "Moral law within" and not the starry heaven above that bestows the individual its true status and prepares him to be deputy of God on earth. It is this development of the ethical personality that the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him, signified when he enjoined on Muslims to assimilate divine attributes. With God as the locus of all values it follows that there is no distinction in Islam between the spiritual and the mundane, the religious and the secular. Material prosperity is a condition of spiritual growth of a people. Islam recommends a positive seeking attitude towards life in all its manifestations.

The objectivity of values does not rule out difference of opinion in moral matters. The content-range of a value widens with experience. Kant was wrong when he recommended complete divorce between morality and experience. He held that the moral law needed no content to be filled in by experience. His moral system remains formal and barren. The true significance of values in ever changing social set-up is discovered gradually by the

advancing consciousness of man. Ultimate values or formal ideals of value need a content to be filled in by experience.

With God as the locus of all intrinsic values the requirements of morality are fully met with. It implies that moral effort is in tune with reality. A morally developed individual or society is more truly real. Further the Quranic emphasis on the continuity of life after death makes moral effort all the more meaningful. In this moral effort, according to the Quran, God becomes a co-worker with man.

The existentialist thinkers deny objectivity of values. When Nietzsche killed God, he thought that he had made the individual bold and courageous. Man had been working, thought Nietzsche, from the dawn of history, under the fear of gods or God, mighty and revengeful but now man had become mature enough to walk fearlessly without the support of God or gods. This loss of faith in God led to anguish, anxiety, dread, feeling of being forsaken and so forth. These concepts are the prize possession of existentialist thinkers. There is no purpose in life, says an existentialist but you can make it meaningful by making a certain commitment. Man is just wedged between life and death, merely a freakish accident. But if absurdity, irrationality and purposelessness be the key note of existence why should one try to make it meaningful by having commitments? Why to endure the non-authentic or the authentic existence at all? Existentialism is the philosophy of pessimism, frustration and failure. It had stepped in to save the individual, to plead for him but only

succeeds in bringing home to him that he is a mere supernumerary, something superfluous. The symbol of man, for Camus, is Sisyphus who was condemned by gods to perform a meaningless task. He was to take a rock to the top of a mountain and when he scaled the mountain the rock was dropped down and Sisyphus set to the same task again and found a certain happiness in that meaningless routine. The cycle of existence is very much like the routine performance of Sisyphus. Individual life history is nothing but a series of contingent happenings. The schools and colleges you get education in, the teachers you meet and the friends you make with or the person you marry and even one's birth are all mere contingent happenings. These philosophers forget that the contingency is the result of mobility and freedom that man enjoys. Let all persons be earth-rooted like mountains or trees and most of the happenings will disappear. Choice presupposes a variety and multiplicity of possible events or courses. Contingent happenings is the price we pay for our freedom and choice. William James was right when he asserted that the mere fact that one continued to live is sufficient proof that one regards life as worth living. It is the meaningfulness of life that sustains you to live it. Your commitments yield you a richness of experience and an increase in the depth and fullness of life.

Life is not meaningless. It is directed towards ends and goals. It becomes obvious when we reflect on the working of our own minds. It is true that a well-planned action may not meet with success but that is no basis for condemning life as meaningless.

Failure sometimes goads you on to greater effort. The existentialist thinkers forget that the values one finds in society at one time are the operative values. These are the choices made by persons who were here before us. These are their interpretations of the formal ideals of values. Values which are the same for all human beings, values which the Quran describes as the beautiful names of Allah. We start our life by adhering to the operative values of the group. But it is open to us to reflect on these values and see if they agree with the formal ideals of values. This implies that we have to check if the operative values continue to guide life adequately. "Virtue without imagination is a constant danger in civilization," says F. Mayer. Changes in operative values are brought about by thinkers who by active participation in and reflective withdrawal from social life of the community, reinterpret them by pressing them back to the principles on which they rest. Thus operative values undergo a steady process of change in the individual and the race. But the formal ideals of value remain the same. It is these which give universal character to morality and the unity of the moral law follows from the unity of God. We do not talk in terms of American or Chinese or Russian moral law. Societies differ in operative values only. But the formal ideals of values are the same for all. According to Islam these values have their locus in God. "And to thy Lord is the goal" (liii 42). Belief in God guarantees objectivity of values and the objectivity of values gives all meaning and significance to moral effort.